



PEACE RIVER PRESBYTERY



WEEKLY PRESBYTERY LETTER - FEBRUARY 18, 2015

Rev. Graham Hart, General Presbyter

Speaking from the Hart

Getting Beaten Up, Following Jesus, and becoming little Christs

I just received an e-mail from a friend who is getting beaten up by the church. Her story is when young, she grew up on the wrong side of the tracks, and at school during recess she found herself often beaten up because she was different than everyone else. Somehow, amazingly and by the grace of God, 'grace' found her. She has gone on to have an impactful life and ministry.

The trouble is she is getting beaten up again, because some (i.e. a few in her flock) think she is living on the wrong side of the tracks, theologically that is. She is as orthodox as they come, but for those believe that on this side of heaven, in order to get into heaven, we need to adhere to 'their' particular 21st century version of the law, as 'they' and 'their' group understand and define it. They wouldn't say it that way, but I believe in practice that is what they are doing.

That kind of thinking is not new. In Jesus' day the Jewish tradition had around 613 commandments that a person, in order to be a good Jew, must follow. As Presbyterians, as a confessional church, we are far from those who say anything goes. In our ordination vows ([click here for link – see page 3](#)) we commit to certain basic affirmation and essential tenants, as does she.

But as the world gets messier, there is something in our human nature that sometimes wants everything spelled out, no greys, no ambiguities, no debating. "Here it is.... here is the TRUTH, or our modern version of the Old Testaments 613 commandments." If someone in the church thinks differently, but still loves Jesus, we make a judgment that they must be following a different Jesus, or not really following Jesus; so we dismiss them, or beat them up - which in the church we can do in such a kind, but hurtful way.

Meanwhile, the world God so loves continues to break; and every night on the evening news we see it.

I do not presume, but I sometimes wonder: whether it is the world's self-inflicted suffering, pain, and evil or the church's misplaced priorities and values, self-absorption and pride that must break the heart of God more. Every church split since the reformation has captivated the energy and passion of all those involved. They (we) get so caught up in the fight, and emotions run high. Those involved in the church fight and theological debate can justify what we are doing and thinking – I know I can and have. But seriously – 41,000 Protestant denominations later (i.e. that's how many there are today) – who got it right? How many new denominations and splits do we need in order to finally fulfil Christ's mission to the world. How many denominational nuances do we need to fulfill the Great Commandment to love God and neighbor as self?

Well, I think our PCUSA ordination vows got it right... because first and foremost... as followers of Jesus we affirm at the center of our faith that: Jesus is Lord, and before anything else, Jesus is the way, the TRUTH and the life.

As Christians, our name says it all ... CHRISTians, or as CS Lewis said, each of us when baptized are to become 'little Christs – for the sake of the world.



*This is the whole of Christianity. There is nothing else. It is so easy to get muddled about that. It is easy to think that the Church has a lot of different objects—education, building, missions, holding services. Just as it is easy to think the State has a lot of different objects—military, political, economic, and what not. But in a way things are much simpler than that. The State exists simply to promote and to protect the ordinary happiness of human beings in this life. A husband and wife chatting over a fire, a couple of friends having a game of darts in a pub, a man reading a book in his own room or digging in his own garden— that is what the State is there for. And unless they are helping to increase and prolong and protect such moments, all the laws, parliaments, armies, courts, police, economics, etc., are simply a waste of time. In the same way the Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952; Harper Collins: 2001) 199.*

Peter, James and John learned that TRUTH is in a person with whom we are invited to follow more than it is a multiple choice test in which only one particular denomination or group has scoring sheet. That was one of the heresies of Joseph Smith who believed that with his golden glasses, only he had access to read and know the truth. Below is a picture of the statue at the place tradition says Jesus asked Peter: Do you love me? Jesus did not give Peter a quiz he had to pass. It was a simple: Do you love me?



So as we begin this Lenten journey, as we read in Hebrews 12:1, “let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith...”

Gratitude to God...

Who is the wind in our sails...

and the rudder to guide us in the Way.

