



FIRST BAPTIST

CHURCH OF ANN ARBOR

October 26, 2011

Pastor's Reflections by Stacey Simpson Duke

When I was a child, my grandmother taught me the hymn "Count Your Blessings." The tune was upbeat, so I liked it. I realized much later that the words are a bit hokey; the central message, though, is good and true - when you're discouraged, stop and consider how blessed you are ("count your blessings, name them one by one"), and you'll be surprised to see the good that is in your life. You'll be surprised at what God has done. I found this notion to be especially compelling when my grandmother sang it, because hers was not an easy life. Still, she managed to count her blessings, and she found plenty of reason to sing.

These days, we live in a climate of anxiety, discouragement, and despair. Economic and employment news is disheartening, and it affects some of us personally. Fear and self-protection seem like natural responses. Faith calls us to something more.

To be a person of faith in times like these is to trust that our lives are still in God's good hands. It is to affirm that, regardless of circumstance, we still have reasons to "count it all pure joy" (James 1:2). Most of us will find that, if we stop to count our blessings - truly take stock of the goodness and grace in our lives - we will be humbled and grateful. When gratitude is authentic and full, it manifests itself in our day-to-day living. Is it possible to be both grateful and greedy? Is it possible to be both grateful and anxious? It seems to me that, as gratitude grows, our attitudes and actions become more grace-filled, more generous, more joyful.

Our church's annual focus on giving (sometimes called our "stewardship campaign" or our "pledge campaign") has begun. The core of this focus is not institutional support but spiritual expression. Giving is a spiritual discipline; it is an exercise of our faith. Giving expresses not only our gratitude to God but also our trust in God. In times such as these, choosing to give is a revolutionary act of courage, hope, and trust - a sign that our faith is not in our own self-sufficiency but in God's provision (and by "provision" I don't mean merely material). Choosing to give is also a way of bearing witness to the value of faith community and Christian ministry - the worship we offer together and the work we do together is of eternal significance. It's something worth sacrificing for. Giving of our money is not nearly the only way to live generously and faithfully, but it is an essential one. What we do with our money is a sign of what we mean to spend our lives on.

I was speaking with someone recently who had been through a life-threatening illness. Some people allow such experiences to shape them towards anxiety or bitterness. Her response? Gratitude. As a person of faith, she looked for and found the many surprising blessings in her difficult journey, and now, on the other side, she says she wants to cry - not from grief but from gratitude. She spoke of how she is now actively looking for how to live her life in a new way, in response to all the good she has received. Her joy was palpable, and listening to her talk made me want to become more aware of my own blessings, and to live my own life with more goodness, generosity, and gratitude.

What blessings do you count, and what do you do with your gratitude? I hope you will join me in taking stock, and in responding with faith, hope, and love. We have so much to be grateful for, and so much to give. Thanks be to God!

Children and Youth Christian Education

NURSERY care is available on the 3rd floor from 9:30 - 12:30.

All children are welcome to worship with their families. After the Time as Children portion of the worship service, preschoolers - 1st grade leave for church school. Children in 2nd and 3rd grade are invited to Children's Worship in 201B.

Preschool - 1st Grade:

10:30 - 11:30 Church School (Rm. 202A&B)
11:30 - 12:30 Second Hour Church School
And Childcare (Rm. 202A&B)

Youth (6th - High School)

10:00 - 11:00 Worship
11:15 - 11:45 Youth Choir (Rm. 306)
11:45 - 12:30 Church School (Room 107)

2nd - 5th grade:

10:00 - 11:00 Worship (2nd and 3rd graders are invited to Children's Worship)
11:15 - 12:00 Church School (Rm. 202B)
12:00 - 12:30 Children's Choir (Rm. 306)

Children and Youth Music & Arts Ministry

11:15 - 11:45 Youth Choir (rm. 306) 12:00 - 12:30 Children's Choir (Rm. 306)

Adult Christian Education 11:30 - 12:30

Changing the Conversation - a third way for congregations
(Marlene Francis, Ron Gregg, Sue Ellen Glover)

Lounge

A discussion inviting our congregation into ten crucial conversations to help us respond with greater vitality, effectiveness, and faithfulness to our culture and its challenges.

