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Building

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Stewardship

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Treasurer

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Newsletter

Heidi Lowe

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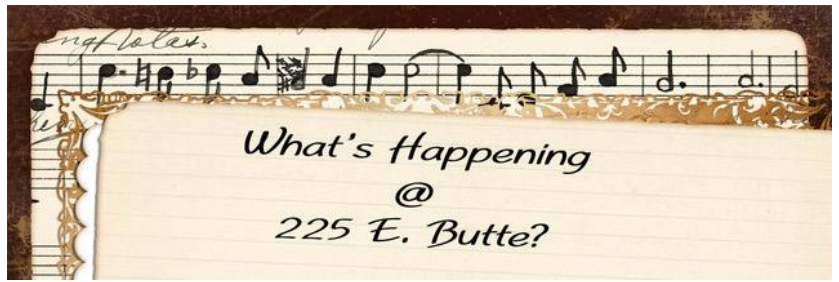
Deadline is 20th of month

Church Secretary

Joyce Martinez

Church Hours

Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday
8:30 – 11:30 a.m.



First Presbyterian Church of Florence
December 2017 Issue 12

The Mission of the First Presbyterian Church of Florence
is to share Jesus Christ through word and action
with all whose lives we can touch.



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Sunday Church Service
10:30 a.m.
Fellowship after worship

2. From the Pastor
3. Special Dates
4. Prayers, Birthdays & Anniversaries
5. In a Different Voice
6. Book Review
7. Libby Gratz Memorial
8. Calendar of Events

From the pastor . . .

We are embarking once again on what a popular song refers to as “the most wonderful time of the year.” And I would not disagree, but I also want to keep this in perspective: Good Friday and Easter are equally necessary to our understanding of what God through Jesus has done for us. If Jesus had not risen from the dead we would not have the assurance of our own eternal life; had he not been crucified – well, of course he could not have risen from the dead; but had he not been born, neither could have happened!

But I do not wish to rain (this is, after all, Arizona; “snow” might be appropriate elsewhere) on any of the joy of Advent and Christmas.

Indeed, I always share in the joy and excitement, and I do believe that while hearing Christmas music in stores before Halloween is pushing things, and while I do not start my own Christmas music listening until the day after Thanksgiving, the secular Christmas is indeed a great gift that Christians have provided to the secular world. Do I think it nonsensical that some would take offense at “Merry Christmas”? You bet, but will I say anything other than “Merry Christmas”? Hardly; I think the expression on my face should convey my sincerity and affection as well as avoid any “triumphalism.”

The “church year,” the *ecclesiastical* year, begins with the first of the four Sundays of *Advent*, which this year is December 3. Advent is the time of waiting and anticipating the birth of Christ, a time of “gestation.” I have long enjoyed the Spanish word (though I learned it in Portuguese), *esperanda*, waiting, which also describes a woman in pregnancy, but it also means waiting as in *hoping*, or in *joyous expectation*, and that really is a wonderful description of what Advent is all about. Though I am taking it out of context because he is talking about “the adoption, the redemption of our bodies,” in Romans [8:22] Paul paints a word picture that could equally be used as a description of Advent up ‘till Christmas:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now. . .

(I suppose I *am* looking for sympathy, but as a pastor, this up-coming church year has as its central version of the Gospel, Mark, which begins with Jesus’ encounter with John the Baptizer, so it is a challenge to come up with sermons in Advent.)

But while we are waiting during Advent, there are things to do. Due to the generosity of members of both the Community Presbyterian Session and the first Presbyterian congregation, and with unexpected contribution from Mosaic Church of the Nazarene to whom Safeway had given more Thanksgiving boxes than Mosaic could contribute, there is an excellent start toward the annual “sharing” food with the less fortunate at Christmas through similar food boxes, though more contributions for the purchase of food and of small toys or the like for some of those who receive such boxes would be helpful. The Florence church will have its annual Live Nativity on the evening of Saturday, December 16 (6:30 pm, 7:15, 8:00); cookies and hot chocolate are shared with the 2-300 people who attend, and contributions of those are welcome from any and all. (I would be completely remiss if I did not shout out a tremendous and loud “Thank you!” to ShaRon Liedl, who is handling the food boxes and, with her husband, Gary, does a ton of hours of work to stage the Live Nativity.)

