

The AGAPE News

May 2008

Vol. 3, No. 5



For six decades, Presbyterians have joined with other Christian denominations throughout the nation in supporting One Great Hour of Sharing. That support makes a tremendous difference to people around the world who are experiencing need. The ministries of One Great Hour of Sharing – Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, Self-Development of People, and the Presbyterian Hunger program – provide a range of responses that quickly address the most immediate and urgent needs while working patiently, in partnership with those in need, to address the underlying causes of chronic problems. During the month of May you will hear about “Sharing Resources and Changing Lives” and how your support can help.

The dedication of our OGHS gifts will be on May 18.

St. Andrew's 2nd Annual T-shirt Contest!!!!

Put your creative juices in gear and create a t-shirt design for Peace Camp. The contest ends May 11. Put your design on a plain, white, 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper with your name on the back (so that it can't be seen by voters). There will be a box or tray to put the design in on the counter under the office window. On May 18, the designs will be posted and the congregation will vote on them. The winner will be announced May 25 at which time, he or she will receive a Barnes and Noble gift card and a free t-shirt. If you have any questions, you can contact Tonya Hiland at 422-2823 or mthiland@sbcglobal.net.

Mud Pies

When we were children we played at making mud pies. In imitation of one parent we might make “chocolate” pies, by stirring mud in a pan. In imitation of our other parent we might go to work in make believe cars carrying a “briefcase” made of cardboard.

Much of what passes for religion is similar to children playing in their parents clothes. Great saints are rare. It is much more common to find those who repeat the words and actions of the great examples. Such imitations capture the external appearance of piety and faith, but fall short of the one thing that makes religion great, which is love.

We can still learn from such imitative religion. We can imagine what a parent might do for a living if we watch the child's imitation. If the child crawls under a wagon we might reasonably assume that the parent is a mechanic. A child who stands behind a box and pounds on a book is probably the offspring of a preacher. We might even figure out what the child had for dinner by seeing their impression of the cooking process. We can learn much from observing such impressions, but we never want to eat the meal they have cooked.

Even scripture is an uneven affair. The church teaches that one Spirit inspired the whole Bible; still, it is quite clear that scripture was written by people at various levels of understanding. We must face the disturbing truth that scripture seems to be spoken at these different levels. How can we tell the difference between a great and obscure revelation? It's not really so hard. Christ is the symbol of what good religion looks like in its fullness. Childish religion isn't like Jesus. It doesn't really feed or cloth us. It doesn't give us light for living and loving. As Jesus said so many times, the test is always love. If we remember this one teaching, sifting through scripture is no more difficult than distinguish between pies made of real chocolate and ones made of mud.

Love,



Dear Church Family and Friends,

When do any of us *not* have some form of stress in our life? It may start gradually in our head and be manageable but then it changes and becomes chronic. We have all been there. Stress and our response to it is a key to our physical and mental well being.

That shoulder, neck or back pain, the sleepless nights, headaches, GI distress, and low immunity all can be signs of stress. The symptoms are real. The stress that we may or may not be conscious of contributes to our body's response and our overall ability to cope with symptoms. We all *should* know when we are having a stress related response. But often times we just don't.

Scientists are unclear how stress contributes to illness, but there is a strong chance that both behavioral and physiological factors are at work. Studies suggest that the release of stress hormones might promote low level inflammation. Low level inflammation can contribute to the symptoms we feel and lead to chronic illness.

Chronic stress can affect relationships at home and at work as well as take a toll on our body. Stress reduction is an absolute must for good health.

Below are a few ideas that might help you ease some of the stress you might be feeling in your day to day life.