October 30 - Courageous Leaders in Catalytic Times, a discussion of a brief DVD presentation by the Rev. Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil, whose ministry and mission is "to transform organizations into reconciling communities" and "to produce inter-culturally competent leaders and communities on college campuses, in churches and in organizations around the world."

November 6 - Why Are We Here What business are we in? What is the purpose of First Baptist Church Ann Arbor? We will explore some ways to describe the purpose of a church and look specifically at what we might consider to be the purpose of our own church.

Young Adult Class (Rev. Paul Simpson Duke, leader)

Room 108

This class consists of conversational Bible study, discussing texts from the Prophets. "Young Adult" is defined as mid-twenties to 40(ish!).

Other Adult Education Opportunities:

Wednesday Bible Study Bible Study meets at 1:30 p.m. in the Lounge, with Paul Simpson Duke leading a study of the Stories of David. Please join us for study, fellowship and snacks!

Adult Small Groups (ChristCare): Centered on Bible study, fellowship, mission, prayer and worship, we currently have two groups: one which meets monthly and the other which meets every other week. See Stacey, Paul or Sue Ellen for more information about joining a group.

College/University Students: The Gathering is for undergraduates and graduate students. We gather every Wednesday night at 5:30pm in the Campus Center for a free home-cooked meal, friendship, and study. This year our topic is "Images for the Struggles and the Joy: Help from the Psalms," led by Paul Simpson Duke. In addition to Wednesday night gatherings, we also get together for films, service projects, and social events. If you would like to be added to our email list for announcements, please see Stacey Simpson Duke.



FBC News & Happenings

Love, Share, Give, 2012!

*"Christ has no body now, but yours.
No hands, no feet on earth, but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which
Christ looks compassion into the world.
Yours are the feet
with which Christ walks to do good.
Yours are the hands
with which Christ blesses the world."* - Saint Teresa of Ávila
(1515 - 1582)

On Sunday, November 13th, please plan to join us as we place our pledge cards in the offering plates. Together, we will ask God's blessing on these promises and celebrate God's great goodness toward us.

If you have any questions or concerns please don't hesitate to contact Pastors Stacey or Paul at the church, or the Stewardship Chair, Renee Keogh at 734-660-4105 or email: rkeogh19@yahoo.com.

FBC Ladies' Book Club Meeting

The next meeting of the FBC Ladies' Book Club is scheduled for Monday, November 7th, at 7 pm, at Toni Burton's house. We will discuss "The Syringa Tree" by Pamela Gien. All church ladies are welcome! Please contact Janice Stumpf, jlstumpf@umich.edu or 663-4871, for further information.

Food Collection for Hikone

The Boards of Christian Education and Mission Action are again sponsoring a food drive for our friends at Hikone housing. The Christmas holiday break is very tough on low income children - they are not in school so they do not receive their free lunches and breakfasts, the Community Center is not open, Food Gatherers does not deliver, and the food stamps are running out because it's the end of the month. Please help us gather a truck-load of food starting this week through December 19. We are looking especially for kid-friendly non-perishable food such as macaroni and cheese, peanut butter, cereal, soup, oatmeal packets, juice/milk boxes, liter plastic containers of juice, tuna, canned pasta, breakfast granola bars, fruit cups and cans, etc. We also love monetary donations which will be used to purchase milk, bread and fresh produce.

Children's Choir (2nd-5th) and Youth Choir (6th-12th)

Come and join us on Sunday in room 306 to praise God with music! The Youth Choir sings anthems in various styles and rings chimes from time to time, and the Children's Choir sings fun Bible songs and plays instruments. Youth Choir: 11:15-11:45AM Children's Choir: Noon -12:30PM

Clocks "fall back" on November 6th Just a reminder that DST ends on November 6 and most of the U.S. reverts to standard time. Don't forget to set your clocks back an hour before going to bed on Saturday night!

