The First Church Porch Project: Discerning God’s call to love the city

JOHN BAIR & REV. RYAN MOORE

“Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon’s Porch.” -Acts 5:12

Running along the east side the Temple in Jerusalem was a porch. Solomon’s Porch is mentioned three times in the New Testament. First in John 10, Jesus steps out onto the porch to announce that he’s God’s Son. So the porch is a place of encounter between the incarnate God and men.

Then in Acts 3, Peter, having just healed the lame beggar, bears witness to the ongoing power and authority of the crucified and risen Christ. Here the porch is a place for the church to proclaim the gospel in word. Finally, in Acts 5 we learn that Solomon’s porch was a place of healing and a place of belonging. The porch is a place for the church to enact the gospel in deed.

Any porch is a liminal place, a thin place, a transitional space, or a threshold between one world and the next. For the stranger, the distance from the curb to the front door is

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Lights, camera, sermon

TV ministry brings worship home

STEFLANIE FARRIS

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." -Mark 16:15

Flip on your television at 11 a.m. any Sunday morning and you are guaranteed to find a First Church worship service, thanks to our dedicated TV ministry volunteers.

The volunteers have three goals: worship outreach, evangelism and marketing, and these goals are achieved by bringing services to the homebound and the hospitalized, as well as potential members.

“We bring worship to the general public, exposing them to a worshipping congregation,” says Doug Crain, a ministry volunteer for 20 years. “The TV ministry serves as a marketing tool, introducing people to First Church before they ever attend worship or an event.”

The service is broadcast live on Cox at 11 a.m. each Sunday morning and replayed throughout the week on KWHB TV-47 and Cox 7. Worship is also streamed on the church website and viewed by followers as far away as Africa.

The reach of the TV ministry is vast but the hands are few, requiring many volunteers every Sunday. Additional volunteers are needed to continue this ministry and to allow for a four-week per quarter rotating schedule, similar to the usher program. Each broadcast requires seven volunteers including three camera operators, a graphics person, audio engineer, a producer/engineer and a director. These volunteers log approximately 17 hours of service for each hour of television. If crew members are absent, it shows in the broadcast, reducing filming to one camera and limiting the team’s ability to showcase worship.

Richard Halliburton, a TV ministry volunteer for more than 40 years, welcomes new volunteers, and emphasizes that previous video or film production experience is not required. Necessary skills are gained through volunteering. Volunteers start as camera operators and initial camera training takes only a few minutes. Volunteers become proficient in a matter of weeks. Directing, audio, graphics and engineering take more practice so a job-shadowing approach is used to help volunteers grow into these roles. Volunteer time per Sunday is approximately 10:45 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

“I’m involved,” Crain says, “because it’s my way to honor the gifts and skills that I’ve been given by God.”

To volunteer or learn more about supporting the ministry, please contact Doug Crain or Richard Halliburton through the church office.

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lots of wonderful babies!” says Janie Long.

Having traveled to Malawi before, Janie Long was able to observe the fruits of First Church’s relationship with individuals, pastors and ministries in the country, which she says, “include a deep respect and friendship with our brothers and sisters in Christ in Malawi.”

“Our church, FPC, is prayed for regularly by the churches that we visited,” says Long.

“Our church has provided funds for church floors, roofs and windows where hundreds of people are gathering for worship every week. FPC has provided books for the Eckwendeni School of Theology, where about 20 new Presbyterian pastors are graduated each year. By supporting the schools and churches we are helping to equip our friends for the future.”

As the primary focus of the trip was relational, spending time visiting pastors and congregations enabled the team to learn of their needs and share in their joys and concerns.

“It was very gratifying for me to see the development of the churches that we visited,” says Long.

“To see church buildings with concrete floors and tin roofs, the last time I saw them in 2008, they had dirt floors and no roof!”

Team members Jake Dodson, Rev. James Estes and Cory Bys experienced life in Malawi for the first time.

“The biggest surprise for me in traveling to Malawi was the uncompromising hospitality and love of the people there,” Bys says.

“It was as though they felt it to be their duty to give us the best gifts they had to offer—the best of their food, the best of their time, the best of their relationships. I was so humbled by their sacrificial giving and their abundant joy at the opportunity to offer us their best. The love of Christ was so evident in them.”

Every member of this team has stories to tell and experiences to share.

“I hope that the congregation can learn from me that the church in Malawi is strong,” says Bys.