- **Know yourself** and when your body needs to be recharged. Don't ignore the signs. For some it is solitude...30 minutes to be still, to write, practice yoga, pray or to meditate can bring renewal. Others may need to be connected to friends and be social. Only you know what works for you.
- **"No" or "maybe"** might be not easy for you if you are someone who constantly say's **yes** when asked to do something. If you can't say "no" at least consider not saying "yes" immediately. Take a deep breath and say 'I'll get back to you.'
- **Physical activity** releases the chemical norepinephrine which helps the brain deal with stress and depression. Studies have shown that regular exercise can be just as effective as anti-depressants. Try to exercise 30 minutes 5 times a week. Even small amounts (10 minutes) three times a day of regular heart raising activity can make a difference.
- **Use the "Off" button** on your cell phone, lap top, email, blackberry, TV etc. Disconnect from all things electronic each day especially before bedtime.
- **Do something you love** that is just for you. Art, music, crafts, writing, cooking, dancing... whatever brings you joy.

I hope that you will consider some small changes in your life daily. I pray that your life be always blessed with the presence of God's Love and Light.

Love and blessings,
Donna

"I believe that God is in me as the sun is in the color and fragrance of a flower - the Light in the darkness, the Voice in silence." ~Helen Keller

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AGAPE Ministry Team Meetings - 2nd Tuesday, May 13 at 7 p.m.

Artist Team

Glimpses

by Matt Hiland

March 15, the last day of the South By Southwest music conference and festival, was quite an inspiring day for me. I slept relatively late and got up with my son to have breakfast and a soccer game. We had lunch, played charades, watched a movie, and took a short nap, while my infinitely patient and understanding wife got a much-needed break. I left home later than expected, knowing I was probably missing some good stuff (like John Doe's solo set), but confident that there was plenty more to come. The weather was beautiful, and I felt rested and prepared to appreciate the blessings of the day.

I parked near Waterloo Park and walked down the hill to 6th St., where I heard a familiar voice. I walked in and listened to Billy Bragg deliver a stirring set of inspirational and funny songs and speech (one of the things I love about Billy – his ability to be funny without being insulting or degrading to anyone). Proving that he doesn't lack a lighter side, Kate Nash joined him for a cover of the Shangri-Las' song *What's He Like*. After that, though, it was back to the business of supporting the common man against the machine. In his intro to *I Keep the Faith*: "Cynicism is the sentiment that each of us must overcome in order to make a difference." And, in his recollection of a pivotal moment of his life, he made a connection to a pivotal part of my life - St. Andrew's *We Are the Ones* song. He said "It wasn't the Clash that changed my world, it was the audience."

After the Billy Bragg set, caught Chuck Prophet, who doesn't look very rock and roll, but writes great songs, and he and his band performed them very well. Later, I saw Tift Merritt, whose beautiful voice and songs just make you smile and say "wow."

I tried to go to the M. Ward show at St. David's, but couldn't get in, so I went to see HaHaTonka (my Plan C for that time slot), and it turned out to be one of my favorite sets of the week. HaHaTonka, from Springfield, MO, play exuberant country-tinged rock, with four part harmonies, as on their a capella version of *Gallows Poll* and *St. Nick on the Fourth in a Fervor*. This was one more example of how life continually provides for us if we just remain open to receiving.

I went back to St. David's, and my hunch was correct. The crowd had cleared out, allowing me a front-row seat for Anders Parker. The first thing to strike me was what an inspirational room this was. The next thing was the big comfy wooden chairs – very welcome by this time. Anders Parker's quiet melodic music made with vintage instruments seemed to be custom made for this room. These songs, in this setting, seemed as old as the hills, rivers, and trees. They seemed as old as the spirit that says "sing." For one song, he and the fiddle player stepped away from the microphones, unplugged their instruments, and played – in the words of Guy Forsyth - "as God intended." It sounded incredible and I'm not sure why they didn't play the rest of the set that way. In Anders' words "That was good. I guess churches were designed for that."

Of course, the looper doesn't work without electricity and amplification, and that was a key part of the contradictions that made this a special event. The big burly guy singing quiet, delicate, and graceful songs. The antique and apparently homemade instruments working in harmony with the digital looper. The big loud eccentric music conference/festival ending in a place of worship.

