

UPDATE

December 2015

Lincoln Park Presbyterian Church

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Hello!

Steve Hunter's shoes are big ones to fill, but I will do my darnedest. December has a lot of exciting things happening, and most are listed here, including the bake sale, the women's book group, and the announcement about the annual women's retreat, which I hope all the ladies in the congregation will pay special heed to, as it's going to be fantastic.

As your new editor, I'm going to maybe be futzing around with the formatting of Update a bit, just to keep you all on your toes. I've gotten some great suggestions from other members of the congregation, and if you have an idea, let me know and I'll see what we can make happen.

December can make us all a little crazy with the endless running around, buying gifts, traveling, and trying to get that last bit of work done

before everyone leaves for the holidays, but I invite you to take a moment, stop, breathe, and remember what all the bustle around this celebration is trying to prepare for:

HOPE.

In the coming of Jesus, we had a personification of hope for the human race, and of peace on earth and goodwill to all. It's so easy to lose sight of that, but when you see some Christmas lights shining in someone's window, pause your hurried thoughts and remember the hope and promise of the coming of Christ.

Peace be with you all.

-Alice Burton

Stewardship Is...



Love in Action

Stewardship – an Update and a Thank-you.

It's just two weeks since our Stewardship Commitment Sunday, and you have, once again, responded with a generosity that leaves the stewardship team very moved and very humbled. In a year, when the direction of our journey forward has not yet become clear, you have been very clear about one thing – your commitment to this faith community that we call LPPC. As I write this, we have received 27 pledges for a total of \$107, 272. Wow! That has brought us almost two thirds of the way to our pledge goal. So our first thank-you goes to each of you who have already made this commitment. Your support means more than you can know.

A second thank-you goes to those of you who are planning to pledge, but just haven't done it yet. Could we hear from you in the next ten days? That would help us with our final projections as we complete the 2016 budget. You can mail your commitment to the church or send an e-mail to our Financial Secretary Gerry Parker, gerryparker3642@gmail.com. If you gave electronically last year, let us know if you want to continue with the same amount or something different for 2016. We will not continue your withdrawals automatically without your permission.

We are indeed Traveling together as God's Joyful Community. Your pledges are just one more confirmation of all that we value and share. We are very, very grateful!

-Gerri Mead, for the Stewardship Team

Pastor's Reflections

Dear Friends,

When the Worship Team chose the theme of "Wilderness" for Advent, we weren't sure exactly what direction it might lead us all in over the weeks. What we did know was that the idea of, the metaphor of, and the experience of, wilderness lends itself to all kinds of connections and the possibility of making meaning. As a congregation we have been wandering in a wilderness of sorts for the past year and a half as we explore our options for the future. When I mentioned to someone recently what we have been doing, the person responded by saying, "Oh, I'm so sorry." I was shocked! After recovering I then said, "Oh no, this is a really good thing! We are excited about intentionally discerning our vision and purpose for the future." It was a reminder to me of how unusual and for some, unthinkable, that we would walk ourselves into a wilderness in which there is no path laid out and we do not know our exact destination. The last thing I said to the person was, "I am fortunate to be serving with a congregation of people who are adaptable, courageous and willing to 'listen to the music of the Spirit.'" Thanks for being who you are and for inviting me to be on this journey with you.

On the first Sunday of Advent as we explored the theme of Wilderness, I framed it with this quote:

"Wilderness is not just a place; it is also a state of being. If happiness means being happy and sadness means being sad, then wilderness means being wilder. Look it up, and you'll find that the primary meaning of *wild* is "natural." In turn, *natural* comes from the Latin *nasci*, meaning "to be born." Words like natal, nativity, and native come from the same root, all referring to birth. Wilderness, then, is not only the nature you find outdoors. It can also refer to your own true Nature - the You that is closest to your birth. This inner wilderness is the untamed truth of who you really are." (The Wisdom of Wilderness, by Gerald G. May, pp. IX, X)

I love the idea that wilderness means being wilder and that being wilder means getting closer to the untamed truth of who we really are in this life. That is truly what our journey has been about as we explore our options for the future. We have been sorting through the past and the present and we long to be called into our truest selves in the future. What will generosity look like in our future? What will faithfulness look like in our future? What will courage look like in our future? What will community look like in our future?