“There are challenges to the gospel there of course, but their challenges look very different from ours. Hunger and poverty are right at their door, but faith and conviction for Christ is exploding there. The people of Malawi love and know their Savior, and we have so much to learn from them. I want our congregation to know that Christ is real, and that we don’t need the right kind of building

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Mission begins at First Church

On September 17, 1889, ten First Presbyterian Church women gathered in the home of Mrs. C.W. Dorman at the corner of 4th and Main Street to organize a Home and Foreign Missionary Society.

The new missionary society was named in honor of the Rev. R.M. Loughridge’s daughter, Hattie Graybill, who was serving with her husband, the Rev. Graybill, as a missionary in Lenares, Mexico.

The duties of every member of the Hattie Graybill Missionary Society were “to attend meetings regularly; read missionary literature, pray for her representatives on the field; give according to her means for the support of the missionary cause; and render to the society in every way possible her loyal support.”

“Go ye into the world and preach the gospel” was their command.

Early on, the society provided help to the missionaries in Mexico, a seminary in Mississippi and gave clothing and assistance to many Native Americans in the Tulsa area. In 1906, the Hattie Graybill Society sent financial support and clothing to Dwight Mission for the Native Americans in Eastern Oklahoma. In 1922, the S.V. Fait Library collection at the University of Tulsa was acquired through the generosity of the Society. Many organizations in Tulsa and missionaries worldwide were beneficiaries of the Society, which provide 40 years of missionary support from 1889 to 1937.

Between 1900 and 1937, more women’s Missionary Societies were established. The Queen Esther Guild, the Miriam Guild and the Bethany Mission Society of the Westminster Guild were actively supporting missionaries throughout the world. In 1937, the women’s societies agreed to merge into one group and established the Home and Foreign Missionary Society of First Presbyterian Church.

Nearly 125 years ago, ten women began a rich history of service and support at First Church that carries us into the future as we strive, with the leading of the Holy Spirit, to make a difference in the lives and the community in which we live.

—Amy Tingleaf

Home and Foreign Missionary Society in 1889

First Church has a beautiful legacy of loving the city and citizens of Tulsa in Jesus’ name. Building on this tradition, the session of First Church has formed a discernment team which exists to identify areas of need, evaluate our ability to address those needs and finally to mobilize our social, financial and human capital for action. We believe that First Church is poised to engage the needs of our community in new and exciting ways.

Dan Ellinor and John Bair co-chair a team which includes: Amy Tingleaf, Jennifer Powers, Patrick Grogan, John Woolman, James Estes, Duff Points, Jim Miller and Ryan Moore. Fortunately, a great deal of spade-work has already been done. The current strategic team is a beneficiary of the progress made by the Base Camp Mission Team led by Cynthia Stewart, which focused on our overall future strategies in local and global mission and of the hard work of Ken Kline and his NextSteps3 team, which evaluated how our facilities could be used for the common good. Many have invested countless hours, energy and passion in helping the congregation listen to the voice of God. All of this investment and information has brought First Church to a point of decision and action.

The discernment team will meet weekly over the next several months. Along the way, the team will keep the congregation updated and provide opportunity for input. Please keep the team and project in your prayers that the Holy Spirit would guide their good work.
Worship leader search continues

The search continues for a worship leader who will strike a chord with the contemporary congregation while in the interim, regular worship team members continue to lead worship in Stephenson Hall.

A full-time worship leader will be hired to invigorate contemporary worship at the 8:30 a.m. and 11 a.m. services and investigate opportunities for new music ministries. The worship leader will be primarily responsible for planning, leading, and administrating a comprehensive music and worship ministry. This individual will work with co-pastors to craft the theme of each service and coordinate all musical and audio visual aspects of the service.

The worship leader also will provide music for special worship and church gatherings, often partnering with the music director, organist and TIF worship band. The leader will also have an opportunity to explore the possibility of developing a new afternoon or evening worship offering. The worship leader will have several opportunities to work with students, mentoring the youth worship band and participating in Awana, vacation bible school and youth group activities.

The search committee is led by co-chairs Jaclyn Metcalf and Elliot Forsyth and includes Jeff Martinson, Lizzy Bradford and Pam Farris along with Ron Pearson, Duff Points and co-pastors Jim Miller and Ryan Moore.

Embracing their mission, the committee begins each meeting with worship. As they review resumes and online samples of worship, the committee is mindful of survey responses provided from 8:30 a.m. and 11 a.m. service attendees as well as church leaders regarding preferences in contemporary worship.

The candidate pool will be narrowed in June and the committee will conduct phone interviews with these individuals. Following phone interviews, committee members will visit the top candidates in their respective churches to view worship firsthand. The final two candidates will be invited to lead worship during a First Church contemporary service.

