



You Comin'?

Gerrit Dawson, Senior Pastor

Michael Jackson's first hit was called "I Want You Back." That's my heart for 2022. I want to see our Sanctuary filled again on a regular basis. Re-building the church is a key priority.

Across the nation, a Barna survey reported in November that in-person church attendance is down 30% to 50% from pre-COVID numbers. Even with vaccinations and the easing of restrictions. That's across the nation. Now we're an exceptional church in many ways, so our attendance is on the good end of that statistic. But we're still down. And I want you back!

Of course, surges in COVID from breakthrough variants have made all interaction risky; especially for people in groups at a higher risk for dire complications. We get that. Health conditions and age-factors are real concerns. And it never seems to stop: Omicron has swept through the world and it will be another several weeks until it begins to dissipate.

But virus avoidance has not been the only factor! The most common reason is that we just got used to "watching" at home. Or staying home and not watching. Isolation became comfortable. Getting up, dressed and out became a chore. Discovering all the other things there are to do on a Sunday morning became enjoyable. And we seemed to get along just fine without attending.

For church leadership, two ways to address this loss are open to us. One is to try to win the church by enticing consumers to make a consumer choice. "Come to church. It's great! It's a better experience to be in a live audience. We've got new screens. We've got amazing music. The nursery is clean and safe. Among all your choices, choose us!" Yes, we could go that route. And I think I could make a pretty good pitch for the "product" we offer.

But the other route seems deeper, more Biblical and ultimately more compelling. We need to work on our *ecclesiology*. That's a big word that just means what we think about what the church is. In other words, *why* does God summon his people to praise him as *living stones* joined together rather than just as individuals? What makes a church as the *body* of Christ different than any other voluntary organization? How passionate is Jesus about the faithfulness of his *bride*, the church? And how interconnected is the gathered worship of the church to the effectiveness of the mission of the church?

We'll be talking about that in 2022. Not guilt, but challenge. Not advertisement, but inspiration. Not fluff, but substance. I want you back. More importantly, Christ wants you back! You comin'?

Gerrit



2 PEW PRAYER PARTNERS PROGRAM

2 PROCLAIMING CHRIST RECLAIMING FAITH

3 MISSION TRIP OPPORTUNITIES

JANUARY EVENTS

rEcess JAN 7
 Habitat Build Work Day JAN 8
 Women's Spring Study Begins JAN 12
 Mission Trips Info. Meeting JAN 16
 MDO Registration for Members JAN 24
 Discover First Dinner JAN 30

FEBRUARY EVENTS

rEcess FEB 4
 Habitat Build Work Day FEB 5
 Missions Sunday FEB 20

IN MEMORIAM

December 14, 2021
 Ray John Forrest

FLOWERS

The Chapel and Sanctuary flowers are placed . . .

JAN 9 . . . to the glory of God and in loving memory of Helen and John Waldie, parents of Joann Thurston, and Robert Moore Thurston, father of Scott Thurston, given by Joann and Scott Thurston.

JAN 16 . . . to the glory of God and in loving memory of Mr. and Mrs. Frank L. Norwood, Jr. and Larry Charles Musgrove, Sr. by Chrystal Norwood Musgrove and family.

JAN 23 . . . Open date.

JAN 30 . . . to the glory of God and in loving memory of Gene and Cherry Owen by Leah and Billy Edrington.

FEB 6 . . . to the glory of God and in loving memory of Dr. R. Brooks Van Horn, Jr. by his family.

FEB 13 . . . to the glory of God and in loving memory of our father, Mack Gregorie Sr., by Ann K. Gregorie and Nancy Sue Gregorie Burton.

FEB 20 . . . to the glory of God and in loving memory of James Howard and Emogene S. Elliott by their family, Dr. and Mrs. Louis Cenac (Elizabeth Elliott) and Dr. Clifton O. Bingham III.

FEB 27 . . . Open date.

New Prayer Opportunity by Jim Solomon, Associate Pastor of Pastoral Care and Prayer



We are a church that believes in prayer! If I had an opportunity to share all the answers to prayers that I have witnessed during my five and a half years here, I would need many hours to do so! God hears his children and responds in ways that he knows are best, whether the answer to a prayer request is “yes,” “no” or “not yet” (See Matthew 7: 7, John 15: 7-8, and 1 John 5: 14-15).

