From our earliest memories, “the most wonderful time of the year” has been a season of waiting. For children, the month of December seems to creep by at an impossible pace. The long wait from the day stockings are hung, limp and empty over the mantelpiece to the glorious morning when they are at last filled and ready to be dumped into pajama-clad laps seems to take as long as the other eleven months put together. (I now suspect this is accomplished by the siphoning of time off our adult Decembers and adding it to the childhood ones.) And though the waiting we are called into by the season of Advent has little to do with stockings and presents, it is no less intrinsic to the spirit of Christmas.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word advent as, “the arrival of a notable person or thing.” In the Church, Advent is the first season of the liturgical calendar, and at its core is intended to focus our hearts on the arrival of Jesus. We anticipate Him both in celebrating the anniversary of His coming to earth and in looking forward to His second coming, as promised in scripture. Thus, the heartbeat of Advent is found in the spirit of waiting.

As we wait, we mark the weeks leading up to Christmas by the lighting of the Advent wreath, which is itself deeply symbolic. The evergreen circle has no beginning or end; it is a representation of eternity and of the endless love of God. Each candle, too, carries different meaning.

The first week’s candle is purple (the liturgical color for Advent) and symbolizes Hope; the second candle, also purple, represents Peace; the third candle, pink, comes from the originally Catholic Church of Tulsa

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O, come let us adore Him!

ERIC BAIRD, WORSHIP LEADER

I love the holiday season! The smells and colors of fall giving way to the cold invigorating air of winter, the time with family, the food and—of course—the music. My wife Laurel and I have been married about a year and a half now, and it has been awesome! Yet there is one disagreement we always come back to: Christmas songs!

I love Christmas songs and walk around singing them constantly, especially in the summer. Nothing cools one off on a hot summer’s day like thoughts (and sounds) of Christmas! Laurel also loves Christmas songs but believes they should be reserved only for Christmas season (post Thanksgiving, pre New Year). This is actually an interesting representation of our personalities as she prefers to save and savor things, and I prefer to enjoy in the inspiration of the moment. Regardless, there are two conclusions to bring out of our little case study: music is deeply personal, and music takes you somewhere.

As I write this, I am listening to Nat King Cole’s “Autumn Leaves” and “The Christmas Song.” The emotions this music evokes are fascinating. “Autumn Leaves” brings that cozy yet lonely, pensive feel of walking down a tree-lined road, shuffling through the piles of leaves and enjoying the early sunset. “The Christmas Song” takes me back to family Christmases of my childhood memories, sitting on my grandfather’s knee as he reads “The Night Before Christmas,” or the family

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Ask a Pastor

Each issue, a First Church Pastor answers one of your theological, biblical or moral questions. Email your questions to communications@firstchurchtulsa.org (Subject: Ask a Pastor)

The Spirit’s Gift: Discernment

These days we hear a lot about the larger Presbyterian Church (USA) considering some big questions about what God has to say about some hot topics. I hear the word “discernment” used sometimes, but to be honest, I’m not sure I really know what it means in the Christian context...

“...to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, ...to another discerning of spirits...” I Cor. 12:10

“...faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.” Hebrews 5:14

There was a time when John 3:16 was considered the best known verse in the Bible, but at least one survey has shown that these days the most famous verse, the most frequently cited, is: “Judge not, lest you be judged” (Matthew 7:1).

The way that this text is commonly employed today, we might think that Christians are called never to be discerning or to “make a judgment call” on anything, but this is surely not what Jesus intended.

F.F. Bruce, a British New Testament scholar, puts it this way: The New Testament word, “judgment” is “as ambiguous in Greek as it is in English. It may mean exercising a proper discernment, or it may mean sitting in judgment on people (or even condemning them).”

“Condemnation.” That’s the focus of Matthew 7:1. And that’s clearly what Jesus does not want his disciples to offer. Indeed, Jesus, Himself, came “...not to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved...” (John 3:17).