As 2015 draws to a close, my prayer is that we will be wilder and even truer to who we are in 2016!

Grateful for this exciting time of Wilderness,

-Beth

Clerk's Clippings: Who Is "The Other"?

Barb Guibord gave the opening reflection and prayer at the November 24 Session meeting. Given the very recent horrific events of the Russian plane explosion over Egypt, the bombings in Beirut, Paris and Mali, and the resultant widespread fear, Barb focused her thoughts on "The Other". Here is her reflection:

The human condition seems to persistently involve people viewing other people of different races, religions, tribes and families as being the "other." When this occurs, it results in the justification of dehumanizing the "other." This leads to such horrors as slavery, the genocide of American indigenous people, the Holocaust and the recent rise of Islamophobia in our country.



Human history is replete with acts of violence and discrimination based upon the dehumanization of the "other." ISIS and its sociopathic activities are directed at anyone who disagrees with their warped version of Islam; i.e. these are all part of the "other" in ISIS's world.

Interestingly, the Bible offers some very timeless insight into the dynamic involving the "other." We think of the ministry of Christ as being one which involved acceptance and inclusion of the "other." But there are also many examples in the Old Testament of stories involving the importance of the "other" in some of the key stories.

*I recently heard a very interesting interview by Krista Tippett, the moderator of *On Being*. She had a conversation with Rabbi Jonathan Sacks who was the former chief Rabbi of Great Britain for 22 years. His recent book: *Not in God's Name* is directed at*

explaining religious extremism and its significance in our time. Rabbi Sacks had some very interesting reflections and insights into the “other” as described in the Bible. I was frankly quite surprised so here are some of his insights from the Old Testament:

- 1. He stated that there are 36 passages in the Old Testament which focus on loving one’s neighbor as oneself...the neighbor, of course, as potentially being the “other.”*
- 2. He focused on two stories in particular: the story of the Jews in ancient Egypt and the story of Jonah.*

In the story of the Jews under the rule of the Egyptians ancient Egypt, an unexpected hero was the daughter of the evil Pharaoh. Although she was clearly part of the class of the “other” relative to the Jews, at great risk to herself, she rescued Moses, a male Jewish baby whom Pharaoh had condemned to die as part of his country-wide proclamation to kill all male Jewish children. Because of this courageous act by an “other,” the Biblical story of Exodus occurred and Moses became a great prophet of the Jewish people.

The story of Jonah is also an example of how the “other” can have a huge and powerful historical impact on humanity. Jonah, after defying God’s request that he go and preach to the “other,” the Assyrians who were enemies of Israel, ultimately did go and preach to the Assyrian people. This dismayed Jonah as he recognized that God was showing his concern and mercy to these enemies of the Jews. By acquiescing to God’s command and preaching to the “other,” Jonah managed to make more of an impact on the Assyrians than all of the other Jewish prophets who had preceded him.

Here is the point: when we see each other as part of the wondrous diversity of humanity, we are not threatened. We are enriched. Relationships with people who are different from us offer us wisdom and fulfillment. We can give our fellow humans what we can bring as unique persons; whether we be black or white, Jew or Gentile, rich or poor. Here is another point: through the science of DNA research, we have determined that all of life on this incredibly diverse planet comes from the same source of matter. So, here is the real paradox: unity equals diversity!



We cannot confine God to our narrow and limited human categories. We can bring to humanity whatever uniqueness we offer whether this be as a Christian, Muslim, Buddhist or whatever. God exists in every religious tradition. Rabbi Sacks closed with these words: be true to your faith and be a blessing to the faith of others, regardless of their faith.