Christmas Eve this year falls on a Sunday (obviously, “Sunday, December 24”), and there will be both regular morning worship and Christmas Eve services (5:30 pm at Community; 7:00 pm at First). Interestingly, last year, with Christmas on a Sunday for only the second time that I recall in my 18 years as a pastor (there may have been a third occasion on which the church I was serving chose *not* to have such a service following the previous evening’s 11:00 pm service), as on the first such Sunday I remember, Sunday morning worship was surprisingly well attended, and two “visitors” said they were attending simply because they were looking for a church that was having a service that day! We are not having a service on Monday, Christmas, but I encourage you that

since it is not only once a year but less frequent than that, you consider both morning and evening worship on Christmas Eve.

. . . *and now for something completely different*, as they used to say on “Monty Python’s Flying Circus.” In my sermon on November 19 (yesterday, as I write this), I addressed, without resolution as to how to handle the immediate situations, what were then the sexual abuse charges from the past against a twice removed state supreme court justice and now a political candidate in Alabama, and a similar (that is, from the past) charge against a U.S. Senator; timing is everything: an additional and more contemporaneous charge against that Senator and a slew of charges against a well-known television personality came out today!

I do not want to rehash my comments (which indicated my confusion as to what was the proper way to deal with the two specific individuals known at that time), but I do want to repeat this for those of you who were not in worship: Such abuse always involves abusing power by one who in some way – physically, financially, politically, by virtue of position or stature or rank in an organization -- is stronger than the one being abused, *and this is definitely not Christian!* (And sexual abuse is not necessarily the same as complimenting or even flirting, at least before being told not to do so.) There is a wonderful, slightly lengthy discussion of separating sheep from goats that is really Jesus’ final teaching in Matthew [28], and as I mentioned on Sunday, the rather not-so-sane (in my unprofessional opinion) German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), in his essay, “Beyond Good and Evil,” attacked Judaism and Christianity *because* they obligate the strong to have responsibility toward and for the weak!

An obligation of the strong toward the weak. I would hope we would all take Nietzsche’s criticism as a real and positive attribute of what it means to follow the one born on Christmas Day.

. . . and consider that old Dixieland version of “Just a Closer Walk with Thee”: ‘I am weak but thou art strong . . .’ If we are wondering “WWJD,” he would take the hand of the one who is weaker.

Merry Christmas! and peace in the New Year,

John



Baked goods needed for Live Nativity.
Items can be dropped off on the 15th or 16th,

Special Dates for December

December 5	Manger Set-up	900
December 16	Live Nativity	6:30, 7:15, 8:00
December 21	Christmas Food Boxes	TBD

“



Pray for: Denise Montijo and Robin Baca of food bank in Florence, Bob Goree, Krista Johnson, Pete, Rose, Elizabeth, Pauline, Phyllis Mikles, Bob and Doreen Stephens, Phyllis Carlson’s niece, Virginia very serious condition, Skip Blanchard, Charles Askov, Gary Ellsworth, Ann Schneider, BJ Brown-Ferguson, Nancy, Clancy, Carrie Bohlander, Dick and Flory Bondelid, John Buttram, Kathy Jordan, Connie Stephens, Margie’s cousin, Melissa, Lew Moon, Pat Vucson, Bonnie Brunner, Libby Gratz, Muriel Marsteller, Maggie Schulz and daughter, Bev, diagnosed with cancer in lungs, Lois Kuder, Joann and JL Hooper, Denise and Larry Kollert, Joyce and her family, Joann Serra, Patricia, Peggy

Our Church and our Country in these troubled times



December

- 7. Roger Ietand
- 7. Ann cneider
- 12. Agne Egg
- 14. Jean Granger
- 19 Pamela McLellan
- 28. Mary Palmer

4

Please let me know if I missed your Birthday or have the wrong date. Thanks.



