

Shared Life *website edition*

The Monthly Newsletter of Old First Presbyterian Church

December 2011

Church Website: oldfirst.org

Church Photostream: www.flickr.com/photos/oldfirst

Old First Concerts: www.oldfirstconcerts.org

Maggi's Musings

Happy New Year! As many of you know the churches calendar begins anew on the first Sunday of Advent, November 27. Advent means “coming” or “arrival.” During the season of Advent, we celebrate Christ’s coming into the world, and watch with expectant hope for his coming again. In its historical origins, the season of Advent was patterned after the season of Lent, a six-week period of penitence and preparation for Easter. Similarly, the four weeks of Advent present an opportunity for communal discernment and personal examination, as the church prepares to celebrate the birth of the Lord and looks with hope for Christ’s return.

As you read this Shared Life you will find many ways to help you move into this New Year with an open and expectant heart. Much goes on in worship which invites us to grow an expectant spirit and the hope of walking in the ways of Jesus. As the Advent wreath is lit, it is as though we ask for the light of Christ to come into our lives, to rekindle light in our lives, and to illumine a new way of living.

There is art for the eye and mind that draws us to a new focus each week: *Jesus is Home*, *Christ in the Neighborhood*, *Here I am*, and *Reflect the Light*. A daily Advent devotional, *Proclaiming the Good News of God's Peace*, is available in the Narthex (or call the church office and we will mail one to you.) For the tech savvy, go to Luther Seminary’s web site www.luthersem.edu, look at quick link, and click on “God Pause Daily Devotionals.” The Christmas Eve service offers an experience of scripture, hymns, anthems, mystery, light and joy as we celebrate the incarnation of God in the world in the birth of Jesus. This year Christmas Day falls on a Sunday and we will join together for a time of celebration, singing, retelling the Christmas story and celebrating the one whose arrival we have been waiting for this Advent season.

Peace,
Pastor Maggi

END OF THE FISCAL YEAR

2011 Pledges

As of December 1, Old First Presbyterian Church is a bit behind in income compared with the amounts pledged. If you have been waiting till the end of the year to make your pledge current, please do so as soon as possible. Thank you. –the Finance Committee

PARKING DURING OLD FIRST GARAGE TRANSITION

Plan for Street Parking, if You Can

While a committee pursues a new operator for Old First Garage, parking in the structure may be limited or unavailable. For church events, would those who are able to park on the street do so and thus leave the Bank of America Parking lot open for visitors and for those who may need easier access between parking and the church. Thank you.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Christmas Gift Drive for Larkin Street Youth Services, December 4 and 11

The deacons of Old First Presbyterian Church are supporting the Christmas Gift Drive for Larkin Street Youth Services. They are requesting gifts for the more than 450 young people who depend on Larkin Street.

The drive continues for two more Sundays:

December 4 A jacket or backpack, or socks and underwear

December 11 Headphones, an alarm clock, or shaving cream and razors

The items should not be wrapped. They should be placed in the boxes in the narthex.

Salad and Soup Lunch and Mission Fair, December 4

Please plan to enjoy a very informative Mission Fair on Sunday, December 4. Representatives of the local organizations Old First Presbyterian supports by our mission budget will join us at coffee hour to share details about their wonderful work in this community and, in some cases, far beyond. You will also be able to support the work of our deacons, choir, the Peace and Justice/Fair Trade Team, the Alberto Barrios Memorial Children's Library, the Doris Kraus Senior Center, and the Welcome Ministry.

Holiday Greeting Card Board, December 4

December 4, the Holiday Greeting card board will once again be available! It's time to send your Holiday Greeting card to Old First Presbyterian Church for all to enjoy. The money saved on purchasing individual cards and postage will be given to the church. Please write on your check: "For Holiday Greetings."

Christmas Joy Gift -Good News of Great Joy, December 18

A cherished Presbyterian tradition since the 1930s, the Christmas Joy Offering is one of the four special offerings designated by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Because Advent and Christmas shine a light not only on our world's greatest hope but also on our world's greatest need, the PC (USA) provides this timely opportunity for congregations to support causes specifically designed to bring *Good News of Great Joy* to the poor in circumstance or spirit.

Alongside the message of promise and fulfillment in Luke's Gospel, we also hear the clear call to God's people to respond in faith as Christ calls us: "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded" (Luke 12:48).

