Young adults find Christ in the workplace

For many of us in the Niche young adult group at First Church, this season of life is all about starting our careers and pursuing our passions wholeheartedly. However, it’s so easy for us to compartmentalize our work life and have it play out parallel to our Christian walk, never realizing that they are one in the same. Recognizing this, Niche member Henry Fennell challenged us to reflect on how what we do five (or more) days of the week is inextricably tied to our faith.

“I believe the holiness of our vocations is often overlooked amid the life of the church,” Henry expressed. “It pains me to see members of the family of God feeling ashamed that they don’t ‘have a ministry’ when they spend 40-50 hours a week teaching math to high school students or bringing order to the often chaotic world of corporate finance.” In this sentiment, our summer series was born.

Starting in June, our group gathered at various houses to eat, fellowship, and listen to a few accounts of how faith is integrated into our daily lives at work in whatever we do. Henry led a brief devotional, setting a prayerful tone, before our time of sharing. It was the perfect plan to fill our Sunday evenings in this season. It was a simple, casual series, but one that blessed us deeply, drew us closer to one another, and ultimately led us to our Creator.

We got to hear how Christ is found in an animal hospital, in a human hospital, in an accounting office, in a news station, in the classroom, in an artist’s studio, in a factory, and many other places. We learned about how these fields of vocation operate. We explored the notion of a calling, and how sometimes it resounds as if from a megaphone or, other times, resembles a faint whisper. In any case, we know that embarking on a career is a puzzling and challenging experience. Some of us are further along in the process than others, but it gave us joy to see how we all can glorify God wherever we are in life.

“In preparing to present my own journey and career path, I was able to step back and examine the ways God has been at work in and through me and to truly see the value in even what feels like the mundane tasks of daily work,” shared Niche member Hannah Howard. “It was beautiful to be given insights into careers like engineering and accounting (I am a definite right brain as artist and a writer!) and to see the ways the Lord works through all our passions and skill sets to achieve his purposes.

There were lots of laughs and even a few tears in this process. The Niche is a community with many gifts, acting as one body of Christ.

Throughout this series, Psalm 139:14 was echoed in our hearts, “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

These works that we embody and these gifts that we employ each day are a testament to God’s presence in our lives. It’s a truth that should never be forgotten. This summer was all about diving into this truth and focusing on what a Christ-centered community is all about: sharing the big and the small things of our lives, praying through the challenges together, and praising God for the diversity of passions that bring such joy and hope to life.

Henry couldn’t have said it better, “Whenever God’s people bring order, beauty, and abundance into their community, they are furthering the kingdom of God, pulling forward a taste of heaven into today’s reality.”
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)

Building a community of faith

The strategic priorities adopted by the session last year said that we seek to “cultivate a community like that of the twelve.” Just what is the community of the twelve and what do you think it means to cultivate that way of being in Christian community?

The phrase “community of the twelve” refers to Act 2:40-42, which is a description of how the first Christians ordered their life together, with particular attention to “the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

Before speaking about the way this impacts Christian community, let us think together first about community more generally. The implicit importance of community comes to us from the very first chapter of the Bible. In Genesis 1 God says, “Let us make mankind in our own image” (Gen 1:26). Because God is trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—the divine intention is expressed as a shared, cooperative initiative; “let us.” Furthermore, because God exists eternally in mutual love, when the image of God is remade in humanity the product is not individual, but plural: “Male and female He created them” (Gen 1:27). What is more, this is the creation that God calls “very good” (Gen 1:31). So we should not be surprised that when good creation is disrupted by sin, this community is broken and creation becomes marked by alienation between God and humanity, (Gen 3:8) between humanity and the created order (Gen 3:17-19) and between male and female (Gen 3:12, 16b). And ever since sin began this work of alienation within God’s good creation, the divine redemptive mission has been to reconcile all things in Christ (See 1Cor 15:20-28; Col 1:15-20; Heb 2:5-9; Eph 1:19-23). And, in fact, God has reconciled the world to Himself in Christ and has given the Church the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:16-21). One day Jesus will return and the city of God will descend from heaven and God will dwell with us in a new heaven and a new earth. It is not too much to say that Christ-centered community is the goal of all human history (Rev 21:1-8).