Graham

Graham Hart – General Presbyter – Peace River Presbytery

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The following articles may be of interest to you:

[What the Chapel Hill murders reveal about the place of Muslims in American society](#)

Religion News Service: “These three beautiful individuals were exactly the kind of citizens America needs,” says Deah Barakat's former professor.

[Obama's God talk 'doesn't stand a chance' in a polarized America](#)

Religion News Service: Back-to-back controversies raise the question: Can Obama -- or any president -- walk the tightrope of religious rhetoric in today's political crosswinds?

[Too much prayer in politics](#)

The New York Times: Faith and government shouldn't be as cozy as they are in this country, says Frank Bruni.

[Church of England 'has a duty to debate politics'](#)

BBC: The Church of England "has a right and a duty" to speak in the political debate ahead of May's general election, Church leaders say.

[Could Pope Francis be any clearer about his vision for the church?](#)

National Catholic Reporter: The Jesuit pope showed once again that his elevation to the See of Peter has not emasculated the prophetic nature of his priestly ministry and identity as a professed religious.

SPECIAL EVENTS:

(Click on the links or download the attachments.)

[February 26 & 27: Baby Boomers & Beyond with Dr. Amy Hanson](#)

As we face a drop in church membership and the next generation of retirees moving to Florida and NOT automatically coming to church, as has been the habit of past generations, breathe, don't panic, but do something. Keep your calendar marked for the presentation of [Amy Hanson](#), Baby-Boomer and Beyond ([click here for more info](#)) at the Stated Meeting of PRP on February 26, and the regional workshops on Friday, February 27.

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[February 28 & March 1: God's Call To Mission with Rev. Dr. Hunter Farrell](#)

When we wonder what is God up to in the world, is the global church in trouble?... breathe...God is at work as God has been for a long time. Mark your calendars for a Saturday morning, February 28<sup>th</sup>, presentation by Hunter Ferrell, Director of Global Missions for the PCUSA ([click here for video](#)).

**STATED MEETING OF PRESBYTERY**

Thursday, February 26, 9:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.  
Pine Shores Presbyterian Church, Sarasota  
6135 Beechwood Avenue | Sarasota, 34231

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Amy Hanson on Baby Boomers & Beyond

**\*\*Lunch Reservations are required no later than Monday, February 23.**

\$10.00 per person – payable at registration

Email reservations to: [lori@peacriverpresbytery.org](mailto:lori@peacriverpresbytery.org) / [alesia@peacriverpresbytery.org](mailto:alesia@peacriverpresbytery.org)

or call the Presbytery Office, 941-426-8421

Include your name and church.

(Lunch includes hot sandwiches and soup.)

**MISION PENIEL**

*A Ministry of Peace River Presbytery to the Farmworkers in Immokalee*

The Mision Peniel Task Force continues to meet and build the support and structure for continuing this vital ministry. If you want to make a donation to support this recovery effort you may send the check (marked Mision Peniel) to Peace River Presbytery | 5600 Peace River Rd. | North Port, FL. 34287.

- Volunteer Position Opening: Publications Coordinator ([click for information](#))
- Meal Serving Schedule ([click for information](#))

- Collection Centers for Mision Peniel Supplies ([click for information](#))
- Critical Needs List ([click for information](#))

## **BETH-EL FARMWORKER MINISTRY, INC.**

*A Ministry to the Farmworkers in Wimauma*

[Winter 2015 Newsletter](#)

[Fall 2014 Newsletter](#)

## **EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

The following are position openings in PRP churches.

Click on the title for more information.