Undesignated gifts to the Christmas Joy Offering will be distributed equally to the Assistance Program of the Board of Pensions and to support student scholarships at Presbyterian-related racial ethnic schools and colleges. The Christmas Joy Offering will be received on Sunday, December 18.

Christmas Eve Party, December 24

Members and friends of Old First are invited to the annual Christmas Eve party on December 24 at the home of Steve and Sarah Taber, from 5:00 to 7:45 p.m. (prior to the Christmas Eve service). Steve and Sarah will provide ham, turkey and scalloped potatoes, and guests are invited to bring other dishes such as appetizers, vegetables, salads and desserts. The location is 1170 Green Street, near the corner of Hyde. Please contact Sarah either after church on Sundays or by E-mail: sarah@sstaber.com to let her know that you can come and what dish you will be bringing.

CROP Hunger Walk, April 29, 2012

The annual CROP Hunger Walk will not take place as usual in October this year, but instead has been rescheduled to April 29, 2012, again around Lake Merced. The Presbytery organizers hope the date change will help us avoid last year's torrential downpour and the competition for space with the Nike Women's Marathon! We want to have ten walkers this year so mark your calendars.

CHOIR NEWS

Christmas Concert by the Old First Presbyterian Church Choir

The choir will perform a free Christmas concert on Friday, December 9, 8:00 pm at the newly renovated Sunnyside Conservatory, 236 Monterey Boulevard between Baden and Congo Streets. This venue went through a four million dollar renovation and opened last year. If you haven't seen it, now is your opportunity. Our choir will present a seasonal concert of sacred and secular favorites and sell their new Christmas CD before and after the program.

Christmas Shopping Made Easy: Choir CD

Old First Presbyterian Church Choir presents *A Musical Offering: 16 Carols for Christmas*, the choir's first-ever Christmas CD. At just \$12-\$15 (sliding scale), it's the perfect gift for all your family and friends! The CD contains arrangements of beloved and less familiar Christmas carols, some with harp, some with trumpets and organ, and some *a cappella*. Selections include "O Holy Night," "Angels We Have Heard on High," "Lo, How a Rose," "Joy to the World," "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," "Ding, Dong Merrily on High," and a new piece entitled "A Christmastide Blessing," written by Jay Pierson especially for the CD. Look for choir members selling the CD's in the Fellowship Hour after Sunday worship throughout December.

BOOK REVIEW: REDISCOVERING FAITH THROUGH FICTION

***Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott
Reviewed by Diane R. Molberg**

“Christmas won’t be Christmas without any presents.”

Written against the backdrop of the Civil War, Alcott gives us the March family: Meg, Jo, Beth, Amy, and their mother, Marmee. Mr. March is off fighting in the war. Alcott was heavily influenced by John Bunyan’s Christian allegory, *Pilgrim’s Progress* although the moral message is more subtle in Alcott’s work, and that may account for its enduring appeal over decades.

Genteelly poor and stalked by an illness of the time, *Scarlet Fever*, Christmas finds the young girls facing a Christmas without presents. Approaching a hard winter, Marmee has proposed they go without presents, making sacrifice a gift in itself. The girls adore their Mother and will do as she wishes, yet they can’t help thinking of what they wanted: Meg a new dress, bookworm Jo two new books, fragile Beth who will die before the novel’s end, hopes for music, and the ever self-aware Amy wants “a nice box of Faber’s drawing pencils” because, she states, “I really need them.”

It’s hard to imagine needing drawing pencils but it represents everyone’s wish that at Christmas we will be gifted with something special that we wouldn’t buy for ourselves; perhaps even something extravagant. But sacrifice as a gift?

As they sit around the fire waiting for Marmee to come home, they spot her slippers by the fire. They are worn and would provide little comfort in the harsh winter. Beth, the youngest, declares she’s going to buy her a new pair of slippers with her dollar, and then a competition begins between the sisters as to how to spend their dollar until Beth suggests they all buy her something small. Meg decides on a nice pair of gloves, Jo on sturdy Army shoes, Beth on handkerchiefs and Amy on a little bottle of cologne.

They sacrificed their own desires for their Mother but does that mean the March girls received no gift that war-riddled Christmas? Christmas is about love and beauty and, yes, sacrifice. In the end, Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy received the greatest present of all. Love. And it doesn’t even cost a dollar.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

It is time again to identify church members who might be nominated for the offices of elder and deacon. The people nominated will be elected to a three-year term at the Annual Meeting in February 2012.

