Stroll the church hallways this Lenten season and you will encounter grace as Rembrandt saw it.

An etching by the Dutch master, “The Return of the Prodigal Son,” is among over 50 works of art that will be on display February 14 through April 3 at First Presbyterian Church. The exhibit, “The Art of Forgiveness,” features sketches, paintings, textiles and other works of art based on Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son.

The story, recorded in Luke 15:11-32, tells of a son who squanders his inheritance, ends up destitute, repents and returns home to an angry brother and an all-forgiving father. The parable has inspired artists for centuries, and the pieces in this collection capture its vision of divine grace from unique perspectives.

“For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. (Luke 14:24)”

“Some are about love. Some are about shame. Some are about being in the pig sty,” says church member Krista Schaafsma, who helped bring the exhibit to Tulsa after seeing it offered for loan by her alma mater, Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich. “We hope for everyone there will be something in this collection that will speak to them ... ” and there should be!

The exhibit spans centuries and styles, featuring everything from classic etchings by the French artist James Jacques Joseph Tissot to modern black and white linoleum cuts by American artist Steve Prince.

The collection was built largely through the efforts of Mary and Larry Gerbens, who bequeathed the art to their alma mater with the directive that it be shared.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3
Graduation from college, a wedding day, the birth of a child and so on...important days require seasons of preparation. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are at the heart of the gospel. These are days that give a broken world its only hope for a future.

On Good Friday we remember our Savior’s death, and on Easter Sunday we celebrate his resurrection. Lent is the forty-day season of preparation and repentance to receive this good news of our Savior’s sacrifice for the life of the world.

Our theme for Lent 2016 is “The Art of Forgiveness,” and our key text is the story of the Prodigal Son as told in Luke 15:11-32. Here we learn of a father’s amazing and inexplicable love for a rebellious and unlovely child. In other words, here we learn about forgiveness. Here we learn how the depth of our sin is overcome by the wideness of the Father’s love in Jesus Christ.

Gospel-centered forgiveness not only receives sinners home but also transforms their broken hearts. This is why the Apostle Paul is so excited to share that, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come!” (II Corinthians 5:17).

Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we’re welcomed by the Father not as strangers, nor as guests, but like a child at home. “Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we’re welcomed by the Father not as strangers, nor as guests, but like a child at home.”

These small groups are meeting at different times throughout the week at members’ homes, coffee shops and classrooms around the city. Each one offers a unique setting outside of the usual church routine to strengthen your relationship with God and with fellow disciples of Christ.

Secondly, as we continue the theme of the Gospel of Luke, the walls around Miller Library will display a special art gallery style installation, the likes of which have never been seen before at First Church.

“The Art of Forgiveness” will feature over 50 pieces of art inspired by the Prodigal Son, and the exhibition is an invitation for everyone to take a few moments to consider the beauty and promise of this parable through beautiful artwork.

Whether on a Sunday morning or at one of our open house events, we hope you will take the opportunity to invite your own friends and family to come and share this gift to the community and experience the beauty of forgiveness for themselves.

Finally, following a break for Ash Wednesday worship on February 10, Wednesday Night Downtown will transform into a unique Lenten worship experience every week from 6:30-8 p.m. Starting February 17 and continuing through the week after Easter, we will meet in the Sanctuary for worship that is also centered around the narrative of the Prodigal Son and the 15th chapter of the Gospel of Luke.

A talented team will be using candles, acoustic instrumentation and traditional liturgies to creatively use the beautiful space of the Sanctuary and create an intimate encounter with the Lord each week. Artwork featured in the “Art of Forgiveness” will also play a part — aiding in reflection and offering new perspective to this powerful narrative.

As we approach the joyful feast of the Prodigal Son’s return, simultaneously paired with the somber occasion of the Last Supper, we will begin to see the scene take shape as place settings and other elements are added to the chancel table.

—Rev. Ryan Moore Co-pastor

What should the next issue’s pastor’s letter address? Email your own theological, biblical or moral questions to communications@firstchurchtulsa.org (subject: Ask a Pastor).

Faith, life and beauty in the season of Lent

Wednesday night worship schedule

2/17 – Journey Into a Far Country
Luke 15:11-13

2/24 – Longing to Be Fed
Luke 15:14-19

3/2 – Embraced and Kissed

3/9 – The Fatted Calf
Luke 15:25-28a

3/16 – Alive Again?
Luke 15:28b-32
Larry Gerbens, an art buff who had a long career as an eye surgeon before his retirement, says the couple’s collection took root in the writings of Henri Nouwen, whose book, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*, centers on an encounter with Rembrandt’s painting. In addition to collecting fine works of art, the couple began commissioning favorite artists for new works on the parable. About half of the collection on display are commissioned works.