When we come to think that Christ-centered community is the end toward which we are moving, we find that our imagination and longings can be shaped by this promised future. This shaping of imagination and longings is important in our journey as a community and the place where Christians of all ages have gone for renewal of imagination.

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Member Care

Faith Partners Ministry at First Church

KAREN MCMILLAN

Our Mission Statement: Faith Partners Ministry, led by God, nurtures individuals and families struggling with all types of addiction by offering compassion, sharing resources, providing education, and restoring hope and faith through the power of the Holy Spirit and the joy of recovery.

Our Scripture Verse: Romans 12:12 “Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.”

The Faith Partners Ministry team is comprised of several members of First Church who have been personally affected by or who have an immediate family member/friend who is suffering from the stronghold of addiction. Addiction can touch all levels of the social and economic ladder; addiction is not choosy and can affect anyone at anytime. The survey of our congregation showed we feel it is very important for a faith community to help those who have problems with addictions, but our awareness of where to go for help is very limited. Through this ministry, we are providing awareness and support by offering:

- AA/Al-Anon meetings Monday-Friday at noon in the Bernsen;
- A resource center in the Miller Library (support books, pamphlets and lists of community help);
- Educational opportunities to youth and our congregation and friends to promote prevention, recovery, and remove the stigma of shame associated with addiction;
- Pastoral referrals to our team members who can provide Christ-centered compassionate care, a listening ear and a mentoring attitude for those in need.

This journey does not have to be traveled alone; Faith Partners Ministry team is here to support you. Don’t let shame and the stigma of addiction stop you from seeking help through the Pastors and the Faith Partners Ministry team. For more information contact a pastor or Karen McMillan, Team Facilitator, at k.mcmillan@cox.net

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Mission is at the heart of the Rounds family.

As a child of missionaries, Phil Rounds was born and grew up in Japan, returning to the United States at age 16. And it was no surprise when Allison, his daughter with wife Denise, signed up for a church mission trip to Mexico. Allison served in Tijuana where her appetite was piqued listening to returning missionaries tell about their experiences. She pursued mission work further with encouragement from her parents, taking a “Perspectives in Mission” course at John Brown University and she later spent a semester in Egypt on a medical mission.

Allison’s passion for service was matched by classmate, Taylor Martyn, whom she later married. A digital media major, Taylor was surprised to learn that his talents and training could be used in the mission field and the couple began to explore missionary opportunities together. After working in Dallas for four years, the couple moved to Sudan with their daughter, Avery, now six. The family later welcomed three-year-old son, Larson while serving in Kenya.

Allison is an intake and outtake coordinator for Serving in Mission and Africa Inland Missions (AIM) assisting missionaries who serve six to nine months in Africa. Her role includes assimilation, offering advice for cultural sensitivity, and safety for new missionaries, and debriefing services for those leaving the field. Taylor serves as a digital media specialist and recently wrapped up a two-year, full-length film written by Kenyans encouraging Kenyans to become missionaries.

Raising children while serving as missionaries creates many opportunities and challenges. Denise explains that the children of missionaries grow up in a “third culture,” a combination of their family’s indigenous culture and their new culture. This is a reality that Phil experienced first-hand. As children grow, their family synthesizes the elements of these cultures, creating a new, third culture, allowing them to find ways to relate to others. These children are often more open to diverse cultures and have a more inclusive view of the world.

After living within a third culture, re-entering their home culture can be difficult. When Allison visited a national retailer during a previous visit to the states, she was awed by the available selections.

“She stood in the cereal aisle of Target crying,” says Phil. She was overwhelmed by the choices.”

Denise and Phil attended a recent retreat for parents of missionaries. The classes taught families how to transition missionaries back home and find ways to relate to children and grandchildren who have lived in third cultures.

“I’ll share photos of my experiences growing up in Japan with my parents as missionaries,” says Phil. “It will be a way to show that I have also experienced some of what they are going through.”

Time with family in the United States is a precious commodity and Denise admits that it’s tough to be away from the grandkids for two or three years but she believes Allison and Taylor are doing important work and that is worth the sacrifice. Denise and Phil have traveled to Kenya twice - once for Larson’s birth and again last Christmas, they skype when possible and they will see Allison and her family when they return to the U.S. in 2015 to report to sponsoring churches and fundraise for a third term.