[Music Director](#) – Community Presbyterian Church, Englewood

[Part-Time Choir Director](#) – Palma Sola Presbyterian Church, Bradenton

[Interim Choir Director](#) – Trinity Presbyterian Church, Venice

[Organist / Pianist / Accompanist](#) – Palma Sola Presbyterian Church, Bradenton

## **PRAYER NEEDS:**

### **Please continue to pray for:**

- The family of Rev. Dr. Robert M. C. Ward, who passed away on January 31, 2015 following a lengthy illness from a stroke. Dr. Ward was a current member of Blackhawk Presbytery and formerly a member of Peace River Presbytery, serving as Interim Pastor of a couple of PRP churches.
- The family (Martha Chaney) and friends of Rev. Paul Chaney (retired), who recently passed away.
- The family and friends of Dr. Stephen Hayner, who recently passed away.
- Alesia Sharpe, PRP Office Manager, in the passing of her 25-year old son, Christopher, on January 14 from complications related to Muscular Dystrophy.
- Sung and Hope Lee, in the recent passing of Sung's close uncle, Rev. Dr. Syngman Rhee, Moderator of the 212<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.
- Pat Woody and family, in the loss of Rev. Dr. Ray Woody, Pastor Emeritus of Siesta Key Chapel.

- Anita Adkison, mother of Rev. Dr. Stephen Adkison, Pastor of Chapel By The Sea – recovery from breast cancer surgery and treatment to follow. Lives in Arkansas.
- Rev. Susan Rice, Associate Pastor of Faith, Cape Coral – health
- Greg Beckwith (son of Jim and Becky Beckwith) – kidney failure – is undergoing dialysis and is on a kidney transplant list. Greg is also diabetic and underwent quadruple bypass heart surgery in June 2013.
- Glenn Beisser (father of Rev. Devon Beisser Ducheneau, Stated Supply Pastor for Wintergarden P.C.) – lung cancer and heart issues
- Hmingi Browne’s (A.P. of Church of the Palms) sister, Nutei – health
- Donna Blaser (wife of Wayne Blaser) – PRAISE REPORT – the lymphoma is in remission!
- Grandson of Tim and Martha Halverson - suffering from a rare autoimmune disease.
- Beth-El Farmworker Ministry
- Misión Peniel
- Cedarkirk Camp and Conference Center
- Dan and Elizabeth Turk, PCUSA Mission Co-Workers in Madagascar
- Les and Cindy Morgan, PCUSA Mission Co-Workers in Bangladesh
- Pastors and Educators in transition
- Nations in crisis

**CHURCH PRAYER GUIDE: FEBRUARY 2015:**

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|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| February 1  | <u>Pine Shores Presbyterian Church, Sarasota</u><br>Co-Pastor: Rev. Dr. Bruce Wismer<br>email: <a href="mailto:pastors@pineshorespres.org">pastors@pineshorespres.org</a><br>Co-Pastor: Rev. Karen Wismer<br>email: <a href="mailto:karen@pineshorespres.org">karen@pineshorespres.org</a> |
| February 8  | <u>Presbyterian Church of the Covenant, Sarasota</u><br>Pastor: Rev. Michael Mansberg<br>email: <a href="mailto:covenant.presbyterian@comcast.net">covenant.presbyterian@comcast.net</a>                                                                                                   |
| February 15 | <u>Siesta Key Chapel, Sarasota</u><br>Pastor: Rev. Dr. Kathi Wiggins<br>email: <a href="mailto:pastork@comcast.net">pastork@comcast.net</a>                                                                                                                                                |

February 22

Whitfield Estates Presbyterian Church, Sarasota  
Temporary Supply Pastor: Rev. Jane Jones-Norris  
email: [jjn7416@gmail.com](mailto:jjn7416@gmail.com)

**PRESBYTERY CALENDAR: FEBRUARY 2015**

You may view the entire calendar on the Presbytery web site: [www.peaceriverpresbytery.org](http://www.peaceriverpresbytery.org)

**February 18**

Mision Peniel Task Force (@ Covenant Presbyterian Church)

**February 19**

Steering Committee

**February 26**

Stated Meeting of Presbytery (@ Pine Shores Presbyterian Church)

**February 27**

Baby Boomers & Beyond Workshops with Dr. Amy Hanson (@ Venice and First, Bonita Springs)

**February 28**

Rev. Dr. Hunter Farrell, Director of World Mission (@ First, Sarasota)