On the other hand, the gift of “discernment” is highly regarded in the New Testament. In this area, Christians are called to be discerning, discriminating, evaluative—in the best sense of those words. Paul calls discernment one of the Spirit’s gifts to the Church.

The writer to the Hebrews encourages Christians to become “mature” people who know how to make discriminating judgments. He urges Christ-followers to have their faculties “trained by practice” so that they might “distinguish good from evil” (Heb. 5:14).

But the NT sense of discernment is much bigger than that. It also calls us to distinguish the primary from the secondary, the essential from the indifferent and the permanent from the transient.

So, the Church in every age is called to be “discerning,” and First Church is no exception. We have people praying for clarity, wisdom, guidance, direction—in so many different areas in the life of our congregation.

Let me offer two examples:

Elder Dan Ellinor and John Bair lead a “Discernment Team” seeking to discover how the revenue generated by the 8:10 Building (the old Avanti) might enable First Church to most effectively wrap God’s arms around the needs of families and children in downtown Tulsa. They are praying that the Lord will give discernment that is able to distinguish between the good and the better, and between the better and the best. Much progress in gaining this clarity has come. Soon they will bring their report to the Session and the congregation.

The Session of First Church is also in a season of discernment as to how we will respond to the new definition of marriage that arrived in Oklahoma last October. The elders have spent the summer and fall searching the Scriptures, reading widely and praying for direction. Action on these and related questions will be taken by the end of the year.

The Latin word dis-cernere (discern) means literally: to separate apart, to sift, to see and to make judgments based on all of this. That is why we also should pray with the psalmist: “I am your servant; give me discernment” (Ps. 119:125).

May the Lord bless First Church and the larger Church as we seek to do that faithfully, persistently and uncompromisingly.

—Dr. Jim Miller, Co-Pastor
Children’s Ministry

The last several years, First Church has made a serious commitment to equip and encourage young families to worship together. We want parents and kids to sit, stand, sing and pray together. To bring our children to worship is to arrange for them an encounter with the Living God! What greater gift can we give? The unexpected joy, however, is that our kids often end up arranging for us an encounter with the Living God! Nothing is more thrilling than to hear your five year old pray the Lord’s Prayer or your seven year old recite the Apostle’s Creed or your ten year old join in singing Amazing Grace.

Now that our kids are joining us in the pews with more frequency, we are ready to take the next step! We want our kids not only to sit with us in the pews but to lead us from the chancel. Over the next 6-12 months, Julianne Hand, along with support from the children and music ministry teams, will be equipping our kids to lead us in prayer, song and liturgy. We might see kids reading scripture, leading us in prayer, singing the benediction or changing the paraments.

To have kids attending and leading worship is in our DNA as Presbyterians. It was the Reformation that brought children back into worship after a very long absence. John Calvin, the father of Presbyterianism, would reserve the front row at St. Peter’s Cathedral in Geneva for the children of the church. The kids learned psalms and prayers, they were asked about whether they understood the sermon and they attended catechism services to learn the core beliefs of the faith. Even more, children in Calvin’s Geneva didn’t just receive instruction, they gave it! For example, it was the task of the children to teach the congregation new musical settings of the Psalms. Calvin firmly believed children should be SEEN and HEARD!

The reason kids remain in the faith and stay rooted in congregations like ours has little to do with fancy facilities, attractive programming, flashy technology or entertaining events. It has everything to do with affirming, rehearsing and inhabiting this ancient story of God’s unfailing love and amazing grace alongside parents, grandparents and friends. As a parent of young children, thanks for being a people that welcomes, celebrates and values the littlest disciples among us.

“Don’t push these children away. Don’t ever get between them and me. These are at the very center of life in the kingdom.” Mark 10:14 (The Message)

Children’s Discipleship Hour

REV. RYAN MOORE, CO-PASTOR

From left to right: Jonas and Lucas Brown and Benjamin Thomas serve as unofficial junior ushers in the 8:30 worship service in Stephenson Hall. This engagement keeps them excited about attending worship each Sunday!