Your Teaching Elders (pastors) and Ruling Elders, as well as our Prayer Partners, intercede on your behalf for what we receive from you via your completed prayer cards on Sundays, as well as emails and calls that come in each day of each week. Our Prayer Room by the Sanctuary building elevator is staffed with pastors/elders and others following the 9 am service. On Fridays, our weekly Prayer Sheet is emailed to hundreds of intercessors and can also be found in printed form in the Connection Center. Now we have yet another way to pray!

Previously delayed by COVID, I'm excited to announce that we will add a team of “Pew Prayer Partners” to what we are already doing in the realm of prayer ministry! They will be available near the front and back of the Sanctuary following each service beginning Sunday, February 13, including two following the Dunham Chapel service. They will be wearing tags that ask, “How Can I PRAY for you?” If you feel more comfortable asking someone to quietly pray by your side rather than sharing your request in the Prayer Room before a group of people, look for a Pew Prayer Partner. He or she will gladly sit with you to lift up any requests for you. Here's to God who said, “Ask and you shall receive!”

Proclaiming Christ, Reclaiming Faith: Women's Spring Bible Study



The Corinthian church was a mess. Surrounding churches faced opposition and persecution from the unbelieving world around them while the Corinthian church couldn't separate themselves from it! They wanted one foot in God's kingdom, but keep the other foot in the world. They craved the blessings of their new life in Christ but refused to detach themselves from the pleasures of their old lives. They grew disturbingly comfortable with accepting the ways of a world void of gospel truth. Sound familiar?

It seems as if the boundary between the church today and the world around it is disappearing. Like the Corinthians, we have become far too complacent and comfortable with the ways of the world around us, and far too tolerant of how our current culture has redefined things like love, unity, freedom, sex, worship and community. How can Christians live in the world but not of it? How can we relate to the world without compromising our faith?

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul challenges believers to examine every area of their lives through the lens of the gospel. He reminds them how the person and work of Jesus Christ directly affects the life of the church and the lives of believers, and encourages them to make a clean break from the moral impurity of their culture, instead reclaiming a faith that promises life-changing transformation.

Join Women's Ministry this spring as we journey together through 1 Corinthians, and may we be encouraged anew by the timeless truths it holds. We begin the week of January 12 and end the week of April 6.

Wednesdays @ 6.30 pm via Zoom – Begins January 12. Zoom link available on the Women's Ministry webpage: fpcb.org/womensministry.

Thursdays @ 9.30 am, FPC Room 202 – Begins January 13. Childcare offered by request only. Please contact Jaime Carnaggio: jaime@fpcb.org.

Participating in God's Economy by Barry Phillips, Ministry Executive



I read an article some weeks back that began with the words, "God is exceedingly rich. He is like a businessman who has an enormous amount of capital. He has a business in this

universe and his vast wealth is his capital . . . all of this capital is simply himself." Think about that. What is God's "business?" In Matthew Chapter 16, Jesus' words to Peter are, "I will build my church."

Within this universe that God himself created ex nihilo, he is building something; his Church, the Body of Christ. He adds to his Church daily those who are being saved by grace through faith in his Son. And then, by his Holy Spirit in us, we are the Body of Christ and, miracle of miracles, God chooses to make his appeal for reconciliation through us.

Throughout the ages, that "appeal" has taken on different appearances and methods but the message is always the same. It is the simplicity of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is how God builds his Church and how we participate in the construction.

In our time and culture, capital (cash, money,

assets) makes possible the spread of God's love and his good news in many different ways. At First Presbyterian, we have invested in "building up" Gardere Christian Community School through educational excellence founded in the life of Christ. We've planted a church in New Orleans, the Church of the Resurrection, to bring Christ to so many who desperately need him. We have partnered for orphan care and education with Bethany Centre in Uganda and for the rescue of sex trafficked women through Global Transformation Ministries in Medellin, Colombia.

Our "Building Up" effort in the fall of last year, exceeded our goal of \$1.5 million by over \$600,000. I pray that you were able to feel God's pleasure with your cheerful giving. It is part of building up God's Church.