This year, the Nominating Committee includes the following faithful servants: Betsy Chiao, Joy Crosser, Bill Feister, Jeanne Kirkwood, Rose Marie Springer, Priscilla Yu, and John Sebastian.

Deacons and elders are chosen by the people. The Book of Order says:

Elders should be persons of faith, dedication, and good judgment. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel, both within the church and in the world. (G-6.0300)

The office of deacon, as set forth in Scripture, is one of sympathy, witness, and service after the example of Jesus Christ. Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, of exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, warm sympathies and sound judgment should be chosen for this office. (G-6.0400)

There is still time for you to give the committee your suggestions for candidates for either deacon or elder. You can

- speak to one of the committee members; or
- send an E-mail with your suggestions to NomCom@oldfirst.org.

If you have already used the Candidate Suggestion Form, you need not repeat your suggestion to the Committee. Please do not discuss your suggestions with the proposed candidates. Please do pray for the work of the Nominating Committee.

OUR HEALTH: HOLIDAY BLUES

Holiday blues, although serious, should not be confused with another condition called Seasonal Affective Disorder, which is a clinically diagnosed mood disorder that usually occurs during the winter months.

What are holiday blues? The holidays are supposed to be a joyful time of good cheer and optimistic hopes. Yet, it is not unusual for many of us to feel sad or lonely during the holiday period -- a condition that has come to be called holiday blues or holiday depression.

Holiday blues may occur at any holiday or vacation time, but most commonly happens during the December holidays when, it may seem, just about everyone in the world is celebrating in some way. There are many causes for holiday blues, and the symptoms may mimic clinical depression.

While they may be intense and unsettling, holiday blues are usually short-lived, lasting for a few days to a few weeks prior to or just after the holiday. The good news is, holiday blues usually subside after the holiday season is over and daily routines are resumed.

There is a long list of recommended Do's and Don'ts for managing your holiday blues. The most important things to remember are these: It's a normal response to a stress-filled time of the year. You don't have to suffer unnecessarily. Find someone to talk with who can help you through this difficult time -- a family member, friend, member of the clergy, or a physician or professional counselor.

Some ideas: Would you consider joining an OFPC small group within the new year if you are not already part of one? Spend time reading the Bible? Remember God is always with you. Reach out to others. Volunteer where you can and share your gifts and talents.

THIS MONTH'S FEATURE

Old First Welcomes Presbytery of San Francisco**By Pam Byers**

Two hundred plus Presbyterians occupied every nook and cranny – and every available table and chair - when Old First Presbyterian Church hosted the Presbytery of San Francisco on the afternoon and evening of November 8. This meeting of our colleagues from the 78 churches of the presbytery began even as the Welcome Ministry's regular Tuesday hospitality to our neighbors on the street went on. The meeting, which ran from 2:30 to 9:00 p.m., included a dinner (Korean barbeque from local Polk St. restaurant Hahn's Hibachi, plus home-made cookies and other baked goods) for 130 people.

The presbytery and Old First were honored by the presence of General Assembly Moderator Cindy Bolbach – the highest elected official in the Presbyterian Church (USA). A ruling elder (what used to be called simply an elder) from Washington, DC, she preached at the evening communion service. [An extended excerpt from her sermon is printed below.] She also presented a seminar on the recently adopted “New Form of Government,” a comprehensive revision to the Book of Order intended to facilitate ministry by providing greater flexibility to sessions and presbyteries as they carry out their missions. A dozen and a half seminarians from San Francisco Theological Seminary at San Anselmo also attended to observe how a presbytery meeting works to nurture ties among churches and presbyters.

The presbytery meeting covered regular business such as nominations, committee reports, and reception of new ministers; there were also “first readings” for three proposed overtures to the General Assembly concerning the Middle East and approval of a preliminary budget for 2012. The Presbytery Pastor Search Team on which our own pastor, Maggi Henderson, serves reported good progress toward calling a candidate for this critical leadership role.