The Interfaith Roundtable of Washtenaw County will hold its seventeenth Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Celebration on Sunday evening, November 20th, at 7 p.m., at Trinity Lutheran Church, 1400 West Stadium, Ann Arbor. Join us as we give thanks with readings, music, meditations and other unique presentations from a wide variety of faith traditions. Donations accepted for non-perishable food or turkey money to help those in need in our community. 2012 Interfaith Calendars also available. For more information, call Rev. George Lambrides at 734-424-1535 or Laurie Gailunas at 734-662-3654.

Believe in Zero Every day, more than 22,000 children die from causes that are totally preventable – and they don't have to. It's a staggering thought, isn't it? They die from causes most of us in the U.S. rarely worry about. Malnutrition. Unsafe drinking water. Lack of a fifteen-cent vaccine.

UNICEF is working in over 150 countries around the globe to reach a day when the number of children dying needlessly is not 22,000 – it is zero.

Whether trucking safe drinking water to families fleeing conflict in Sudan or traveling by donkey to vaccinate children in Afghanistan's remotest villages; reuniting children with family members in the aftermath of Haiti's earthquake or feeding therapeutic milk to severely malnourished babies in Bangladesh; helping to immunize 55 million children against polio in Nigeria or ensuring pregnant HIV-positive women have the drugs they need to keep their babies virus-free in Nepal, UNICEF is there for the world's most vulnerable children.

In fact, UNICEF has saved more children's lives than any other humanitarian organization in the world. Since 1990 alone, UNICEF and its partners have helped cut the child mortality rate by one-third.

But the truth is, all of us can – and must – do even more. Because, despite progress, children are still dying from causes we have the power to prevent. We will not stop until we get to zero.

And with your help, we will get there. UNICEF's lifesaving programs are funded entirely by voluntary contributions. By Trick-or-Treating for UNICEF, you are helping us save children's lives. It's that simple. The money you raise enables us to get children the health care, clean water, nutrition, education, emergency relief, and more that they need to survive, and thrive.

You can also have complete confidence that your donations are being used wisely. UNICEF is respected worldwide for its high-impact, low-cost solutions to child survival threats. And the U.S. Fund for UNICEF – which supports UNICEF's work through fundraising, advocacy, and education in the United States – has earned six consecutive 4-star ratings from Charity Navigator. Only 3 percent of charities evaluated by this trusted organization have received its highest ranking for at least six straight years. To learn more, visit unicefusa.org

Whatever you decide to give, your efforts are so important because it doesn't take much to save children's lives:

- 25 cents gives 10 children clean water to drink for a day
- \$1 pays for protein biscuits for a starving child
- \$24 supplies an emergency first aid kit
- \$257 buys a School-in-a-Box so kids can learn anywhere
- \$500 provides a water pump for a village or school

A steward is a person who has been entrusted with another person's property, finances or resources. As Christians, we believe that everything we have is a gift from God. We are not owners. Instead, we are stewards of God's many blessings. Stewardship is about prayerfully offering back to God some measure of our time, our talents, our labor, our prayers, our presence, and our finances.

Financial stewardship, then, begins as a response to God: we offer back some percentage of our resources as a sign of gratitude, faithfulness and love. It is, first and foremost, about our spiritual vitality and growth. This offering is then used to support the mission and ministries of First Baptist Church as we seek to fulfill our mission to actively share the love of Jesus Christ with each other, our city, and the world.

I give. Why should I make an annual commitment?

A commitment of record is important because it is a statement of belonging. A commitment is a way of saying, "this is my spiritual home," and "I consider myself a member of First Baptist Church." Furthermore, by making a commitment, we allow the church to plan a budget that accurately anticipates the revenue that will be received from parishioner giving.