“It’s tough being apart but we keep praying for them,” Denise says. “It’s about helping those who cannot help themselves.”

Denise and Phil are proud of Allison and Taylor’s work and passion for helping others. Their advice to youth considering mission work is simple: prayerfully consider the opportunity as a family.

“I encourage students to go on a mission and see what mission work is like and pray,” says Phil. “It involves the whole family.”

To read more about their mission work, visit the Martyn family blog at http://martyns.co/blog/
Praying for our children

STEPHANIE FARRIS

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” -Philippians 4:6-7

First Church member, Dana Grogan knows first-hand the power of prayer in her family. As a member of Mom’s in Prayer International (MIPI), an interdenominational program where two or more moms meet weekly to pray for their children and the school, she has witnessed God’s redemptive work.

“I have seen so many answered prayers including seeing my sons come to know Christ and be guided through difficult times,” says Grogan. “Moms in Prayer is a way to remind us that we are partners with God in raising our children. When we become fearful or burdened about something, we know that we can confidentially share those concerns with others and boldly go before God in prayer.”

Grogan became involved in MIPI about 22 years ago when her oldest son, Michael was in first grade and son, Clay was in preschool. Today, mothers around the world are experiencing the power of the MIPI prayer groups. There are nearly 12,000 schools being prayed for throughout every state in the U.S. and there are groups in over 140 countries. The “Moms in Prayer Booklet,” used during the prayer sessions, has been translated into 55 languages/versions with several translations pending. MIPI has continued to offer new prayer groups including church-based, grandmothers, homeschooling, special needs, prodigal, military, college, career and language-based groups, as well as a growing prison ministry.

The program is based on the biblical examples of group prayer, including when the disciples prayed together after Jesus’ ascension, and how this prayerfulness changed the world. MIPI members meet for one hour each week and follow the Four Steps of Prayer: praise, silent confession, thanksgiving and intercession to keep participants focused in prayer.

“We praise God, acknowledging him for who he is and his character and what he’s capable of doing, using selected scriptures,” explains Grogan. “We confess to God silently. Next, we offer a time of thanksgiving when we thank God for answered prayers and during intercession, we break up into groups of two or three to pray for our child and the other mothers’ children.”

Although Grogan’s sons have begun professional careers, she has continued to participate in MIPI, now helping to lead a college and career group. The group prays for college students and those who have recently entered the workforce and sends care packages and supportive notes with prayers and scriptures.

Grogan’s goal is to establish a prayer group for Emerson Elementary, First Church’s adopted school. First Church previously held a prayer group for Alcott Elementary School until its closing. Church members are encouraged to contact Dana Grogan through the office to express interest. To determine if your child’s school has a prayer group, or to learn more about MIPI, visit www.momsinprayer.org.

Prayer groups do not pray or distribute literature pending. MIPI has continued to offer new prayer groups including church-based, grandmothers, homeschooling, special needs, prodigal, military, college, career and language-based groups, as well as a growing prison ministry.

Summer internship success!

KIRSTYN TAYLOR

This summer, John Richards and Kirstyn Taylor had the opportunity to be the high school Ignite Interns. The internship, which derives its name from Luke 24:32, when the disciples ask themselves, “Were not our hearts burning within us?” is a discipleship program for rising sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Therefore, the service and experience in this internship seek to “ignite” the hearts of the interns as they walk with Christ throughout the summer. They also worked closely with Heather Davis Youth Intern, Dylan Brumley.

“I applied for the Ignite Internship seeking a summer full of discipleship, service and leadership opportunities,” said Kirstyn, “I wanted to shift the focus of the summer from myself to Christ.”

John applied for the Ignite Internship, “because both my older sisters, Phoebe and Anna, were interns when they were in high school and had a great experience; I only heard good things about the internship from them and the other interns after them.”

Every morning, the day begins with a devotion. Over the summer, the interns read through Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. “Spending time each morning in reflection allows the rest of the day to build off of the message God conveys through the scriptures,” Kirstyn explains. “It definitely impacts my attitude for the whole day.”

