

# Shared Life

The Monthly Newsletter of Old First Presbyterian Church

July/August 2014

Church Website: [oldfirst.org](http://oldfirst.org)

Church Photostream: [www.flickr.com/photos/oldfirst](http://www.flickr.com/photos/oldfirst)

Old First Concerts: [www.oldfirstconcerts.org](http://www.oldfirstconcerts.org)

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## DETROIT DELICATESSEN: A PERSPECTIVE ON OUR GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Logan Hollarsmith

I asked the teaching elder commissioner next to me during one plenary session why the General Assembly (GA) never asks his opinion on the structure of the assembly. I was fishing for a joke to break up the summer days spent in the overly air-conditioned dark conference hall. The pastor took a moment to respond. He turned to me and in his slow, deliberative speech told me, “Sometimes it’s better to not see how sausage is made.”



I could not have been luckier than to join in the 221st General Assembly, and it was my privilege to see how the sausage is made. I grew up in this church, and always associated the word “church” with our congregation and address on Sacramento Street. The first three days in Detroit were culture shock to the indoctrination of what appeared to be the *United Nations of Jesus*. I never imagined the sheer scale of the Presbyterian Church and the surprisingly horizontal political structure that unites and governs us. There were teaching and ruling elders from all over the country, representing nearly two million members, and the sense of shared identity among the one thousand participants was strongly felt. I even learned of Presbyterian jokes and our self-declared stereotypes of collective indecision and over-analysis. However, as

encountered through dinner conversations with other elders, in many cases our shared identity as Presbyterians was our only commonality.

Several of the voted decisions divided the church. Speakers made their way to one of the seven microphones to express grief, polarity among the polity, and in tears would share their decision to take their congregation into other denominations. The stakes were very high this year, but as I was informed by a *GA Junkie*: “It’s always this important.”

The GA is a very public affair, where decisions are broadcast and implemented across the country. What is not shared among the masses are the small personal accounts that make up the passing of the overtures by majority vote. The process toward the “calling of the question” was tedious, very uncomfortable, and often hilarious. To bear witness and participate in a transparent democratic system was both inspiring and empowering. This feeling of unity was balanced, on the contrary, by moments more relatable to those dreams of entering your final exams in a bathrobe (to which everyone can relate, I’m sure).

Presbyterian polity, regardless of how many times I read the Wikipedia page, refused to make sense to me. Sometimes, the GA spent hours perfecting an amendment that was doomed to fail from the start. And often, debates were broken down into the assumed meaning behind the Dewey-Decimal System: *3.13 will be grouped with 3.6 and if you voted in the affirmative to disapprove 4.17 you will want to take the*

*same action on 3.11.* I loved it. It was like a code that I was given one week to crack. One man approached the microphone in protest to this secret language and drawled, “All these numbers...what do they mean? It feels I’m at a pig auction!”

Other Young Adult Advisory Delegates (YAADs) were able to correct the official parliamentarians on matters of Robert’s Rules of Order. This was my first encounter with Robert’s Rules, and I could not compete with the young adults who read Robert’s Rules while I was still reading Dr. Seuss. But our collective knowledge of both the Bible and slightly more nuanced politics made a difference. One young adult had the final word in the same-sex marriage debate, reminding the assembly that she was wearing pearls, wearing pants, and had cut her own hair. All of which, are not permitted in the Bible. Women are not even allowed to be ordained, according to the Book of Confessions.

It was a good group of young adults. And although I was on the older side of the group, and at times felt alienated by their summer camp atmosphere, I was proud to be a YAAD in the 221st GA.

I too would make my way up to the YAAD-designated microphone during plenary to state my case, but my position at the very front-left of the stage made my walk to the microphone a good 25 seconds. By the time I reached *Microphone 6* and received my paddle (green = in favor; red = against; star = internet is broken; etc.), the question would be called and I would rush back to my seat in time to vote. Although my seat in the front proved detrimental to my public participation, its close proximity to the backstage entrance was an invaluable resource.