FPC welcomes Julianne Hand, children’s worship arts leader

First Presbyterian Church is excited to welcome Julianne Hand as the new children’s worship arts leader. We give thanks for her investment of talent and love as we seek to engage our children in music and worship leadership!

Julianne is a native Tulsan and graduated from the University of Tulsa in 2004 with a major in Musical Theater. For the past four years, she has worked in the pre-school at Kirk of the Hills, where she created and implemented a music curriculum for children ages nine months through six years old.

Julianne and her husband have three boys, ages three, five and eight, and they plan to become fully active at First Church.

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“Don’t push these children away. Don’t ever get between them and me. These are at the very center of life in the kingdom.” Mark 10:14 (The Message)
When someone considers embarking on a missionary journey to a foreign country, whether for the first time or for the hundredth time, questions about what the trip will look, feel and be like ensue. Without a doubt, every mission trip is unique in its effect on those who go to do the work of the Kingdom. Even if the geographical location, ministry partners and objective goals remain the same, no two trips are alike.

The main source for these variances are the people that we serve. Each time we reach out to communities around the world, we encounter new people with individual circumstances unique to their life and experiences. Recently I had the opportunity to sit down with Janie Long, a registered nurse and long-time member of First Presbyterian, and ask her some questions about her experiences on past mission trips to Mexico with International Medical Assistance (now Chosen-IMA).

The first story that came to her mind was one that exemplified the trust of the Mexican patients in the skills of the doctors: “Here I was, one of only two nurses in the whole clinic. The other nurse was in the recovery area, and I was in the O.R. prepping the room for the next patient. The language barrier was immense between us. I could not speak to the patient lying on the operating table, and he could not speak to me. Yet after I had been frantically running around the room trying to finish everything, I paused as I left the room. His heart rate monitor caught my attention—his heart rate was so soft and steady. My heart rate, however, was through the roof.

“He didn’t know me, he couldn’t speak to me, he couldn’t ask me any questions, yet he was at such peace trusting that we were going to take very good care of him. That spoke volumes to me.”

It is in times like these that we fulfill the Lord’s commandment to His disciples, as found in Luke 9:2, “to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick.”

Through Janie’s presence on the trip, she was able to help so many receive healing in their bodies to treat ailments for which they otherwise might not have ever received assistance. “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Eph. 2:10).

The Bible’s wisdom on giving is entirely Chosen IMA sets sights on Mexico

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feasts at my Great Aunt Hice’s house where, after the vast array of food was consumed and wrapping paper ripped from veiled treasures, we would gather around the old player piano and sing classic Christmas hymns and tunes (much to the elder family members delight and chagrin of us children).

I love these memories and the substance of them brings not only those moments back to life, but for a moment resurrects those loved ones now passed on. In things of this nature, music is intrinsic to the human experience.

Music is a language that engages our whole being, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. It connects with us so deeply that it affects the way people dress, think and behave. It has been at the heart of many culture wars and religious movements throughout history. Music can be divisive, and it can bring people together.

It is how we allow music to impact us that makes it a divine gift or merely human. Subjected to the flesh, the value of music is merely in the art and the emotional content that it brings, whether good or bad. Subjected to the Holy Spirit, the end result is always worship!

In this, our humming of a simple Christmas song can become a profound moment of conversation and transformation with our heavenly Father. This holiday season I challenge you to be aware of moments of memory and joy (whether singing a tune or sipping cider by the fire) that can become moments of deep profound worship and conversation with God.

When a song brings up memories of yesterday, take a moment to pray for those you are thinking of and to give thanks for the lives of those who have touched your life. Another might stir in your mind images of idyllic Christmas moments; take that time to pray for those who are experiencing suffering and hardship. When a song gets you thinking about our Savior, take time to speak with Him, listen to Him and revel in thankful-ness for His grace. Ask how you might live out the Gospel in word and deed this Holiday season, as He leads.

Let us all grow in Him and learn to worship Him with our lives more fully. Happy Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas, dear First Church Family!