“We believe the right candidate is out there,” committee member Pam Farris says. “And we believe God is leading us to that person.”

Sharing your story: God’s Word comes alive

God said to Moses: “The place where you are standing is holy ground.” -Exodus 3:2

God speaks those same words to me in the Miller Atrium. The architecture of our atrium has a voice that says, “THIS IS HOLY GROUND.”

The atrium has had many unanticipated surprises. Besides the [arches], the Indiana limestone piled high and the stained glass windows, the terrazzo floors give invitation to our little lambs. The children are comfortable to run and play and grow and be visible to our adult flock. They find their own creative designs for circulating in this spacious area.

Their voices echo the original purpose of the atrium, “where congregations meet congregations.” I hear God’s voice reminding us these children are His gift to the Spirit’s power and growth of our church.

The atrium is a connector between the old church and the new church, the infants and the elderly. It is the anatomical “spine” of the Body of Christ. Spiritual growth and strength are visible and audible there.

Place a shiny penny in the palm of a little one’s hand. They know it is your intention to watch as they run to meet Jesus. However, without hesitation, they will first fold their hands, bow their head and whisper “Bless You, Jesus.” Then, they freely toss the penny into the water of the courtyard fountain. It takes guidance the first time only.

— Marlene Morgan

Has a specific verse of scripture come to your mind when you needed it? Have you experienced God’s Word coming alive for you in a specific way in a particular situation? We would love to hear from you! Share your story with the congregation in Tidings by submitting it via email to communications@firstchurchtulsa.org (up to 200 words).
Lynne Mansur makes a promise to the children of First Presbyterian Church upon their baptism. And every summer, she makes good on that promise. She treks up the steep hill that leads to Camp Loughridge to spend a week singing, playing and guiding at Vacation Bible School, delivering on the pledge that all congregants make: to help the church’s smallest members come to know Jesus better.

“At the ripe age of probably 55 or so, I realized I wasn’t giving back in any way to the children as we promised to do in the baptism service,” Mansur says. “For me, that’s why I’ve gotten involved in the children’s program. And I enjoy it.”

VBS (for children in kindergarten through third grades), VBX (fourth and fifth grades) and a new program called, VBE-xtra, take place June 2 to June 6. This year’s theme is “Targeting in on Who God Is.” Each day, the children will learn about the essential characteristics of God as displayed in the lives of David, the Old Testament king, and Peter, the New Testament disciple. VBE-xtra is an extended-day offering at the church for children who participate in VBS or VBX at Camp Loughridge.

None of the programs in this vital summer ministry would be possible without the help of volunteers like Mansur, says Kim Salmon, special events coordinator for the Children’s Ministry.

“Since the first day she rode her Harley up the hill to Camp Loughridge and toward the children awaiting her at VBS, she has been a blessing to volunteers, children and staff alike! Lynne is our VBS Tour Guide extraordinaire,” she says. “We thank God for her, and all the volunteers that make VBS so wonderful.”

Mansur’s own daughters are grown and her grandchildren have been too young to participate in VBS. And yet, for five summers, she’s volunteered there. She would prefer not to have attention called to her volunteer efforts. She simply thinks it’s important for her generation to reach out to help with the youngest generation.

“I just see the need for people my age to try and give back. It allows us the opportunity, the blessing, of getting to know some of the little children so we don’t lose touch,” she says. “We get to watch them grow up through the church.”

And she finds that the time spent on that hill in June always comes back as a blessing in her own life.

“I watch the joy in those little children and watch them learn the songs and Bible verses and know that they’re little sponges at that age,” Mansur says. “They’re absorbing so much. In this case, it’s a good, godly witness.”

There is still time to sign up to help out with this June as a VBS volunteer. Contact Kim Salmon at 918-301-1008 or ksalmon@firstchurchtulsa.org or sign up online at www.firstchurchtulsa.org/vbs-volunteers.
The Lord Reigns! Praying the Psalms in Every Season

REV. RYAN MOORE

“The Lord reigns; he is robed in majesty, the Lord is robed; he has put on strength as his belt.” Psalm 93:1

The Psalms express the full range of human emotion. You name it, the Psalms have it. There is everything from flat out praise, “Let everything that have breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!” (Ps. 150:6) to the not so nice cursing Psalms, “O God, break their teeth in their mouths” (Ps. 58:6). There is lots of frustration and confusion, “Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” (Ps. 10:1) and there are robust and repeated affirmations of God’s sure provision, “Your steadfast love endures forever” (Ps. 118 and 136).