Some of the service opportunities included Vacation Bible School, Crossover Summer Day Camp at Hawthorne Elementary, Works of HeArt art class, led by Lauren Allen, at Tulsa Day Center for the Homeless, chapel and Bible study with Chaplin Rick Davis at Inverness Village and TINA (Totally Into Gnarly Adventures) Wednesday evening middle school Bible study. Each Ignite Intern also went on a mission trip: John went on the Exodus Belize trip, while Kirstyn went as an adult leader on the Pathfinder trip to Dallas.

“Belize was an amazing experience that I’ll never forget,” said John. “To see how the Belizeans had so little and yet they were so content was eye-opening, and watching the World Cup in Belize was unbelievable!”

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The Pathfinders worked all week at an organization called Voice of Hope. “Working with students and adults alike helped me build friendships that will last a lifetime!” said Kirstyn. “Working with youth is my passion,” said Dylan. “This summer was exactly what I wanted it to be and am thankful for the opportunities I had.”

At the end of the summer, the Ignite Interns and Dylan Brumley went on a spiritual retreat to Miami, New Mexico. Along with the interns, Dan Russell, High School Ministries Director, and Jaclyn and Julia Metcalf, both Exodus alumni, joined them on their adventure. The purpose of the retreat is to spend a week connecting with God and exploring his creation. Some of the highlights were staying in Our Lady of Guadalupe Benedictine Abbey, camping at Cimarron Canyon State Park and visiting Philmont, as well as reading Practicing the Presence of God by Brother Lawrence.

“I will never forget this summer,” said John, “I loved working with Dylan and Kirstyn and doing the work of God within the walls of my own city. I’ll always cherish the friendships I’ve made this summer. It was a great experience and I definitely encourage the other kids in the youth group to apply for the internship next year.”

Going into the summer, the interns had pretty high expectations, all of which were exceeded. The summer was a journey and time of growth and maturity not only in spirituality, but also in leadership. “I was blessed to have the opportunity to work with youth and staff members of First Pres., while creating memories and relationships I will cherish for the rest of my life,” said Kirstyn. “I will carry out the things I learned from this summer next year and in the years beyond. I would also encourage any youth interested to get involved and be prepared for challenges, but when conquered, reap huge rewards for God’s kingdom.”

For more information contact Steve Wilson at swilson@firstchurch.org

Eric Baird, contemporary worship leader

Eric Baird was born and raised here in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Eric graduated from John Brown University in 2003 with a degree in Cross Cultural Services. These studies served him well as he engaged in worship ministry, church planting, and missions. Eric and Laurel have just returned to Tulsa from serving in ministry in Ireland, Eric for the past 3 years, and Laurel for the past 4. The Lord surprised them this past fall in calling them to return to Tulsa. His new position as Contemporary Worship Leader here at First Church also came as a very welcome surprise. Knowing God has led him to this specific place at this specific time, Eric is blessed and humbled to join with the work the Lord is doing in and through this incredible ministry.

Jackson Seibert, associate director of middle school ministries

Jackson Seibert, First Presbyterian Church’s new associate director of middle school ministries leads Pathfinders and Confirmation. Jackson grew up in First Church as a member of both Pathfinders and Exodus. In 2007 he was a part of the inaugural Ignite high school internship, and in 2011 he served as the Heather Davis youth ministries intern. Jackson has been a volunteer with the Pathfinders since 2008 and enjoys the outdoors, missions, ice cream, sports (golf, baseball, basketball and soccer), entomology and the 4th of July. He and his wife Jessica have one dog, Clarence.

Hannah Keith, ministry assistant

Hannah Keith was born and raised in Cookeville, Tennessee, where she attended Tennessee Technological University and majored in Spanish and French and did a lot of history studies as well. For awhile she worked for a filter distribution company in Tennessee before moving to Tulsa in late July to attend the DOMATA School of Ministry at World Outreach Church.

“I am so honored to work in the Presbyterian church,” says Hannah. “I am called to mission. There is no doubt about it - that is what God wants me to do the rest of my life.” She has been on mission trips to Panama and Honduras, but looks forward to venturing to other countries.