“They all had stories about the place of grace and forgiveness in their lives and, because of where they’re coming from, how they interpreted the parable,” Gerbens says. “The continuing motivation was dealing with artists and dealing with other people who saw the work and were positively affected by it.”

Schaafsma read about the exhibit in an alumni newsletter and couldn’t shake a desire to bring it to First Church. Calvin College made the exhibit available at no charge, but she says it took God’s provision — in the form of a hard-working team and the help of other church committees — to bring it to Tulsa.

Church members and staff handled numerous logistics from shipping to security to planning open houses. A newly added display and lighting system has transformed the hallways around the Miller Library into gallery space. The group procured donated pedestals to display some works in the atrium.

The exhibit comes at a pivotal point in the life of the congregation, as the church refines plans for a new arts-based ministry. Schaafsma envisions the day when children in the after-school arts academy in the Bernsen Community Life Center can use the new display space to show off their own creations.

“What a wonderful way to bring the community into the church,” she says.

With the season of Lent offering a fitting backdrop to reconsider the story of Christ’s gift of grace, the church plans to hold open houses on March 4 and April 1, coinciding with the Brady Arts District’s popular “First Friday” art crawls.

First Church has invited local artists and is encouraging people of all faith backgrounds to see the works of art. Schaafsma says everyone can relate to the need to receive and grant forgiveness. Churches that have previously hosted the exhibit report a profound spiritual impact on those who see it again and again.

“It was beyond what they ever expected,” she says. “People will look at it the first time and see color and shapes and styles and pick their favorites. But when they look at it a second, a third, a fourth and a fifth time, it often leads to a real spiritual experience, where the art speaks to them, whether their issue is needing God’s forgiveness or their issue is giving forgiveness to someone who has wronged them.”

Gerbens, who will give a lecture on the collection in Stephenson Hall on March 6 at 4 p.m., suggests that viewers first enjoy the pieces as art and consider, “Does it move you? Do you like the medium? Is this an artist whose work appeals to you?”

Then, he suggests they move on to asking deeper questions about what the artist is trying to say about the parable. Many of the works, he says, are autobiographical. The later works of Tissot, for example, focused on the revival of his Catholic faith.

“’I hope,” Gerbens says, “that people take time to enjoy it for art’s sake but also to ask themselves, ‘What is the artist saying?’ and ‘How is the art speaking to me?’”

The exhibit is free and open to the public, weekdays from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. and Sundays from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. On Wednesdays, the gallery will also be open during Wednesday Night Downtown until 8 p.m. Docent-led group tours can also be arranged by calling the church.

**Open House Events:**
- Friday, March 4 from 6-9 p.m.
- Friday, April 1 from 6-9 p.m.

**Lecture by the Collector, Dr. Larry Gerbens:**
- Sunday, March 6 at 4 p.m.
This year, Awana International invited children’s directors from ten American churches to join them in the Dominican Republic. Jan Miller and Shannon Bair departed from Tulsa on January 12 to represent First Church. The purpose of this “vision trip” was to give those attending a taste of what Awana is doing around the world and inspire US churches to explore the impact they could have globally. Jan Miller, director of children’s ministries at First Church, has seen the great impact the Awana program has on our children and was excited to explore possibilities of supporting the program through our existing international mission partners.

During the trip, participants were involved with a Seed Planter’s Training weekend. Pastors from 100 churches in the region were encouraged to send their top two children’s ministries volunteers to learn how to implement Awana Clubs in their churches.

Awana International has developed Truth Seekers, a curriculum that has been translated into multiple languages and can be operated with very little expense. Just $10 per child covers everything they will need for two years, including training for leaders, curriculum and materials.

Awana International brought leaders from all over the US to engage with local leaders being trained to begin their own Awana ministries.

Awana has done an outstanding job of creating a program that teaches children the same truths found in a US-based Awana Club, but is presented in a way that is easily adaptable to the local cultures. Awana provides regional missionaries to help shepherd and train leaders on the ground, but all hands-on work is done by local volunteers.

One of the things that struck Jan about those at the Seed Planter’s Training was the age and quality of the volunteers attending. “Most of them were between 18 and 25. The weekend was really focused on encouraging and empowering them, so they can return and train up other volunteers in their churches.”