The Psalms don’t shy away from any human emotion. That’s one reason John Calvin wrote that the Psalms are “an anatomy of the soul.” They are surgical, all encompassing and brutally honest. Martin Luther added, “The Psalms is the book of all saints, and everyone in whatever situation they may be, find in that situation psalms and words that fit their case . . . that suit them as if the words were put there just for their sake, so that they could not put it better themselves, or wish for anything better.”

As one reads the Psalms its not uncommon to think, “That’s exactly how I feel! That’s just what I want to say!” Still, the Psalms are far more than self-discovery. They’re far more than revealing the deepest and most inner workings of our own hearts, souls and minds.

At their core, the Psalms disclose the relationship of a people with a loving God. This is the Living God. This is the God who brought Israel out of Egypt and raised Jesus Christ from the dead. This is the God who relentlessly pursues his people from Genesis to Revelation. Incidentally, this is why Martin Luther labeled the Psalms “the Bible in miniature.”

This is the God—Father, Son and Spirit—who loves his creation so much that he’ll make the journey from manger, to cross, to empty tomb, to a final return in glory.

Now, this relationship, as already indicated, is far from neat and tidy. It’s full of drama, sorrow, and struggle as well as joy, triumph and love. Nevertheless, however disparate and conflicting the Psalms may appear they all have this central affirmation in common: The Lord reigns!

He reigns in victory and defeat. He reigns through tears and laughter. He reigns in death and in life. He reigns over creation and on Zion’s holy hill. He reigns before time, in time and for all eternity.

Join us this summer as we preach and pray through the Psalms. Allow the Psalms to be your tutor, revealing the inner workings of your heart and the amazing love and faithfulness of God in the midst of life’s ups and downs. Come and pray, whatever season of life you might find yourself in, that “The Lord reigns!”

Summer Wednesday Night Downtown: June 4, 11, 18, 25

“The Old Testament: A Sketchbook of Heavenly Realities”

Join us Wednesday evenings in Stephenson Hall, June 4, 11, 18 and 25 for dinner at 5:45 p.m. Teaching will last from 6:30 until 7:45 p.m. Register for dinner online at www.firstchurchtulsa.org/ wndt or call Gretchen Bashforth at 918-301-1019.

The Letter to the Hebrews offers a laser-like focus into God’s redemptive action in Jesus—and argues that the Old Testament religious practices serve as the “Sketchbook” of Heavenly realities. We’ll take a four-week 30,000-foot view of this letter with the Sketchbook (and its fulfillment) in mind.

June 4     The Great High Priest
June 11    The Sacrificial System
June 18    The Law
June 25    The Curtain of the Temple
What does it mean that Jesus Christ “ascended into heaven?”

We are in the season of the church calendar called Eastertide, or the Great Fifty Days between Easter Sunday (Jesus’ resurrection from the dead) and Pentecost (the Holy Spirit’s descent on the apostles and the subsequent birth of the church).

Forty days into Eastertide—this year that falls on May 29—we arrive at the Ascension of the Lord Jesus. As recorded in Acts 1, Jesus and his disciples are standing outside Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives. After Jesus once again reassures the disciples the Holy Spirit is soon to come, he charges them to be his witnesses in “Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” As the disciples listen and watch Jesus is “lifted up, and a cloud takes him out of their sight.”

So what does this bizarre scene of Jesus’ levitation mean for us today?

First, it means that God keeps his promises. It affirms that God finishes what he begins. It means that God is dependable. God said he would send the Son, the Son said he would die and rise again, and Jesus said he would return to the Father in heaven and send the Holy Spirit as a comforter and advocate. The Ascension reminds us that God is a God who keeps his promises, and so will return again as he said.

Second, the Ascension of Jesus is God’s raising up fallen creation. Jesus’ ascension isn’t a one man rocket-ship to heaven; rather, it is Jesus opening up a glorious highway, closed since the beginning of time, for both the living and the dead to follow.

Third, Jesus’ Ascension assures us that the full expression of human life is at the right hand of God the Father. The resurrected Jesus remains fully human as he ascends to heaven. He takes all the life experience, including the worst of his suffering and alienation, to the throne room of the Father. This means, astonishingly, that Almighty God can identify with us in every way.

Fourth and finally, the Ascension means that by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is unconfined by time and space. Paradoxically, this means that the Ascension is a move of Jesus not away from us but mysteriously towards us. It means we don’t have to travel back in history to be close to Jesus. It means we don’t have to go to Israel to be close to Jesus. It means that Jesus is as present, maybe even more so, to us than if we were on the Mount of Olives at the time of his ascent to heaven.