I met the staff who orchestrated the entire assembly on day one, when I rushed backstage to express food poisoning into a cardboard box once filled with the new hymnals, *Glory to God*. It was all that was needed to receive the unofficial backstage pass for the rest of the week. I spoke with the camera operators, the representatives of the company hired to tally the votes, those who write the script only moments before it is read by the moderator, and I especially became colloquial with those who restocked the coffee and soda. It was like going behind the curtain of Oz. The questions and answers were already written, printed, and delivered to the moderator even before the question was publicly asked. Presbyterians are organized and have been doing GA for a long time. Aside from voting malfunctions, internet outages, and comical script mishaps, the plenary floor operated efficiently and effectively.

But in the matters of Committee 09-Social Justice (where I served) and the overtures regarding the Middle East, I felt the most at home and a strong sense of purpose. In the smaller committee meetings, I was able to make amendments that settled debates, and ask questions that deepened the scope on several of the overtures. As people prayed for the three kidnapped Israeli boys, I quietly reminded others to extend their compassion to the seventeen Palestinian boys kidnapped in the week prior, as well as the bombings of Gaza, hundreds of arrests, and killings in the search for the three boys. Although we as a church have begun to make a firm stand on the actions of Israel, the Palestinian story is still not told.

When I returned home to upstate New York, news of the GA had already reached my friends and employers. Many of my friends were delighted with the GA outcomes and overwhelmingly proud to have known someone on the inside. Others were not so pleased. My boss approached me while aboard his John Deere and before asking how my trip was, he asked “Did you vote about those companies? I mean did you personally vote against Caterpillar?” I explained to him my reasons for supporting the divestment of Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola Solutions over the idling tractor. I acknowledged an unfamiliar calmness and confidence within myself as I explained the human rights violations in relation to the actions of these companies. I have heard “both sides” to 162 controversial topics within the church. I am beginning to learn how the sausage is made.

## **GENERAL ASSEMBLY MOVES FORWARD ON MARRIAGE AND MUCH ELSE**

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Pam Byers

With the theme “Abound in Hope,” the 221<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) met from June 14 to 21 in Detroit; 680 commissioners, 150 or so advisory delegates, and several thousand observers, staff, and hangers-on.

Of most immediate importance to Old First, the General Assembly (GA) approved by a 61% vote an Authoritative Interpretation of the Directory for Worship’s section on marriage. This allows clergy and sessions in the states where same-gender marriage is legal to officiate at such weddings without fear of prosecution in church courts, if in their pastoral discernment and scriptural understanding the marriage is warranted. Pastors and sessions also have complete discretion not to perform such ceremonies or permit the use of church property for them, if their interpretation of scripture does not support them. Old First’s session sent this overture to the Presbytery of San Francisco, which passed it to become one of two dozen presbyteries requesting this action. The new ruling took effect as of close of business on Saturday, June 21.

The GA also passed a proposed amendment to the Directory for Worship, changing the description of marriage from “a civil contract between a man and a woman” to “a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman.” This amendment will need to be passed by a majority of presbyteries over the next year.

The GA took the first step toward adding the Belhar Confession, a prophetic call for racial reconciliation from South Africa, to our Book of Confessions, approving sending it out to presbyteries for study and vote. And it took the last step approving a new and more accurate translation of the Heidelberg Catechism.

The GA endorsed a number of strong actions on gun violence, called on Presbyterians to support immigration reform, and passed two overtures from the Presbytery of San Francisco calling for a study of drug policies (so as not to incarcerate a whole generation of young men of color) and for investigation of divestment from fossil fuels.

In perhaps its most controversial move, the GA narrowly approved a call to divest from three American companies whose products are used in the occupation of the Palestinian Territory, along with a number of other measures aiming at promoting Israeli/Palestinian peacemaking.

Late one night, after a very long day of deliberations, commissioners and advisory delegates tossed around 248 giant red beach balls to celebrate the 248 New Worshipping Communities established in the past two years. The Sanctuary for the Arts in Oakland, led by Jeff Cheifetz, is one such.

Pam Byers attended as overture advocate for our session’s overture, and Logan Hollarsmith served as our presbytery’s young adult advisory delegate. Recent intern David Altshuler and former Old Firsters Keenan Kelsey, Deb Avery, Linda Stewart-Kalen, and Tim and Madeline Hart-Andersen also attended in various capacities.