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The mission partnership between First Church and the Romanian Evangelical Medical Mission is now over ten years strong, with teams that travel to Romania every year. REMM is a unique mission partner that provides hope and healing to the people of Romania in the name of Christ.

This fall, we are excited to share a unique plan, through which a grove of walnut trees can create sustainable revenue in a country where nut farming is a major industry.

According to remm-ministry.org, “REMM already owns 10 hectares of rich Romanian farmland.” Turning that land into a walnut tree grove “translates into total harvest value of $215,000—nearly 90% of what REMM needs to raise in support for one year!”

Since the campaign was introduced in November, First Church has already raised funds for 32.5 walnut trees! We need your support to continue towards our goal of purchasing 100 trees! Donations can be made through the Gift Back program (see below) or by visiting firstchurchtulsa.org/remm.

Donate a tree in the name of a loved one or someone special, or donate together as a Sunday school, small group, or family! With the help of the Holy Spirit, we know we can reach our goal!

The numbers are in, and it’s official: the 2014 Helping Hand Golf Tournament raised $25,571.58! The funds raised will be put to use right away to help many Tulsans, especially during the holiday season this year.

Thanks to the many people who generously gave of their time and money this year, including a generous gift from the estate of Joan Coe, and a note of gratitude to Joe Land who was instrumental in making the tournament a success! A special thanks is also due to each and every volunteer at Helping Hand Ministries. They have the opportunity to live out Hebrews 13:2 on a daily basis.

This year’s tournament was in memory of Bunty Seibert who generously gave of her time and energy to offer a helping hand to Tulsans in need. The tournament was a great success, but Bunty would still tell us that “the need is as great as ever.” To learn more about supporting the Helping Hand Ministry, contact Hannah Keith at 918-301-1039 or hkeith@firstchurchtulsa.org.

Next year’s Golf Tournament is scheduled for September 18, 2015!
different from the thoughts of this world regarding investing in the lives of others. In short, when you give of your time, your money and your energy on behalf of the Kingdom as an ambassador of the King of Kings, all that you give is returned to you in the form of intangible blessings. Being on the mission field, giving all that you have in that short amount of time, it seems like what you are doing is humanly impossible, but when you get home and begin to reflect on the end result, you realize that God worked through you and used you, a willing vessel, to perform the impossible. You realize that He worked a miracle through you to provide a miracle for somebody else. It is when we lay down our life and our priorities that we begin to embrace the fullness of His plan for our lives, and there is nothing that we can buy that will ever replace the satisfaction of that revelation.

Going into the whole world starts in our backyard, but it also includes venturing out beyond our comfort zone. Never let the fear of the unknown hinder you from stepping out beyond your borders. You may not know what to expect, but at the very least you can be confident that you will return changed from the inside out.

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tradition of Gaudete Sunday (Gaudete meaning “rejoice”) and symbolizes Joy; and the fourth candle, purple again, represents Love.

Advent concludes with the lighting of the white candle, the Christ candle, and the light cast by the staggered march of flames around the circle portrays the power of our risen Lord to scatter the darkness and bring us into everlasting Light.

But it is only by patient, expectant waiting that we come to see this fully lit wreath; it is only by learning to pause in the midst of the chaos of the season and cultivate a yearning for our Lord’s coming that we may truly enter into the joy of the fulfillment of Advent.

FPC members Stefani and Blake Bartholomew are one family who lit the Peace candle during advent in Stephenson Hall last year, and they consider this idea of waiting in light of the arrival of their children. “We have grown in the spirit of Advent by seizing each moment with gladness and appreciation. We await the Christmas Eve children’s service each year and cherish singing ‘Silent Night.’ The sizes of our children each year, going from being held in a warm, snuggly blanket, to standing hand in hand are etched into our memories.”

As we begin Advent, let us allow the spirit of patient waiting to work in us and echo like a collective heartbeat with words that shape us, even as they define the season: “Come, Lord Jesus.”

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What impact could an IMA trip have on your life?
FPC is seeking both medical and non-medical volunteers for our next trip in February 2015! Contact Hannah Keith at 918-301-1039 or email hkeith@firstchurchtulsa.org.