According to their website, truthseekers-us.org, as Awana was developing their international program they discovered “...we needed to import knowledge and ideas, rather than just exporting them.” Partnering with international Awana clubs creates a win-win situation as churches learn from each other.

Miller and Bair also had the opportunity to observe four of the local Awana programs in action. Jan observed that “the biggest thing I noticed was the joy on each child’s face. One of their favorite songs was one that spoke of thankfulness. So often when we think of ‘thankfulness’ we speak of being thankful for what we have, but these children were so thankful to have Jesus!”

Along with spreading the Good News through Awana, international partnerships create ongoing relationships through which lives on both sides can be touched.

On their trip, Miller and Bair visited one Awana Club linked with Willow Creek church out of Chicago. By getting to know the local community, Willow Creek discovered one of their greatest needs was clean water, so they created a water treatment plant to provide clean water for everyone. Through an Awana partnership with the local church and this community, they were able to help provide both living water for their souls as well as clean water for their bodies.

Miller’s passion for bringing Awana to one of our international mission partners was invigorated through this experience, and the trip provided a beautiful vision for engaging and loving our brothers and sisters in Christ, both locally and internationally.

Please join us in prayer that God would help us to see outside our church walls and into the community — as well as distant lands — and that we would be obedient to that calling.

Reflecting on the whole experience, Miller couldn’t help but emphasize, “Teaching kids the Gospel is the most fundamental thing we can do.”

Both Awana’s core Christian message and fun games are translated to engage a variety of local languages and cultures.
The first of two international mission trips to Africa and Romania in summer 2016, First Church members will return to Malawi, Africa from May 26-June 7.

Ask mission trip leader Scott Rodehaver about his previous travels to Malawi, Africa, and you might be surprised to learn that the 2016 First Church mission trip will be his eleventh to the country.

Scott’s first trip to Malawi was in 1997. He later led a mission trip to Honduras to assist after Hurricane Mitch in 1999 and was part of the FPC discernment group that traveled to Valladolid, Mexico prior to the church’s commitment to help raise funds and build a hospital to serve the Mayan people in the Yucatan peninsula. His favorite mission memories, not surprisingly, were made in Malawi when the Rodehaver family served together from 2001-2002.

“I’ve been involved with church mission trips since junior high,” says Rodehaver. “It has always been a calling to serve cross culturally and learn form the global church.”

First Church members like Rodehaver have continued to return to Malawi due to a partnership formed with the Presbytery and the Synod of Livingstonia Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in 1997 and more recently with the Bandawe Presbytery.

“We seek to nurture our partnership so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith,” says Rodehaver. “We also hope to discern a long-term, sustainable development program that we can partner with the Presbytery. This could be an educational, medical, or agricultural program.”

Additional mission volunteers are needed. Adult and mature high school student volunteers may complete a participant application through the church office by mid February. The application helps Scott to understand the volunteers’ talents and develop mission activities that best match the group’s abilities.

The cost of the trip is approximately $2,750, including airfare. Scholarships are available for those who qualify. Volunteers must also participate in mandatory training sessions, led by Scott Rodehaver and Rev. James Estes. These sessions will prepare the group to minister together and assure that volunteers are familiar with Malawian culture.

Can’t make the trip? The group will be collecting medical supplies and medications for a mobile medical clinic. Contributions to fund mission scholarships are also gratefully accepted. As always your prayers will be much appreciated.

Scott encourages those considering the mission trip to, “Pray about it and follow what you hear. Africa can be ... an experience that God can use to change lives — both Malawians’ and ours.”

Over the last year, Malawi has been ravaged by floods and droughts, creating record food shortages — a stark contrast to the lush green meadows captured in this photo by six missionaries during the last First Church trip to Malawi in 2014.

Next Cursillo Weekend: April 21-24, 2016

The word “Cursillo” means “short course,” and the retreat is designed for members of the Presbyterian Church who seek to grow in their faith and commitment to the Master. It is a unique opportunity to experience a few days lived in a vibrant Christian community without the distractions of the secular world.

Learn more and register online at firstchurchtulsa.org

Total cost of the weekend is $175. Scholarships are available.
With heartfelt gratitude to all those who provided financial support to Helping Hand Ministry (HHM), enabling us to assist individuals and family members in the Greater Tulsa Area that were struggling and in desperate need of a helping hand, the volunteers would like to share with you what was accomplished in 2015.