Why do we talk so much about *money*?

Like it or not, money plays a central role in our day to day lives. Just imagine how difficult it would be to make it through a single day without a thought of money, some small transaction. Because that is true, money can become either a valuable tool in our spiritual development or a stumbling block on our path to a Christ-filled life. When used with intention, with conviction - perhaps even as a spiritual practice - money can further our work as God's hands in this world, bringing glory to God and enabling more and more people to know the love of Jesus Christ. But, as with any tool with which one hopes to create great works, a dedicated practice is essential. How might our financial habits open our lives up to God and to our neighbors? Where might God be calling us to go today?

So, this is like paying dues?

Absolutely not! Stewardship is not an entrance fee, nor is it a legalistic, one-size-fits-all model of giving. Stewardship is about taking stock of everything we have been given by God and then prayerfully considering how we can offer back our time, our talents, and our treasure.

In the end, stewardship is not about total dollars and cents. It is about recognizing God's generous love toward us, and being transformed into generous-hearted people ourselves. And, because that is true, stewardship is actually incredibly egalitarian. We are all called to give generously. We are all able to give generously. Generosity is not about how much we have; it is about what we do with what we have.

How much should I give?

Throughout the Old Testament, the people of Israel are reminded to bring the "first fruits" of all their labor to God, offering a tithe (10%) as a sign of their gratitude for all that God had done for them. In the Gospels, Jesus goes so far as to invite us to sell everything we have - to let go, to stop worrying - so that we might share all we have with our neighbors, near and far. We are invited to turn away from the things of this world in order to turn and follow the path of Christ. If the thought of tithing seems overwhelming, start by adding two percent to your current giving and then move toward the tithe.

We ask that everyone consider making a commitment that is both responsible and significant based on his or her financial situation.

Where does the money I give to First Baptist go?

Annual stewardship funds everything involved in our church's ministry: our mission and outreach ministries; worship and music; education and programs for children, youth, and adults; fellowship events; pastoral care; salaries; and building costs. Every fall we prayerfully and carefully budget for these ministries; your financial gifts support and bless the work of God through our church.