What excites her most about her new job is being able to work for the body of Christ full time.
Developing Faith in College

CORY BYS

This fall, the transition into college will be an incredibly exciting and pivotal time in many young people’s lives. Students leave behind the old world they knew and begin to make choices that will impact their future careers, friendships and faith. These choices made at the beginning of the college career will lead to habits developed that are difficult to break. I want to encourage soon-to-be college freshmen and their parents to be intentional about the college transition by doing these three things immediately upon (if not before!) entering college.

1. Find a local church

This may simply be your home church if you’re staying in town, but it is absolutely crucial to make worship a part of every week you spend in college. Attending worship provides a framework for our week because it is our way of saying to God, “I’m surrendering to you this week by engaging in corporate worship.” It may take a while to find a local church where you feel called. Many students “church-hop” for a period before finding a congregation where they can both serve and be served. A church’s attention to young people should be a key factor in finding a local congregation.

2. Find a Christian community on campus

You probably don’t want to hear another cliche statement about how college is hard and will challenge your faith, but it’s true. It’s not cool to be a Christian in America’s universities, and you need to realize that. Therefore, a Christian group of friends will be invaluable to you to support you as you grow and are challenged in your faith. Most college campuses have several or many Christian communities that gather throughout the week, and often these will be tied to or supported by local Christian communities. Please note that campus ministries do not replace the church, but are an extension of it. A weekly Bible study with your peers should be an integral part of your college experience.

3. Find a non-Christian community on campus

Students who have grown up in the church typically have one of two completely different college experiences. They either virtually leave the church behind or fall into the “Christian bubble.” Being a Christian and living intentionally in the world (but not “of” it) is one of the hardest things about discipleship. So don’t over or under commit yourself! Be intentional about engaging in a Christian community, but don’t attend so many campus ministry events that you only develop Christian relationships. Remember that the gospel is good news—news that has hopefully changed your life but is also meant to change the lives of others. So join a fraternity or sorority or an intramural team with people from your floor. Make friendships with people that believe differently than you, not so that you can “save” them but so that you can be challenged in your faith and come closer to Christ and, Lord willing, draw others closer to Christ at the same time. The best way to be a witness to others is to witness Christ working in your own life and to be blown away by His beauty.

One of the most challenging (and fun!) things about college is that no one will tell you what to do. Most people would call this “freedom,” but you will soon learn that it doesn’t feel like freedom. It can actually be scary, and at the same time liberating. The reality of human nature is that we all bow down to something, and people on college campuses “bow down” to personal appearance, good grades, partying, sex or even video games. Choose to bow down to Christ and I guarantee that your college experience will be better for it—better, but not easier. Freedom in Christ is found by being in relationship with Him, so develop habits from the get-go that will develop you as a Christian.

“I believe that Moms in Prayer is more than just praying for our children. It’s also sacrificing our time to help other moms pray for their children. It is a time of encouragement. It’s a time of worshiping God. It’s a time to feed our souls,” says Grogan.

Grogan says she has learned a great deal about prayer through MIPI and shares a few tips for parents: be accountable and consistent with your prayers for your children; let someone walk beside you in prayer and help you to recognize answered prayers; pray in good times, not just in rough patches; and remember that we may not always aware of how God is answering our prayers but He is faithful.

Grogan also emphasizes that the power of our prayer extends far beyond a single moment, impacting our children as they grow, and for future generations.

“Our prayers will outlive us,” says Grogan. “The prayers we pray for our children are around and affecting our children. That’s the beauty of prayer – there’s no expiration.”

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4
Making the pipes speak for four decades

KELLY BROWN

Ron Pearson was a young boy growing up in a northern Minnesota farming community when he heard his first real organ. Its notes sounded on his parents’ phonograph, from a recording of an organ that Bach himself had played.

He marveled at the instrument’s voice — the power of it, the dynamic range of it, the way its nine octaves could fill a cathedral with thunderous shouts or ride the air as lightly as a whisper.

“There was something about the sound that intrigued me,” Pearson says. “And I was fascinated by how it worked. How is it that you can play a key and somewhere, way up in the ceiling, there’s a pipe that speaks?”

Pearson has been coaxing the pipes to speak for 50 years, 40 of those as the organist at First Presbyterian Church in Tulsa. On Oct. 12 at 4 p.m., he will present his 41st organ concert at the church. On Nov. 21, members of the congregation are invited to join Pearson.