Several news stories are posted on the bulletin board outside the Munro Room. Hundreds of individual news reports from GA can be found at <http://oga.pcusa.org/statements-news/>

## **NEW! OLD FIRST HAS A DEFIBRILLATOR**

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Look for the Automated External Defibrillator (AED) in a **Red + White Heart Start Case** located in the Social Hall mounted to the east wall near the piano. **Everyone** should be aware of the AED's location if directed to obtain it for use in an emergency. It is not locked but it is secured in place with a plastic loop, which can easily detach to remove the device from its secured position on the wall.

**What is an AED?** It is a portable device that checks the heart rhythm of a person who has experienced sudden cardiac arrest. If needed, it can send an electric shock to the heart to try to save a life by restoring a normal heart rhythm.

**Who Will Use the AED?** This summer there will be training for the all members of the Usher Team, current members of the Board of Deacons, current members of the Session, our Pastor and Senior Center Staff and their volunteers. Three Registered Nurses: Cindy Burt, Heather Losee and Andrea Segura Smith have volunteered to conduct the initial training, starting with these groups. It is possible that others interested in the training may attend a later training after these initial groups are trained. Of note, the AED is designed for use by laypersons. It is likely that some of our members and visitors have already received AED training. Often school age children and teens who belong to clubs and scouts have received training. Thanks to technology, the AED device gives voice prompts when appropriate to initiate the shock if it is needed to help save a life.

**In Summary:** Please note the location of the AED in case you are asked in an emergency to bring it to another location in the church. We pray to God that we will not need to use the AED, but we thank God that we will be trained and ready in case we do. **Amen!**

## **OFPC CELEBRATIONS**

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### **265 Years of Service at Old First**

Old First remembered our founding in May 1849, with a special worship service and delicious potluck luncheon. Thanks to Betty Voris and all the great Community Building Committee team members for another successful social gathering!

During the worship service, Steve Taber recalled various institutions founded by Old First in its early years, including the Protestant Orphanage, founded in 1851 and still active today as the Edgewood Children's Home. Bill Campbell spoke of the founding of Larkin Street Youth Services 30 years ago; he brought with him Roger Hull, who was pastor of Old First at the time Bill and others helped found Larkin St, and Jim Emerson, whose son Jed was an early Executive Director. Michael Berg and Pam Byers discussed Old First's newest social outreach ministry, the re-envisioned monthly Community Dinners.

Bill brought several celebratory, anniversary banners from Larkin Street; they hung in the sanctuary for much of May.



### **Pentecost Artwork**

Even Luke had a hard time describing the coming of the Holy Spirit to the early Christians, speaking of "tongues, as of fire" in Acts 2. Old First celebrated Pentecost, "the birthday of the church," with Spirit-filled music and preaching and a spectacular new art installation which the whole congregation had crafted from plastic bottles over several weeks.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

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### **Book Discussion: *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, July 13 and 20**

There will be two opportunities to discuss Barbara Brown Taylor's *Learning to Walk in the Dark* in July. The first will be July 13, 9:30 am. The second discussion will be July 20, after Coffee Hour. We will leave to have lunch (Dutch treat) somewhere on Polk St. and discuss the book over lunch. Check Old First's FaceBook pages for further discussion opportunities in August.

### **American Red Cross Blood Drive, July 19 and 26**

The San Francisco Interfaith Council and American Red Cross are co-sponsoring a blood drive, to be held two different days at different locations. On July 19, it will be at the Mormon Chapel (Pacific at Gough), and July 26, at the new St. Mary's Cathedral (Geary at Gough). You can sign up for an appointment on-line at [redcrossblood.org](http://redcrossblood.org). Put in InterfaithCommunity as the passcode to sign up.

### **Worship Committee: Planning Workshops, July 19 and August 23**

The Worship Committee will hold two planning workshops: An Advent planning workshop on Saturday, July 19, and a World Communion Sunday planning workshop on Saturday, August 23. Both will begin at 10:00 am in the sanctuary. For further information, see Linda Reyder or Hsaiochien Chuang.