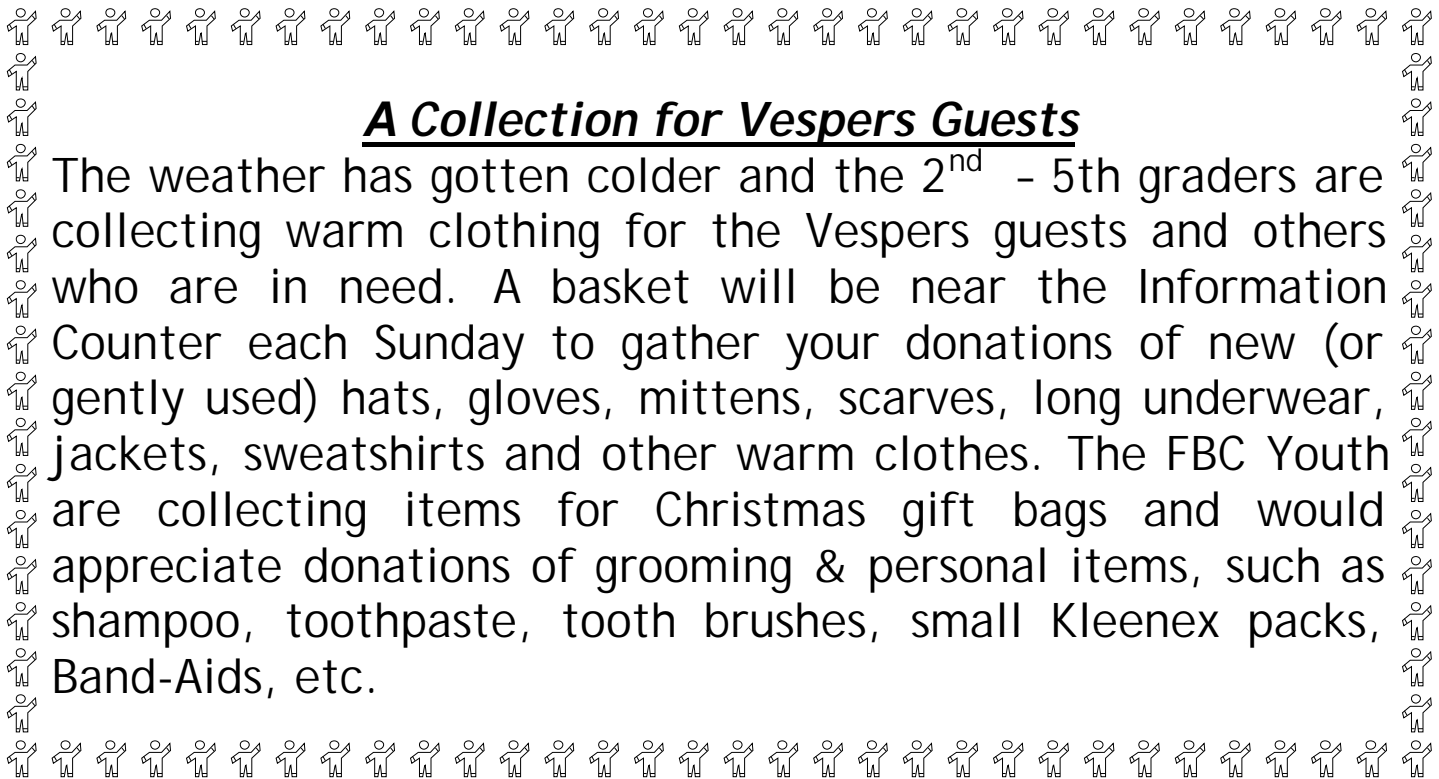
NOVEMBER 2011

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1 5:30 Vespers	2 1:30 Bible Study 5:30 The Gathering 7:30 Executive Council	3 7:30 Choir	4	5 <i>Set your clocks back 1 hour tonight!</i>
6 10:00 Worship 11:30 Second Hour 5:00 FBC Youth Group	7 5:30 Outreach	8 5:30 Vespers	9 * newsletter * 1:30 Bible Study 5:30 The Gathering 7:30 Davis-Diels ChristCare	10 7:30 Choir	11	12
13 10:00 Worship 11:30 Second Hour 5:00 FBC Youth Group	14 7:30 Mission Action	15 5:30 Vespers 7:00 Trustees	16 1:30 Bible Study 5:30 The Gathering	17 1:00 ABWM Joint Meeting of Circles 7:30 Choir	18	19
20 10:00 Worship 11:30 Second Hour 5:00 FBC Youth Group	21	22 5:30 Vespers	23 * newsletter *	24 <i>Thanksgiving Day</i> <i>Church Office & Buildings Closed</i>	25 <i>Church Office & Buildings Closed</i>	26
27 10:00 Worship 11:30 Second Hour	28	29 5:30 Vespers	30 1:30 Bible Study 5:30 The Gathering			

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The Reverends Paul & Stacey Simpson Duke, Co-Pastors

Next
newsletter
deadline:
*Sunday,
November 6*

A decorative border of small human icons surrounds the text.

A Collection for Vespers Guests

The weather has gotten colder and the 2nd - 5th graders are collecting warm clothing for the Vespers guests and others who are in need. A basket will be near the Information Counter each Sunday to gather your donations of new (or gently used) hats, gloves, mittens, scarves, long underwear, jackets, sweatshirts and other warm clothes. The FBC Youth are collecting items for Christmas gift bags and would appreciate donations of grooming & personal items, such as shampoo, toothpaste, tooth brushes, small Kleenex packs, Band-Aids, etc.