HHM ended the year 2015 with its best year since it started in 1981, disbursing funds in the amount of $422,591 that helped 5,648 individuals and family members as follows:

- Food to provide 19,260 meals to 2,140 households;
- Funds to help 2,589 individuals and family members avoid a shut-off of utility services;
- Rent assistance to 468 individuals and family members to avoid an eviction from their landlord;
- Prescription medication assistance to 39 individuals;
- Assisted 412 individuals to secure a photo identification card that is necessary to apply for a job.

HHM could not have accomplished the above without your support. Thank you for helping us help others in need.

—Emma Smith, President

For over six years, Tulsa International Fellowship, or TIF, has continued to grow and evolve as an important part of the First Presbyterian Church community. The ministry hosts vibrant worship and provides a tightly-knit home-away-from-home for international worshipers, primarily born in different countries around Africa.

Together with TIF leadership, the First Church Session, Strategic Planning Committee and Personnel Committee have determined that the next step in growing the community is to elect a designated associate pastor called to provide leadership to TIF and its many programs and ministries.

On January 10, 2016, a congregational meeting was held to elect an Designated Associate Pastor Nominating Committee. The motion was presented and approved at each of our five worship services.

Elders Farris and Cravens reported to the congregation that the Personnel Committee had determined that the timing was right for First Church to add a designated associate pastor to provide pastoral leadership for the Tulsa International Fellowship.

On January 11 TIF hosted a vibrant worship service, celebrating prayers of thanks from 2015 and installing an elder called from their community.

The position will be for a “designated associate pastor,” which is a two-year, renewable, contractual arrangement. The Presbytery reviews our Church Information Form and forwards it, so that the position may be listed on the national website for interested pastors to see. The Presbytery reviews those showing interest and submits the most appropriate candidates to our Associate Pastor Nominating Committee.

The search committee includes: Jennifer Philp (Chair), Robbie Burke, Michael Madsen, Elisa Mangesho, Grace Masaku and Jaclyn Metcalf (Alternate).

The final candidate will be presented to the congregation, which must approve the call.

Please pray for the committee as they begin this important work, and pray for the TIF community as they continue to answer their calling in First Presbyterian Church.

ANNA MILLIGAN

Worship and Music

Mission and Outreach
FEBRUARY 10 - ASH WEDNESDAY
Service at 6:30 p.m. in the Sanctuary with the imposition of the ashes. A soup dinner will be served at 5:30 p.m. in Stephenson Hall before worship ($3 for adults, free for children 12 and under). There will be no Awana or WNDT adult programming. Reserve dinner online or call 918-301-1019.

FEBRUARY 13 - AMASS EXODUS
Our monthly gathering for high school students from 6-9 p.m. in the Powerhouse with food, fun, games, music and a relevant message.

FEBRUARY 14 - ART OF FORGIVENESS
GALLERY ON DISPLAY
See page 1.

FEBRUARY 14 - INQUIRERS’ CLASS BEGINS (SUNDAYS)
Learn more about the Presbyterian tradition and what it means to be a member of First Church on Sundays, Feb. 14-March 6. Learn more online or call Patricia Hall at 918-301-1028.

FEBRUARY 14 - FOUNDATION SUNDAY
All are invited to a reception at 12:15-1 p.m. in Miller Library for a celebration of “A Legacy of Love.” Light hors d’oeuvres will be provided. Learn more about making a lasting investment in the future of First Church.

FEBRUARY 14 - “AS TIME GOES BY” VALENTINE’S DAY DINNER
Celebrate generations of authentic love at First Church with an elegant evening of fine dining and entertainment. 6:30 p.m. in Stephenson Hall. $25 per person. Register by February 9 online or by calling 918-301-1015.

FEBRUARY 17 - LENTEN WORSHIP
During the season of Lent, a unique worship experience will be held every Wednesday night from 6:30-8 p.m. in the Sanctuary. Optional WNDT dinner will be served at 5:45 p.m. in Stephenson Hall ($6 adults, $3 children, $15 max per family). Reserve dinner online or by calling 918-301-1019.

FEBRUARY 19 - SISTERS IN CHRIST
TRIVIA NIGHT
A special evening of fellowship for the women of First Church at 6 p.m.

FEBRUARY 19 - PLANET WISDOM
High schoolers join in this youth conference February 19-20. Youth will ride together from church and spend Friday night at the Powerhouse. Learn more and register online.