Ron Pearson at the keys of the main organ console before it was removed for refurbishment.

Even Pearson is amazed that four decades have passed since he first took his place at the console of the sanctuary’s mighty Austin organ as a 24-year-old graduate student.

“There’s that saying that time flies when you’re having fun,” he says. “It’s truly been a lot of fun. There are always challenges, of course. But I’m very blessed to be where I am, and it’s been a wonderful ride so far. The congregation has been extremely generous and kind to me and my family, and I’m very grateful for that.”

Pearson’s mother started teaching him piano at age four. When he was a young teen, the Lutheran church his family faithfully attended needed an organist. His mother volunteered him. The departing organist — a college-bound high school senior — told him how to turn the instrument on and push a few buttons, and then young Pearson was on his own.

His mother sought out more advanced instruction 30 miles away in Grand Forks, N.D. His lessons took place, ironically, at First Presbyterian Church there. He recalls how his father

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tion and longings is the place of prayer. Prayer, as Acts 2 reminds us, is ever the chief labor of the Christian community. Prayer really is the first work. I’m not sure how many groups in First Church gather expressly for the purpose of prayer, but every time I hear about one of these gatherings I get excited. This is because when one looks at church history it becomes evident that small groups devoted to prayer can lead to big things. I would love to see a half dozen new prayer groups start in the next year with the specific intention of praying for souls to be added to the Church, for the one Church in Tulsa to grow in humility and holiness, and to pray for a growing hunger for God’s disclosed presence. When these essential Christian longings begin to fill our imagination in the place of prayer, we can be assured that the Lord will hear.

As our imagination and longings are reshaped inwardly in the place of prayer, our outward life in mission is also renewed. Again, given that redeemed community is the end toward which we are moving, what would it look like if we longed for and imagined together some ways that Tulsa could anticipate and embody the promised city of God? Being reshaped in this way allows us to look at things from another point of view. For example, consider caring for the poor. If we are trying to imagine a way in which the great city of God could be prefigured among us, then we will naturally start seeking to create Christ-centered community. In order to help a poor person this will mean increasing their connection to people more than to institutions. Said differently, instead of trying to only provide services, we would hope to enter into redemptive and transformative friendship. Because we believe that Jesus is creating deep Christ-centered community we will see others less as under-resourced or under-funded, and increasingly as underfriend. This is a difficult problem in our culture because we can imagine creating social services for underserved communities and we can think of gathering resources for

under resourced communities, but we frequently lack the theological and social imagination needed to recapitalize a community in terms of relationship.

So the beginning of an answer is that being a community of the twelve involves seeking to order our lives so that our imagination and longings can be formed and reformed according to the teaching of the apostles and fellowship, and breaking bread and prayer. I think an especially important part of being community like that of the twelve in Tulsa at this time is praying together for grace to confess sins and to humble ourselves, for the flourishing of the church and reaching of the lost, and for an increased yearning to know God, to see his face, to glimpse his glory (Tim Keller, Center Church). In giving voice to these foundational gospel longings we invite the Lord to shape our imagination as we long together for the coming of his kingdom and doing of his will in our city.

—Rev. James Estes
took off work to drive him to his lesson and then napped on the back pew.

When he was 17 years old, his home church, Our Savior’s Lutheran in Warren, installed a small pipe organ. Pearson spent every spare moment watching the workmen, asking lots of questions, and learning as much as he could about the basics of organ design and construction. It was valuable training for what was to come.

Pearson studied organ as both an undergraduate and graduate student. As he was finishing his master’s degree at the University of Michigan, an instructor who was from Oklahoma told him about an opening in Tulsa.

Pearson held his first concert just six weeks into his new job at First Church. He knew he was lucky.

The relationship between an organist and the organ is much like that between a ship and its captain, he says. Pearson found himself at the helm of a magnificent instrument, the Austin organ purchased in 1967 by the Sharp family.

He knows every one of its 6,642 pipes by name. He describes it as a complex and delicate tool.

“It’s kind of like a highly tuned sports car that’s got to run on all cylinders at the same time,” he says. “You sort of become one with it.”