In the Old Testament God says that he’ll never leave us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6, 8). Likewise, Jesus in Matthew 28:20 assures his disciples that “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” The Ascension of Jesus is God’s way of making it so.

—Rev. Ryan Moore
or the perfect ministry model to experience life with him. The Church is big and beautiful, and we only need to look to our brothers and sisters in Malawi to realize that!"

Though you may not be able to travel to Malawi, “we always need a home team to pray and support our partnership visits,” says Rodehaver.

“We also hope to have Malawians visit First Church. Returning the hospitality by hosting Malawians in our homes is a very meaningful way to participate while staying in the Heartland of America.”

Support of many of our on-going projects really makes a difference too.

“One of the most common things we heard from the congregations was that they needed a clean water resource,” says Long.

“It is very humbling to hear people ask for clean water, something we don’t even think about. Supporting the H2O Project during Lent [provides] water wells to areas in Malawi to help the very people we were visiting! Malaria is very prevalent in Malawi, we saw so many people sick with it. Support of the Mothers Day Cards buys treated mosquito nets and provides health care for women and children in Africa.”

The joy of being Christ’s hands and feet in our world through mission often impacts those who serve in unexpected ways.

“We always learn from our brothers and sisters in Malawi,” says team leader Scott Rodehaver.

“Sometimes it takes a complete disenagement from our normal life and immersion in another culture to learn holy lessons. It helps us see things different upon our return and build relationships that allow us to look beyond ourselves.”

The team that traveled to Malawi would be the first to promote the many mission opportunities at First Church, especially to those who haven’t taken the plunge before.

“I would encourage anyone who feels called by the Holy Spirit to go on a mission trip; local, regional or international, to be obedient to the call,” says Long.

“You will not be disappointed!”

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L to R: Lizzy Bradford, Cory Bys, Rev. James Estes, Janie Long, Jake Dodson and Scott Rodehaver

JUNE 1, 8, 15, 22 & 29: AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF GRACE Please join us for Autobiographies of Grace on Sunday mornings during June in the Kerr Chapel at 9:30 a.m. These stories of God’s grace will inspire you, enrich your faith, and enable you to see more clearly God’s grace at work in your own life.

JUNE 1: Rev. James Estes
JUNE 8: Lori Kanitz
JUNE 15: Tony & Lynn Miller
JUNE 22: Patrick Kirunda
JUNE 29: Bob & Marion Simmons

JUNE 2-6: VBS This year’s Vacation Bible School is from 9 a.m.-noon, June 2-6 with the theme “Targeting on Who God Is.” See page 5 for details if you’d like to volunteer.

JUNE 4, 11, 18 & 25: SUMMER WEDNESDAY NIGHT DOWNTOWN Wednesday evenings in Stephenson Hall, June 4, 11, 18 and 25 for dinner at 5:45 p.m. Teaching will last from 6:30 until 7:45 p.m. Register for dinner online at www.firstchurchtulsa.org or call Gretchen Bashforth at 918-301-1019. See page 6 for details.

JUNE 7 & 8: INQUIRERS’ CLASS Interested in learning more about membership and the life and history of our church and the Presbyterian tradition? Join us Saturday, June 7, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. and Sunday, June 8, 9:15 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. Childcare reservation deadline is June 3. If interested, please contact Patricia Hall, 918-301-1028, phall@firstchurchtulsa.org or register online at www.firstchurchtulsa.org

JUNE 11-17: EXODUS BELIZE MISSION TRIP Please hold our students in prayer as they travel to Belize to serve Christ.

JUNE 15-21: PATHFINDER SUMMER MISSION TRIP Please pray for our junior high students as they travel to West Dallas to serve at Voice of Hope Ministries in their Summer Day Camp program.

JULY 20: TIF MUSIC EXTRAVAGANZA Join with the Tulsa International Fellowship in this one-of-a-kind musical celebration with artists from around the world!

JULY 31-AUGUST 11: ROMANIA SUMMER MISSION TRIP Once again this summer, FPC is sending a mission team back to minister in Romania with REMM. The team will work with abandoned children, gypsy communities, rural families and provide VBS and worship services for local churches, as well as assist REMM with other ministries. Is the Lord calling YOU to join us? For more information call Elliot Forsyth (918-808-3980), Patty Seibert (918-645-2918), or Katie McQueen (918-805-0875).