Application deadline is Dec. 15!

New Members - October 2014

CATHERINE ANDERSON
HALEY DAHL
MADELINE “MADDIE” COUNTS
BLAINE & CADIJAH “CIP” FRIZZELL
ORA FRASIER HARRISON
JOHN HENSHAW & MIA VAHLBERG

HANNA HOWARD
ANGELA “ANGIE” LAWSON
DIANE PARNELL
JERRY & LILA SMITH
CHRISTINE TYLER

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

Next Inquirers’ Class: Jan. 2015.
Deacons share joy

KELLY BROWN

Every summer, volunteers from First Presbyterian Church give children who have been battling cancer the chance to focus on something else: fun.

They can swim, canoe, make crafts and even conquer the giant swing on the ropes course at Camp Loughridge through Camp Sunshine, a one-day camp sponsored by the Deacons.

For the children and their families, it’s one day to truly enjoy summer fun with other families who also are undergoing cancer treatment.

“It is always such a joyful time,” says Stephanie Kern, who has served as chair of Camp Sunshine for the past two years. “A lot of the same families come back year after year and look forward to it.”

She shares that the children, who range in age from very young to teenagers, seem to almost forget their illness while at camp.

“Some campers may be missing a limb or their hair, but they all have beaming smiles at camp,” she says. “This day is really about being Christ to these families—showing love and hospitality and providing a fun experience.”

“Before I became a Deacon, I didn’t even know this was something our church did,” she says. “There are just so many opportunities through First Church to share Christ’s love with others.”

The next Camp Sunshine will be held August 8, 2015. Kern says any church member, not just Deacons, are encouraged to help. Interested volunteers should call Dionna Schooley, ministry assistant for pastoral care at 918-301-1029 or email dschooley@firstchurchtulsa.org.

FPC deacons and volunteers help children into the canoes at Camp Loughridge during Camp Sunshine.

The next Deacon-hosted community outreach event will be Celebrating Christmas Together at Emerson Elementary school (see below).
Listen | Learn | Discern

the January Series 2015

...and 9 others

Bobette Buster
Elizabeth Dias

Adm. James Stavridis
Roxana Saberi
Richard M. Daley

"Fifteen days of a free liberal arts education!"

7 Wednesday
BOBETTE BUSTER
Storytelling and the Arc of Transformation

8 Thursday
WILLIAM HURLBUT
Chemicals to Consciousness: The Mystery of the Human Mind

9 Friday
BRYAN STEVENSON
Why Mass Incarceration Defines Us as a Society

12 Monday
CRAIG DETWILER
iGo: How Technology Shapes our Spiritual and Social Lives

13 Tuesday
TOYA FRIEDMAN
Kinderlager: Reflections of a Child Holocaust Survivor

14 Wednesday
RICHARD M. DALEY
CEO of the City

15 Thursday
JAMES FISHKIN
When the People Speak: Deliberate Democracy

16 Friday
ROXANA SABERI
On the Streets of Tehran

19 Monday
ALYCE CLAERBAUT
In honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Jazz Great Billy Strayhorn: Beyond the Peaceful Side

20 Tuesday
DAVID KATZ
The Rational Un-fattening of America's Families

21 Wednesday
ELIZABETH DIAS
Covering TIME

22 Thursday
ADM. JAMES STAVRIDIS
A Navy Admiral's Thoughts on Global Security

23 Friday
LARRY LOUTERS
Demonstrating the Wonder of Chemistry: Discovering God's Majesty in the Minuscule

26 Monday
PAUL MARSHALL
The Global Assault on Christians

27 Tuesday
JERRY SITTLER
Adversity and Spiritual Formation

CALVIN College

FREE lectures live-streamed from Calvin College to Stephenson Hall
11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. (lunch starting at 11:00 a.m.) weekdays, January 7-27

To reserve lunch ($5) and view a parking map and schedule, visit:
www.firstchurchtulsa.org/januaryseries