How fitting it was that my SXSW ended in a church. The music speaks to me, and to many others, on a level that is beyond conscious comprehension. It ties us in to the ever-present unknowable. It inspires us, releases our anger, soothes us, helps us laugh, helps us cry, and reminds us to be reverent. The next morning, at St. Andrew's, Gerald Gafford said "The church was never meant to be a museum where people come to see what perfect people look like. It was meant to be a hospital where people come to be healed." So, the church is a place where imperfect people get together to heal each other in whatever way they can find. Music – especially live music - is the same for me. It is never perfect, it heals both those who make it and those who experience it, and it works best when shared directly among those who seek the healing.

Ambassador Team



Local Elections are May 10. This election includes races for municipality governments

(including several positions on Austin's City Council), school district boards, and Austin Community College board members. Also Austin ISD bonds. Voters Guide compiled by League of Women

Voters: http://lwvaustin.org/votersguide/votersguide_may2008.pdf. Early voting will be held April 28 through May 6. The polling places, both [early voting](#) and [Election Day](#) can be viewed on the Travis County Clerk's website or Williamson County Clerks website.



Spiritual Activism

Study Group

The Spiritual Activist Study Group meets on the second and fourth Mondays at 7:15. Come discuss how activism

Food Pantry



Shower Ministry

Your Dinner is Served! Round Table

Dinners

WHO: All members and friends of the St. Andrews community

WHAT: **Round Table Dinners** are held in the private homes of volunteer host(s). Some are only for adults and others include children. Some are formal and some are highly informal. The dinners are an opportunity for members of the church community to connect on a personal level.

WHEN: **Friday, May 16 and Saturday, May 17**

WHERE: Homes of Volunteer Hosts

HOW: The host is responsible for providing the main course and beverage. The Host(s) also sets the tone of the evening-time, children or no children, formal or informal. Sign-up to be a **guest** on **Sundays May 4 and 11**. Guests will be able to sign up for the dinner that will be their best match.

Guests will be contacted by their host and asked to provide a contribution of food. This is a wonderful chance to connect to the friendly people who make St. Andrew's a warm and welcoming place. Please contact Liz Bernstein @ 670-0934

(bsteinbrs@suddenlink.net) or Peggy Rackley @ 990-2426 (Rackley@swbell.net), if you have any questions.

and spirituality intersect.

The food pantry was open twice during April, and eleven volunteers distributed food for 52 adults and 14 children, while 19 showers were taken by homeless individuals from our area. Special thanks are extended to the volunteers who have worked at the pantry many times in the last months: Bill and Molly Hornbuckle; Ken and Liz Bernstein; Margaret Nilson; Peggy Rackley; Jacque and David Seale; Leslie Harper; Noah Truax, June Oliver, and Barry Becker. Very special gratitude is extended to John and Julie McCalpin, who keep the pantry stocked with donations, and Jackie Saul, who has worked every time we have had last minute cancellations, and even came to work a shift with a wounded head! Many others, too numerous to name here, have helped in a variety of important ways. We need every one of you, and we thank you on behalf of the people who receive these services

Pastoral Care Team

Who are the people in the purple stoles...?



Pastoral Care Team members are now wearing beautifully hand-crafted purple stoles to identify themselves to the congregation. Anyone, who has an idea or concern relating to the welfare of our church members or friends, should feel free to approach team members in order to help them address that need. Some, but by no means all, of the areas are meals for the sick or shut-ins for a discrete period of time; rides to doctor appointments or church activities; home or nursing home visits; delivery of prayer shawls and dissemination of information on access to health care through the Congregational Nurse. The team also wants to hear your ideas on workshops relevant to the physical, emotional and spiritual health of our congregation. Members of the team are bound by confidentiality and anything shared with them will only be passed on with permission.

We are grateful to Janet Rice for sharing her gift of creativity in producing such lovely works of art for our team.

Educator Team



Theology in
Everyday Life

The Theology in Everyday Life discussion group meets on the 1st and 3rd Monday evenings of the month (May 5 and 19) from 7:15 pm till 8:30

pm in the adult classroom in the children's wing. Facilitators open and close the meetings on time. The discussions evolve from participants experience and opinions of the subject at hand. The goal is to enrich our lives by understanding how the Christian message translates into actual everyday life. Topics are chosen by individuals and accompanying backup material is available in a basket in the foyer. If a subject interests you, pick up a copy and come join the discussion. Everyone is welcome.