December

- 24. Allen & ndra ander
- 27. Jim & Melva Burn
- 29. Joe & Norma Eppinga

Please let me know your anniversary.

ATTENTION PLEASE!!

IF YOU WISH TO HAVE SOMETHING PUT IN THE NEWSLETTER, PLEASE SEND IT TO newsletter225@yahoo.com DO NOT SEND IT TO MY PERSONAL EMAIL ADDRESS. THANK YOU!!!!!!

DISCLAIMER

Articles shared or written by individuals are not necessarily the views or opinions of the church. If you have something you would like to share or something you have written, I would be happy to include them in the newsletter. All shared or written articles will be attributed to the person who sent them in.

Please be careful of copyrighted material.

In a Different Voice

(A monthly column written and submitted by Judith Johnston)

Strange, interesting, weird, charming, scary—as America becomes increasingly diverse, we are confronted by more & more people whose ways are not our ways. Yet, God seems to have spoken to His children in many different places at very different times. Some of these diverse views will be featured each month to encourage a healthy curiosity about other spiritual writings and to open us up to possibilities for a larger spiritual awareness.

"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." [Ephesians 6:11-12](#)

For a world view of witchcraft, good and bad, and laws both ancient and modern regarding its practice, punishment or acceptance, you may wish to [Google Witchcraft – \(name of country\)](#).

An example: Magic is closely tied to religion. In the Middle Ages white magic, which invoked the saints and angels, and black magic, which turned to 'unclean spirits' such as devils and demons, were practiced widely in Ukraine. The alleged practitioners of black magic were often tried by the community or the courts, but there were no witchhunts comparable to those known in Western Europe.

The basic premise behind Spiritualism is simple: no one really leaves when they die, and death is simply a change of state. If the living are a melting ice cube, the dead are just the water. As such, the deceased can be "refrozen" for a time to interact with the living, whether it be for a comforting chat, a bit of advice, or even just as a fun trick at parties. It's these beliefs that have drawn some of the country's most gifted psychics to [Lily Dale](#), and today, it remains one of the best-kept secrets for communing with the dead.

1 Samuel 28, 29, 30, 31 - summarized: When Samuel dies, he is buried in [Ramah](#). Saul, the current King of Israel, seeks wisdom from God in choosing a course of action against the assembled forces of the [Philistines](#). He receives no answer from [dreams](#), prophets, or the [Urim and Thummim](#). Having driven out all [necromancers](#) and [magicians](#) from Israel, Saul searches for a witch anonymously and in disguise. His search leads him to a woman of Endor, who claims that she can see the ghost of Samuel rising from the abode of the dead.^[7] The voice of the prophet's ghost, after complaining of being disturbed, berates Saul for disobeying God, and predicts Saul's downfall. The spirit reiterates a pre-mortem prophecy by Samuel, adding that Saul will perish with his whole army in battle the next day. Saul is terrified. The next day, his army is defeated as prophesied, and Saul commits suicide.

2There He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. **3**Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared before them, talking with Jesus. **4**Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If You wish, I will put up three shelters: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." **Matthew 17:2 – 4.**

Odd Hours

by Dean Koontz

Our hero, Odd Thomas (Odd is really his first name) is haunted by a dream of an all-encompassing red tide, and he is drawn to a California sea-side town where confrontation with evil of the usual detective mystery type is compounded by the paranormal, psychic magnetism, prognosticators, and poltergeists.

One does not expect to find laugh-out-loud comedy in a murder mystery, but Koontz's juxtaposition of actual situations with scenes from movies, a celebrity's life, iconic food, or want-ad styles provide the comedic entertainment. While a psychotic killer is trying to club Odd to death with a huge flashlight, Odd says he is "impressed with the manufacturer's durability standards."