FEBRUARY 20 - INQUIRERS’ CLASS BEGINS (WEEKEND SESSION)
Learn more about the Presbyterian tradition and what it means to be a member of First Church in a Saturday/Sunday session. Learn more online or call Patricia Hall at 918-301-1028.

FEBRUARY 23 - RETIREES LUNCHEON
Sarah Strocker from INCOG Area Agency on Aging will be presenting a program on Long Term Care Facilities. Lunch is at 11:30 a.m. in the Miller Library for $5. Reservations are required by January 21 to 918-584-4701.

MARCH 4 - ART OF FORGIVENESS OPEN HOUSE
A special open house coincides with “First Friday” with refreshments and entertainment from 6-9 p.m.

MARCH 6 - ART OF FORGIVENESS LECTURE BY THE COLLECTOR
Hear from the gallery’s collector and donor, Dr. Larry Gerbens at 4 p.m. in Stephenson Hall

MARCH 11 - 8DATES
Fellowship, a presentation on parenting, and a chance to leave the church for a date night! Childcare ($2/child) must be reserved online or by calling 918-301-1009 by March 8.

MARCH 11 - EAB: SUN MIN KIM/BREE AHERN & SHERIDAN ROAD
At 7:30 p.m. in the Powerhouse. Learn more and register online.

MARCH 11 - RETIREES LUNCHEON
Our monthly gathering for high school students from 6-9 p.m. in the Powerhouse with food, fun, games, music and a relevant message.

MARCH 20 - PALM SUNDAY
Jubilant worship and waving of palm branches in all regular Sunday services.

MARCH 24 - MAUNDY THURSDAY
Moving worship includes choral music, the “Living Last Supper,” and communion at 7:30 p.m. in the Sanctuary.

MARCH 24 - EASTER PRAYER VIGIL
Help “keep watch and pray” by maintaining a chain of unbroken prayer from Maundy Thursday through Easter morning. Sign up online or call the Petersons at 918-296-5548.

MARCH 25 - GOOD FRIDAY
A community worship service will be held at noon in the Kerr Chapel.

MARCH 27 - EASTER SUNDAY
Sunrise service at 6:30 a.m. at Camp Loughridge. All other services will be held at regular times as special music ensembles ring out with the Joy of Christ’s resurrection! The 8 a.m. traditional service is held in the Sanctuary.

APRIL 1 - ART OF FORGIVENESS OPEN HOUSE
A special open house coincides with “First Friday” with refreshments and entertainment from 6-9 p.m.

APRIL 1 - SCHOLARSHIP DEADLINE
Remember, the deadline for the various scholarships administered by First Presbyterian Church has been moved to April 1. An application is available on our web site, firstchurchtulsa.org.

Learn more about these events and more happening in the life of FPC, online at firstchurchtulsa.org.
This Lent, First Presbyterian Church hosts a special exhibition featuring over 50 original pieces inspired by the familiar parable of the Prodigal Son as interpreted by Rembrandt, Thomas Hart Benton, JJ Tissot, and dozens of other artists. A wide variety of works includes paintings, prints, ceramics, textiles, and other media.

Come and reflect upon the love and mercy of the father, illustrated by beautiful artwork displayed in a unique gallery setting.

**Free and Open to the Public**

**February 14 - April 3**

at First Presbyterian Church of Tulsa

**Open House Events:**
- Friday, March 4 from 6-9 p.m.
- Friday, April 1 from 6-9 p.m.

**Lecture by the Collector, Dr. Larry Gerbens:**
- Sunday, March 6 at 4 p.m.

[firstchurchtulsa.org/art](http://firstchurchtulsa.org/art)

Currently, 478 families have pledged, 30% of our total church population of 1,575 families. Together they have offered $2,266,490 back to God, 86% of the way towards a pledge goal of $2,650,000.

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

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

Books are available for $12 from the Book Table

Learn more and sign up at firstchurchtulsa.org/lent

This Lent, small groups are meeting around Tulsa throughout the week to study the Gospel of Luke using N.T. Wright’s book “Lent for Everyone.”

**THE ART OF FORGIVENESS**

This Lent, First Presbyterian Church hosts a special exhibition featuring over 50 original pieces inspired by the familiar parable of the Prodigal Son as interpreted by Rembrandt, Thomas Hart Benton, JJ Tissot, and dozens of other artists. A wide variety of works includes paintings, prints, ceramics, textiles, and other media.

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