Veterans Against the War Speaker Gives Youth Presentation May 4

Hart Vigas, of Veterans Against the War will be speaking to the youth of St. Andrew's on Sunday, May 4 about his time in Iraq and the Conscientious Objector process he went through when he returned from Iraq. As a member of Iraq Veterans Against the War, Veterans for Peace, Non-Military Options for Youth, and the GI Rights Hotline he will go into the struggle for peace where everyone has a voice.

The presentation is from 9:30-10:30 in the loft on Sunday morning at St. Andrew's and is for 12 and older. Parents of middle school age youth are encouraged to make an individual judgment about the appropriateness of the topic. Please contact Tamara Iyer at Tamara.Iyer@gmail.com or 251-0698 for more information.

Children's News



If you have questions or would like to be involved in any of the programs listed, please contact our Children's Christian Education Coordinator, Tammy Iyer, at 251-0698 or email Tamara.Iyer@gmail.com.

✂ **VBS Peace Camp News** Peace Camp has been set for June 8-12 in the evenings. Registration ends June 1. Sunday, May 18, there will be a VBS Peace Camp Meeting after church. The meeting is for all volunteers including the youth to go over the details of VBS Peace Camp. Lunch will be provided by Jason's Deli. Please RSVP to Tamara Iyer at Tamara.Iyer@gmail.com

✂ The **Godly Play** approach in Sunday School at 9:30 am, uses an open classroom with selected, developmentally appropriate story materials. The ultimate goal of Godly Play is to teach children the art of using the language of our Christian tradition so that they may encounter God in a personal way and begin to find direction for their own lives. Rather than giving pat answers or teaching doctrine, Godly Play seeks to support the child's own spiritual quest and enable the child to develop a faith that is continually growing. Central to this way of teaching is the assumption that children do have encounters with the mystery of the presence of God. What they do not have is the language to communicate about their experiences.

✂ **Children's Church** is where every child is valued and encouraged to safely explore their own experiences of God. Children ages 4 to 10 are invited to participate in their own worship service. They have rituals, songs, activities and small groups. Children's Church curriculum is based on the same scripture references used in Jim's sermon and meets when the children leave the sanctuary after the Puppet Show.

Help Renew Our Web Site (staopen.com)

Cliff Tylick has volunteered to manage a project team to produce our new Web site. There are three key components to an effective Web site: (1) good design, which Mara Kelly has agreed to provide; (2) sound coding; and (3) good information, which is where you (yes, you) come in: Sunday, May 18, at 12:30 P.M., the project team will meet to clarify requirements and take additional input. Throughout the project, we will be asking how you use our site. So please start spending some time at staopen.com with these questions in mind:

- What do you find there that works well for you?
- What is there, but hard to find?
- What don't you find there that you expect to?
- How else can the Web site support our mission?

We'll be asking for your answers more than once as our project moves along. By providing this kind of feedback, you will help us make our site a stimulus to our vital community of faith.

Session Summary

Our budget for 2008 has been approved by session. As I stated last month in my report, it is a faith statement of what we hope will happen this year. However session did ask that discretionary spending in excess of \$2,000 be approved in advance.

It's that time of year to be thinking of persons to serve on our Nominating Committee for selection of a slate of officers to serve in the class of 2011 on session. If anyone has a suggestion of someone to serve on this committee, please ask that person if they would be interested in serving and then pass their name on to Carroll Shelton or Alice Ortiz.

Due to the dates selected for Peace Camp, our AGAPE Teams will meet on June 3rd rather than June 10th. Another date to note is the One Great Hour of Sharing special offering which will occur on May 18th. Our gifts support ministries of disaster response, refugee assistance and resettlement, and community development that help people find safe refuge, start new lives, and work together to strengthen their families and communities.

Finally your session has approved an overture to go to our General Assembly in their meeting in June. This overture asks that churches be allowed to use non-sexist language in any or all aspects of church life. This would be something individual sessions, in consultation with their pastor(s) and congregation, could set as policy for that church. This is something your session has already established, but we are asking the greater church to allow this practice to be established as an option throughout the PCUSA. Getting overtures through GA and approved by enough Presbyteries now is a two year process at best, so stay tuned for further developments.