Brief references to God, well-known Bible stories, and verses add eschatological insights or yet another comedic dimension to this novel.

Odd's philosophies and wisdom statements provide peaceful bridges between episodes of tension and alarm.

One challenge to the reader is the frequent casual walks with Odd into his fertile imagination, followed by an abrupt return to the reality of the plot, leaving the reader to discern what is actually happening to Odd and what is only his fantasy

There are several other novels in the Odd Thomas series which readers might wish to pursue.

Judith Johnston

The Theology of Humor and Joy

It is the test of a good religion whether you can joke about it.

-G.K. Chesterton

No one would have been invited to dinner as often as Jesus was unless he was interesting and had a sense of humor.

-Charles M. Schultz

If a fellow doesn't have a good time once in a while and get a good laugh out of the serious side of life, he doesn't half live.

-Will Rogers

Humor is proof of faith.

-Charles M. Schultz

Much of what we're about as people of faith is discovering the joy of our relationships to God and each other, and I think humor is an important dimension of who we are as human beings.

-Rabbi David Stern, Temple Emanu-El, Dallas Texas, The Dallas Morning News



A memorial service was held Nov. 18th for Libby Gratz

Libby was born in Newville, PA, in 1927, graduated from Shippensburg State Teachers College with a B.S. in Education. Later she got a Master in Education from the University of Houston and a PhD from the University of Iowa. Anyone who attended Bible Study with her knew she was a teacher. She was preceded in death by her husband, Jerre, and is survived by daughter Kathleen Gratz, son Michael Gratz and wife Nancy Roberts, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, as well as siblings, sisters- and brothers-in-law, nieces and nephews.

In Defense of Santa Claus

“It’s not Santa Claus’ fault that people forgot the Infant Jesus. Why does the world love Santa Claus?

“First of all, he’s a joyous individual. People are attracted to joyous individuals as filings are attracted to a magnet. Next, Santa Claus is interested in making others happy. He increases the happy moments in the life of everyone he meets. He loves his work; he gets fun out of his job.

“He is childlike, simple, humble, sincere, and forgiving. Finally, he is a giver. His philosophy is to give himself away in service. He is a friend to everyone. He smiles.

“Perhaps you and I could attain greater happiness if we emulated Santa Claus a little more, for his way is the way of the Infant Jesus also.”

Msgr. Joseph P. Dooley, Martins Creek PA

“The soul of one who serves God always swims in joy, always keeping holiday, and is always in the mood for singing.

John of the Cross (1591 A.D.)

“Is not Jesus pointing to children even as models for grownups?”

Pope John Paul II

December 2017

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3 1 st Sunday of Advent Isa. 64:1-9 Ps. 80:1-7, 17-19 I Cor. 1:3-9 Mark 13:24-37	4 7 pm Al-Anon	5 MANGER SETUP 900	6	7	8 Women's Luncheon 11:30 Old Pueblo	
10 2 nd Sunday in Advent Isa. 40: 1-11 Ps. 85:1-2, 8-13 2 Peter 3:8-15a Mark 1:1-8	11 7 pm Al-Anon	12	13 1:00-2:00 Hygiene Bank	14	15	16
17 3 rd Sunday in Advent Isa. 61:1-4, 8-11 Ps. 126 or Luke 1:46b-55 I Thess. 5: 16-24 John 1:6-8, 19-28	18 7 pm Al-Anon		20	21 Christmas Box Distribution	22	23
24 4 th Sunday of Advent Christmas Eve Isa. 9:2-7 Ps. 96 Titus: 2:11-14 Luke 2:1-14 (15-20) Christmas Eve Service 7:00	25 Christmas 7 pm Al-Anon	26	27	28	29	30
31 1 st Sunday after Christmas Day Isa. 61:10-63:3 Ps. 148 FGal. 4:4-7 Luke 2:22-40						

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