The meeting could not have happened without the cheerful and effective work of more than three dozen Old Firsters including Steve Bacik, Erwin Barron, Gabriele Beck-Engesser, George Becker, Nina and Michael Berg, Chris and Cindy Burt, Bill and Marilyn Campbell, Betsy Chiao, Tracy and Barry Clagett, Joy Crosser, Saskia DeVries, Bill Feister, Maggi Henderson, Bob Hermann, Kristi Hoerauf, Dan Joraanstad, Jeanne Kirkwood, Marne Krozek, Dana Nojima, Michael Norton, Chuck Olson, Jean Olson, Jay Pierson, Glen Potter, Linda Reyder, Rowena Richie, Annie-Scott Rogers, Mary Russell, John Sebastian, Rose Marie Springer, Sarah and Steve Taber, Betty Voris, and Lori Yamauchi – as well as outstanding work by Fernando Gonzales and Brad Peterson. We owe them a hearty thank you!

In addition to a dozen bakers from Old First (included above), Keenan Kelsey and others from Noe Valley Ministry helped provide dessert; Grace Suzuki and half a dozen members of Christ United Presbyterian provided bountiful snacks during the afternoon. Jay Pierson and several choir members promoted the choir's forthcoming Christmas CD.

Many presbyters commented to me on the warmth and also efficiency of Old First's hospitality. I'm glad we only get asked to host once every few years! But I am also grateful for the chance

to welcome our colleagues in the broader church. *Thank you* to all who helped show off Old First and make our fellow Presbyterians comfortable.

PC(USA) MODERATOR CYNTHIA BOLBACH'S SERMON

Breaking Through: An Extended Excerpt from the Sermon by Ruling Elder Cynthia Bolbach, Moderator of the 219th General Assembly to the Presbytery of San Francisco at Its Meeting, November 8, 2011, at Old First Presbyterian Church

We Presbyterians like meetings.

We hope that when we come together it will be like the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down and all who were gathered there understood each other even though they were speaking in different tongues. The reality is, however, that all too often, when we gather together we speak the same language, yet no one understands.

Let's recognize first that the difficulty we face in meetings is not something faced only by 21st century Presbyterians. Look at Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. Paul founded that church, he put 18 months into establishing a Christian community there. Imagine the emotional investment that he has in making sure that the community continues to thrive and to grow.

And so, when we read parts of his letter to the church there, his frustration, his pain, fairly leap off the pages at us. "It has been brought to my attention," he writes, "that there are quarrels among you." Not only are there quarrels, but Paul goes on to tell them that "your meetings tend to do more harm than good."

* * *

But Paul knows, better than any of us, that no one – not the folks living in Corinth in the first century, or Presbyterians living in the 21st century – none of us can follow Jesus in isolation. As much as we'd like to avoid the squabbling, the disagreements that come about whenever people gather together, we can't. We need to come together if we want to be Christians.

And as proof I offer the Gospel story about the paralyzed man who wants to see Jesus, wants to hear him preach. – It's in Mark, Chapter 2. – But because of the large crowd that had gathered at the house where Jesus was, he can't get through the crowd. Left to his own devices, he would not, could not, see Jesus.

But he is not left to his own devices; others are there to help him. They lift him up onto the roof of the house, cut a hole in the roof, and then lower him down. By their action, the paralyzed man sees Jesus.

The paralyzed man could not have seen Jesus on his own. And, let's be honest, neither can we. Every one of us is paralyzed in some way. Maybe we're paralyzed by a prior, unhappy experience in church. Maybe we're paralyzed by fear that faith in Jesus Christ will cause us to be ridiculed or not taken seriously in a post-modern age. Maybe we're paralyzed by the untimely death of someone we loved, wondering how a God of love could allow something like that to happen.

And just as individuals can become paralyzed, so too can a denomination.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) is perilously close to paralysis, paralysis caused by many factors, including

- Our weariness over fighting continuing battles about who can serve as ordained leaders in our church;
- Our uncertainty and fear over what the future of a denomination is in a time that has been called not just post-denominational but post-Christian;
- Our grief over the possible loss of the kind of church that many of us have known and loved for all of our lives – a grief that is no less real even though we know that the church must change if it is to survive; and
- Our anxiety over what, exactly, that change should be.

How can we overcome that paralysis?

The Gospel tells us: we have to rely on others. We have to rely on those whom we know and on those whom we don't know. We have to rely both on people we like and people we don't like. We have to rely on anyone who is committed to following Jesus and who can think creatively, like those in the Gospel story, to help us see Jesus.

We don't know what motivated those folks to step out of the crowd and take action. We don't know if they knew each other, or if they liked each other. We don't know how long it took them to punch that hole in the roof. We don't know if they had to deal with an angry homeowner.