Even in the face of this seemingly never-ending pandemic, your faithfulness in giving to your church has made continuation of our worship, ministry and over 30 ministry partnerships in Baton Rouge uninterrupted. It is such a joy to see so many give so much for so great a cause as God's purpose of building up his Church.

One last observation by your Ministry Executive. Each year almost 34% of our giving arrives at the end of the year in November and

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Exciting Mission Opportunities by Whitney Alexander, Associate Pastor of Missions



We are excited to offer mission trips again to the congregation in 2022. Join us Sunday, January 16 at the home of Wendi and Stephen French, (212 Shady Lake Parkway) at 5 pm to hear

the details on three mission opportunities; information you'll find helpful as you prayerfully consider joining one of these trips. Please RSVP to Whitney if you are coming to this meeting (225.810.2607).

Three Mission Trips. Our first trip will be May 27-June 5 to the Smiles Foundation in Cihei, Romania. (All ages are welcome to Romania. We have taken 2 year olds to 85 years old). Our second trip will be June 11-18 to Colombia with Katherine and Brian Miller of Global Transformation Ministries. Our third trip brings

us back to Romania December 2-10 when we'll bring Christmas cheer to the children.

Kevin Hoy of the Smiles Foundation will be with us on Thursday evening, February 10 at the home of Wendi and Stephen French from 6 pm to 8.30 pm for dinner and an opportunity to ask questions about our upcoming mission trips as well as hear his presentation on the Sunset House being planned for Cihei.

Missions Sunday. Mission Conference Sunday is February 20 and we are excited to welcome the president of Inter Varsity Fellowship, Tom Lin, as our guest preacher at the 9 and 11 am worship services as well as a Sunday School opportunity in the Chapel from 10.10 to 10.50. Everyone is invited for lunch in the gym to fellowship with Tom Lin from 12.10 to 1.30 and ask him ques-

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SUNDAY WORSHIP

7.45 Chapel Communion
9 am Contemporary
11 am Classic Reformed

Livestream: YouTube and Facebook

SERMON TEXTS

Texts are subject to change.

JANUARY 9 Psalm 1	FEBRUARY 6 Eph. 4: 1-7, 11-16
JANUARY 16 Psalm 107: 1-16	FEBRUARY 13 Psalm 4
JANUARY 23 Psalm 107: 17-43	FEBRUARY 20 To be determined
JANUARY 30 Eph. 2: 19-22 Heb. 10: 24-25	FEBRUARY 27 To be determined

PASTORAL STAFF

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God's Economy *continued from pg. 2*

December. This means we run a deficit during the first ten months of the year. But we build our budget based on this dynamic. Likewise, a large number of us wait until as late as February to send in our estimates of giving (pledges). This means that we enter the new year not having yet received pledges from those who pledged last year. It is more comfortable to develop a budget based on pledges received rather than pledges not yet received. These two dynamics of pledging and giving certainly keep things exciting around our business office between November and February. But you know what? I wouldn't have it any other way. Seeing your faithfulness year in and year out is such an incredible blessing and reminder that God will continue to build his Church and make his appeal through the likes of us. Happy New Year!

Mission Opportunities *continued from pg. 2*

tions about the work of Inter Varsity.

Habitat House Work Continues. Our Habitat for Humanity Home has two more workdays planned on Saturday, January 8 and February 5. Please join us from 8 am to 12 noon at Terrence Carter's home, 845 N. 31st Street, as we paint the inside.

Hurricane Relief. If you are interested in helping rebuild in Thibodaux, Raceland and Larose, please contact Whitney. We will go on Wednesday, January 12 and January 26 from 6.30 am till 4.30 pm.

MDO Registration for FPC Members

MDO and Preschool Registration for 2022-2023 opens for our church members on Monday, January 24. Contact Whitney Weiner at mdo@fpcbr.org or 225.620.0245 for more information.



Lost and Found Clean Out

It's time to clean out the Lost and Found box in the Sanctuary building. Please be sure to check for your lost items by the end of January. Any unclaimed items will be "shared" with the Purple Cow or thrown away.