Submitted by Babs Miller, Clerk of Session



St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Living and Sharing Progressive Christianity

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OPEN MINDS BOOKSTORE

There will be a special book sale on Sunday, May 18. Mark your calendars!

Newly featured books:

Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended

Tragedy, Kraybill, Nolt, et al. (\$21) "This book tells a story of forgiveness informed by deep faith, rooted in a rich history, and practiced in real life. In an American society that often resorts to revenge, it is a powerful example of the better way taught by Jesus." (Jim Wallis) This book depicts how the unique view of life, death, and forgiveness that is such a strong part of Amish culture and religion transformed the Nickel Mines tragedy.

Watch for upcoming review - Grace (Eventually): Thoughts on Faith by Anne Lamott.

Still Here: Embracing Aging, Changing and Dying

by Ram Dass. (\$13) The man who blazed the spiritual trail for his generation brings his wisdom and humor to the path that takes us to the end of life and beyond. Here he is wiser, more sober, more humble, and funnier than ever. Here and now we're not as young and it's not so easy, and he's still teaching us how to age with courage and compassion.

The Great Awakening: Reviving Faith & Politics in a Post-Religious Right America by Jim Wallis, (\$21)

Inspirational and substantial, this book invites us to become part of a new spiritual and social movement and make a difference. It is a hopeful guide to how we can put things right.

Also featured:

Welcome to the Wisdom of the World by Joan Chittister. (\$20) This book is a helpful guide to life's most pressing questions and draws from Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The last part of the book compares many aspects of these five traditions, followed by a section that finds the common threads running through them all.

Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in

Our Busy Lives by Wayne Muller, (\$14) A wise treatment of stress, this book gives permission to slow down from the busyness of our lives to rest, reflect and appreciate. All of us need to heed this wisdom. If we don't take care of ourselves in this way, we will not be equipped to give to others.

Eat, Pray, Love by Elisabeth Gilbert, (\$13). In this engaging book, Elizabeth Gilbert chronicles the story of a year spent looking for transformation following the ending of her marriage and a serious depression. She spent 4 months each in Italy (eat), at an ashram in India (pray), and in Bali (love). Her profound life changes are told in this unrestrained and intelligent meditation on finding love in its many forms.

The Last Week by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan. (\$18 hardcover, \$12 paperback). What was the "passion" of Jesus really about? Using the Gospel of Mark as the basis for this study, the authors look at each day of the final week of the life of Jesus both historically and theologically.

Taking Our Places: The Buddhist Path to Truly Growing Up by Norman Fischer, (\$12) This hands-on guide provides a surprising new perspective that can turn old ideas on their heads and reinvigorate our understanding of what it means to be mature.

How to Believe: Teachers and Seekers Show the Way to a Modern, Life-Changing Faith by Jon Spayde.(\$20)

This book has chapters featuring our own Rev. Jim Rigby and Gerald Gafford.

How Then, Shall We Live?: Four Simple Questions That Reveal the Beauty and Meaning of Our

Lives by Wayne Muller (\$14) Today's notions of healing and recovery too often keep us focused on our deficiencies rather than our strengths. Wayne Muller's new book gently guides us to the place where we are already perfect, already blessed with the wisdom we need to live a life of meaning, purpose and grace.

A Wind Swept Over the Waters by John Nichols (\$13) Reflections on 60 favorite Bible passages. As our lives change, even the most familiar words of the Bible can strike us in new and unexpected ways. Short readings can be used for daily inspiration.

Walk in a Relaxed Manner: Life Lessons from Walking the Camino by Joyce Rupp, (\$12)

This well-known author presents her adventures on a pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago in Spain.. One of the main points of a pilgrimage is not knowing what will happen on the journey. Another part of it is living in the Now.

Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer by Richard Rohr.(\$14.50)

Fr. Rohr offers that God is found in all things, even the most painful or sinful things. And it is through contemplative prayer that we are able to "see" and to hold the paradox of the good and bad within each of us and throughout human history.