But we do know that they came together. We know they stepped out of the crowd. We know that they did what they had to do to get the paralyzed man into the room where Jesus was. The paralyzed man saw Jesus. And so did they.

Twenty centuries later, they challenge us: Can we take risks and step out of the crowd? Can we start breaking holes in roofs? Can we help people see Jesus?

* * *

We come to church, we come to our community of faith, to help each other overcome our paralysis, to help each other see Jesus. We come so that, together, when we see Jesus, we can confess, with Peter, that he is the Christ, the son of the living God. God finds us, in all of our disagreements, in all of our messiness, but also in our togetherness as friends seeking Jesus.

God finds you. God finds me. God finds the church. Thanks be to God.

STEWARDSHIP CAMPAIGN FOR 2012

Still Have that Pledge Card? If you have not yet turned in your pledge cards for 2012, please do so as soon as possible. Every pledge large or small helps Old First Presbyterian Church plan its ministry and mission for the new year. If you need a new card, simply call the church office.

A LETTER FROM DIANE MOLBERG

When I first took on the role of editor of Shared Life in January 2010, I knew I could never match the 25-year-tenure of my predecessor, Rosemary Bledsoe, but I'm blessed to have been your editor for Shared Life for two years.

Beginning with the January 2012 issue, I am stepping away from my role as editor of Shared Life. However, I will continue to assist the Shared Life Team as Shared Life begins yet another page in its journey and as a search for a new editor begins.

I hope to continue to teach in the Adult Sunday School classes as times become available. God has changed my life in such a way that I believe it is now time to more directly pursue my personal creative interests as they move toward completion, and step away from other tasks that absorb my time.

On a personal note, I can't say enough about the pleasures I've had working with so many of you. In every single instance when I've requested a piece from any one of you, you have never declined to submit something. I think that's amazing. In all cases over the past year and a half you have shown respect and good will to me and I appreciate it.

In closing I will repeat what Rosemary wrote in her final note. "What counts is what is yet to come."

Diane

DECEMBER DATES

Saturday, 12/3	The "Greening" of the Sanctuary (10:00 am to 12:00 noon)
Sunday, 12/4	Name Tag Sunday: Wear your own name tag and take a look at others'. Soup Potluck and Mission Fair after Worship
Saturday, 12/10	SF Interfaith Food Pantry hosted by All Participating Congregations (9:00 am) Welcome: Community Dinner, (4:30 to 8:00 pm)
Sunday 12/11	Deadline for January 2012 issue of Shared Life
Saturday 12/17	SF Interfaith Food Pantry hosted by Old First Presbyterian Church (9:00 am)
Monday 12/19	Senior Center with Christmas Luncheon (12:00 noon)
Saturday 12/24	Welcome: Christmas Eve Community Dinner (4:30 to 8:00 pm) Festive Potluck at the Taber's Home (5:00 to 7:45 pm) Christmas Eve Worship with Communion (8:00 pm)
Sunday 12/25	Christmas Day Worship (11:00 am)

THE OFFICERS OF OLD FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Board of Deacons: **Nina Berg**, Communion Clean Up, Funding Requests, Flowers/Memorial Donations; **Carol Carter**, Funding Requests, Communion Cleanup; **Tracy Clagett**, Secretary; **Dan Joraanstad**, Co-Moderator; **Craig Kehne**, Coffee Hour, Communion Cleanup; **Diane Lewis**, Funding Requests, Cards; **Harriet MacClean**, Memorial Receptions and Meals; **Dana Nojima**, Co-Moderator, Merchandise Sales; **Glen Potter**, Transportation; **AnnieScott Rogers**, Deacons' Prayer Chain; **Oliver Spencer**, Special Events; **Sarah Taber**, Memorial Receptions and Meals; **Hornghshen Tu**, Technology; **Priscilla Yu**, Funding Requests

Elders on Session: **George Becker**, Personnel; **Michael Berg**, Mission and Giving; **Chris Burt**, Worship; **Pam Byers**, Community Building; **Saskia de Vries**, Worship; **Gregory Free**, Finance; **Kristi Hoerauf**, Finance; **Sidney Hollar**, Christian Education; **Jeanne Kirkwood**, Clerk of Session; **Mary Russell**, Mission and Giving; **John Sebastian**, Planning; **Steve Taber**, Operations; **Betty Voris**, Community Building; **George Yu**, Christian Education