Barb closed her thoughts with this prayer: Loving and wondrous God: thank you for the plurality of life which you have created. Let us embrace what has been given to us and celebrate our differences. Let us persistently and methodically tear down the walls which separate us and participate in the experience of welcoming our magnificent differences. Let us remember that Jesus embraced the “other” which in his time involved such people as Gentiles, tax collectors and prostitutes. Let us learn from this as we pass through our own prejudices and fears of the “other” in our world today. In Jesus’ name: AMEN

In sharing what has gone well, not so well, and what we are learning in the past month, we were very pleased with the stewardship campaign: for the strong commitment of members and friends, for the powerful presentations by Barry Smith and Gail Russell in worship, for the fun time we had together at the lunch, for our great Bingo caller Claudia, and for the generous donation of the delicious lunch by our neighboring restaurant, Salvatore’s. The Floating Opera’s performance of “Cosi fan Tutti” was such fun, and we’re looking forward to further performances from that group. The bake sales supporting the Women’s Retreat Scholarship Fund were quite successful, and we were grateful for those who baked and those who sold. We agreed that one thing we’d learned in November was that it’s important to have fun together, maybe especially in hard times (like what we have just experienced that Barb was discussing earlier).

We were very excited to learn that the Nominating Committee will present Ronda Howell as a candidate for a three year term for Session, at a brief congregational meeting to be held immediately following worship on Sunday, December 6.

Our Focus Topic was the Congregational Assessment Tool (CAT). This tool was sent to the entire congregation electronically, and responses are due back in early December. We discussed how important it is to encourage folks to submit their responses, so that we can get a good picture about the health of our congregation. Our responses will be anonymous, which is also important to all who fill out the tool. In mid-December, a representative from the Presbytery who is trained in interpreting the responses will meet with the Session, the LIFT Team, and anyone else who is interested in learning about the results and what they mean about LPPC and its future direction. Watch for further details about the CAT and the gathering to learn about the outcomes.

We reviewed a draft of the proposed budget for 2016; we'll vote on it in its final form at our December meeting. In looking at the calendar for the upcoming two months, we approved the following:

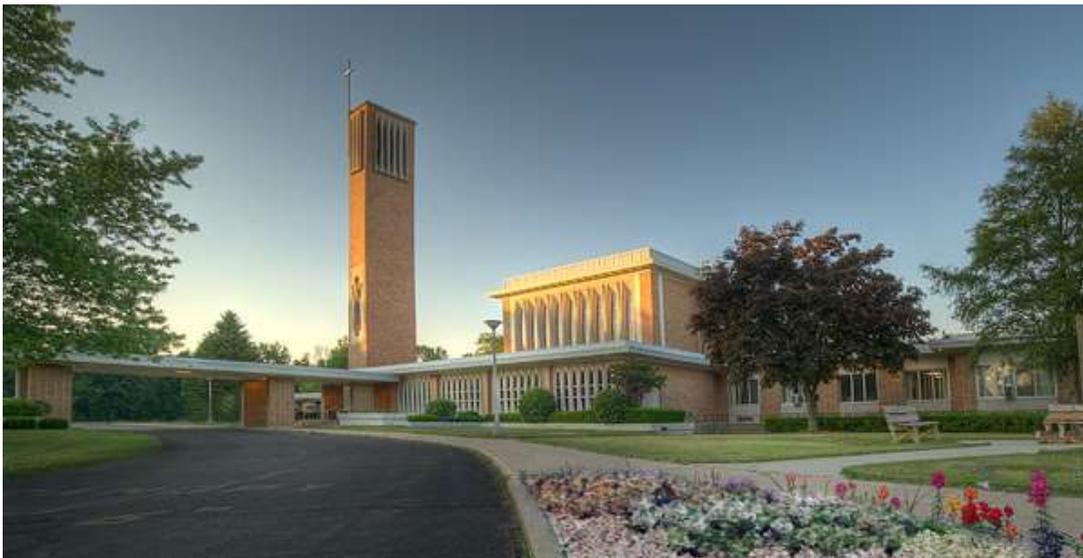
- Congregational meeting following worship to nominate and elect an elder to the class of 2018 (nominee is Ronda Howell), and a congregational representative to the Nominating committee, class of 2016 (nominee is Blythe Howard-Chou)
- Christmas Eve worship will be held at 7 p.m. this year (instead of 7:30 p.m.)
- Sunday morning, December 27, we will be invited to worship at Lakeview Presbyterian Church
- This year's Annual Meeting of the Congregation and the Corporation will be held Sunday, January 31, after morning worship and a potluck lunch.