But 47 years of collected dirt, including the dust kicked up by the sanctuary’s renovation, and normal wear and tear eventually took a toll on the organ. Last year, work began on rehabilitating the instrument, including professional cleaning of every pipe and a much-needed update to the console.

Barring unforeseen delays, all the pipes are expected to be back in place by Christmas services, he says.

This means his annual organ concert will take place using the small console in the choir loft and the 1,100 pipes in the rear gallery of the sanctuary. Along with classical works by Bach, Mendelssohn and Cesar Franck, the concert will include arrangements of hymn tunes, and a set of variations on the “Star Spangled Banner” by the American composer Dudley Buck, in celebration of the 200th anniversary of our national anthem.

Pearson says he carefully selected each piece to suit the organ’s currently limited capacity, which he likens to a chamber orchestra.

“If you don’t have the equivalent to a 100-piece orchestra, you don’t pick music that requires a 100-piece orchestra,” he explains. “You pick music that will sound good on a smaller set of pipes.”

Each concert requires months of planning and hours upon hours of practice. Even 40 years aren’t enough to quell the nerves that Pearson expects at showtime.

“You stomach turns. Your fingers sweat. Every year, I say ‘Why do I do this?’” he says, laughing.

His favorite moments on the bench are likely the ones shared by the congregation: the singing of “Silent Night” by candlelight on Christmas Eve, Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus” and Widor’s palm-shaking “Toccata” on Easter morning.

Pearson diligently practices hymns, even though he’s played them again and again. It is the responsibility of the organ and the organist, he says, to be the musical proclaimer of the message on Sunday morning.

“If you don’t get that, you don’t belong on the bench,” he says. “There would be something missing in the interpretation of the hymns. You have to be in tune with the message and trying every Sunday to help deliver the mail, so to speak.”

No two organs are alike. Each is designed to fit a particular space. Perhaps, organists are like that too.

Before Pearson, First Presbyterian Church went through five organists in six years. He came as a young man, met his wife, Joanne, here and raised three daughters.

“I landed in the right place,” he says. “It was a good fit.”

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**Calendar of Events**

**SEPTEMBER 28: INQUIRERS’ CLASS BEGINS** The Sunday session of the new member class begins at 9:15 a.m. in room #2106. Contact Patricia Hall, 918-301-1028.

**OCTOBER 5: WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY**

**OCTOBER 10: 8 DATES** Monthly 8 Dates programming resumes with dinner and a presentation on parenting. Childcare available by reservation ($2) at 918-301-1009 or online at firstchurchtulsa.org/8dates.

**OCTOBER 12: RON PEARSON’S 41ST ANNUAL ORGAN CONCERT** Experience a master at the keys as Ron Pearson celebrates his 40th year at First Church.

**OCTOBER 13: COLLEGE OF ELDERS DINNER** Wonderful dinner by Chef Joseph and the State of the Church Address by our co-pastors for all past and current elders. Begins at 5:30 p.m. Reservations by October 6th, contact Sharon Richards at 918.584.4701 or srichards@firstchurchtulsa.org.

**OCTOBER 31: EAB - OSU CONCERT CHORALE & CHAMBER CHOIR** Evenings at the Bernsen presents a special night with some of our state’s best award-winning vocal ensembles. For ticket information, call 918-388-4720.

**NOVEMBER 1: ALL SAINTS DAY SERVICE**

**NOVEMBER 2: STEWARDSHIP SUNDAY**

**NOVEMBER 7-9: EXODUS FALL RETREAT**

**NOVEMBER 9: CHANCEL CHOIR CONCERT** Favorite choruses from great oratorios at 5 p.m. in the sanctuary.

**NOVEMBER 14: 8 DATES** Dinner and a presentation on parenting. Childcare available by reservation ($2) at 918-301-1009 or online at firstchurchtulsa.org/8dates.

**NOVEMBER 21: RON PEARSON’S 40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION**

**NOVEMBER 24: COMMUNITY THANKSGIVING SERVICE**

**NOVEMBER 27: THANKSGIVING WORSHIP & DINNER** Worship in Kerr Chapel at 11:00 a.m. Dinner in Stephenson Hall to follow for those without family nearby during the holiday. Reservations required by Friday, November 21. Call Cathy at 918-584-4701 to reserve your space. Please indicate if you need transportation.