While we didn't discuss Barb's reflection during the rest of our meeting, the question of who is the other, and who is our neighbor, continued to ring true. It's a question for our congregation, it's a question for our city, it's a question for the nation, and for the world.

-Gail Russell, Clerk of Session

Women's Retreat. Don't Miss It!

The 2016 Women's Retreat will be here before you know it. That's right. So it's time now to make plans to attend this **February 5-7** gathering of the women from LPPC and First United Church of Oak Park. In mid-December you will receive our brochure with all the details about this, so watch for it. In the meantime, mark it on your calendar as a definite "YES"!



More Bake Sales!

.... and more opportunities to support the Women’s Retreat Scholarship Fund. On **Sunday, December 6**, both in the morning following worship, and at the evening Holiday Concert offered by Floating Opera, we will have two more bake sales. We hope you will consider baking, selling, and/or buying! Please contact Gail Russell and Gerri Mead at **meadrussell@sbcglobal.net** if you can contribute goodies or help sell. Looking forward to delicious holiday fare!

Women’s Book Group

On **Saturday, December 12**, the Women’s Book Group will discuss “My Brilliant Friend” by Elena Ferrante at 9:30 a.m. in the Lighthouse Lounge on the 14th floor at **The Admiral at the Lake, 929 Foster Ave.**

Ferrante’s novel, which has been a best-seller in Europe and the U.S., is about the friendship of two women--Elena and Lila— beginning when they are girls on the tough streets of 1950s Naples. And intertwined in the story of the women’s bond is the story of a neighborhood, a city and a country undergoing dramatic change.

All women are invited to join the conversation beginning Light refreshments will be served.

Those with questions about the book group or in need of transportation, see or call Sharon Stangenes, 312-203-4666 or sharon.stangenes@gmail.com.

-Sharon Stangenes

December Birthdays

- 3 Jeff Doane
- 14 Jim Poling
- 14 Gail Russell
- 21 Lucy Shair-Baker
- 24 Joellen Hosler
- 26 Blythe Howard-Chou
- 26 Dave Geilen

Christmas Joy Offering Promises Made. Promises Kept.

The Christmas Joy Offering is a cherished Presbyterian tradition that has been around since the 1930's—a tradition LPPC will continue on Sunday, December 13.

This offering benefits the Assistance Program of the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian-related racial ethnic schools and colleges.

The Assistance Program of the Board of Pensions provided about 1.6 million in grants in 2014. These grants offered income supplements for nearly 300 households and housing supplements for more than 200 households. Through the Assistance Program of the Board of Pensions, the Christmas Joy Offering is able to assist church workers and their families during their time of need, giving back to those who have spent their lives in the service of the church.

The Christmas Joy Offering also supports education and development at Presbyterian-related racial ethnic schools and colleges. 1.4 million of the 2014 gifts are being used to provide education, enabling students to attend Presbyterian-related racial ethnic schools and colleges. The offering benefits the Menaul School, the Presbyterian Pan American School and Stillman College.

The importance of the racial ethnic schools and colleges of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is demonstrated in the continuing partnership between the two entities. The institutions have provided quality education to the people who have contributed immeasurable to the church at large and to the world. Students are educated for the professions of their choice in an environment which supports and nurtures racial and ethnic heritage.

Many of the college students are the first in their family to attend college and come from low to moderate income families. They may be marginalized and would not be accepted at other institutions of higher learning. The secondary schools receive students earlier than typical schools and prepare them for acceptance at institutions of higher learning.

Please join us on Sunday, December 13, and support the Christmas Joy Offering to help sustain these programs.

For more information regarding these valuable programs you may visit the following websites.

<http://www.pensions.org/PlansAndPrograms/AssistanceProgram/Pages/default.aspx>

for the Assistance program of the Board of Pensions and

<http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/resc/> for the Presbyterian-related racial ethnic schools and colleges.

-Social Justice Ministry Team