### **AIDS Walk, Sunday, July 20**

Old First members and friends can join with other Bay Area Presbyterians on Team 1057 "Presbyterians Fighting Aids." The AIDS Walk takes place in Golden Gate Park. Check out the registration and donation information at <http://www.aidswalk.net/sanfran/>. Register with the team and help support the cause! Or consider sponsoring a walker! Choose a walker's name instead of "General Donation." Questions? Contact [marc@missionbaycc.org](mailto:marc@missionbaycc.org). There will also be sign-up and sponsor information at coffee hours until then. Thank you!!

### **Interfaith Food Pantry, July 26, August 23**

Old First is responsible for staffing the Interfaith Food Pantry on Saturday, July 26. We also need to provide some of the volunteers August 23, an "All Faiths' Day." If you are able to help unload the truck and/or distribute food that day, send an E-mail to [foodpantry@oldfirst.org](mailto:foodpantry@oldfirst.org).

### **Old First Concert with Organist Don Pearson, August 1**

Old First Concerts puts on many enjoyable concerts throughout the year. However, the concert to be held on Friday, August 1 is rather special, because it couldn't happen anywhere *but* at Old First. On August 1 at 8:00 pm, Don Pearson will play the exceptional Old First Presbyterian Church organ. The concert will feature JS Bach's *Toacatta and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565*; *Six Schubler Chorale Preludes, BWV 645–650*; *Concerto in A minor, BWV 593*; *Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor, BWV 282*; *Notebook for Anna; Fugue in E-flat, 'St. Anne', BWV 552*; *Fugue in G minor, BWV 578*; *Fugue in G major, BWV 577*; and *Fantasy and Fugue in G minor, BWV 542*

Don Pearson has played Bach across the country, began the annual Bach Birthday Organ Concert at St. John's Episcopal Cathedral in Denver, and was founder and from 2000 to 2003 also music director of the Denver Bach Society. Taking nine thick volumes to print, the organ music of Bach is some of the most dramatic, passionate, and exciting music ever written.

### **Guest Preachers Cinda and Steve Gorman, August 3**

On Sunday, August 3, we will be privileged to hear Cinda and Steve Gorman – both in a 9:30 am overview of the present situation for Christians in Egypt and in 11:00 am worship when they will preach. At 9:30 am they will particularly address the Second Revolution and the move toward a new constitutional government. The Gormans are Presbyterian teachers and co-workers in Egypt. They attended General Assembly in Detroit in June to inform, inspire and encourage support for the various Christian ministries in Egypt, and to report on Christian/Muslim relations and how Copts, Roman Catholics and Protestants relate ecumenically.

### **Summer Picnic, August 3**

Summer time means summer fun and Old First is ready for a picnic potluck without the ants. Save the date: August 3. Hamburgers and hot dogs are the meat of the day and Old First members and guests are asked to bring the salads, side dishes and dessert. Of course, if you don't cook, you are still welcome to join us for a small donation. Sign-ups begin July 13.

### **Stewardship Seminar, August 16**

Kenneth L McFayden, PhD will lead a seminar on stewardship for teaching elders and ruling elders of the Presbytery of San Francisco, to be held at Old First Presbyterian Church. The seminar will run from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. The cost is \$25.00 for the seminar and a catered lunch.



McFayden is Dean of the Leadership Institute and Professor of Ministry and Leadership Development at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, and teaches courses in the areas of congregational leadership and administration. In addition to his administrative and teaching roles, he has served as keynote speaker on the topic of leadership and change in a variety of settings. He has conducted numerous workshops and consultations for clergy and lay professionals in the theory and practice of leadership, and in team development, strategic planning, and conflict management.

McFayden will also be our guest preacher on Sunday, August 17.

### **Autumn Picnic, September 28**

Save the date for an Autumn Picnic on September 28. We will have barbecue or a similar main dish. Potluck dishes will be welcome. The Summit 2 Picnic Areas of Lafayette Park have been reserved for Old First from 9:00 am until sunset. Please contact the deacons with offers to help.

### **ERWIN BARRON TEACHES COURSE ON BIBLE AT CCSF: FALL 2014**

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Have you ever wanted to take a real college Bible class? Now's your chance! This Fall Semester 2014 City College of San Francisco will offer a survey class called "The Bible as Literature." Community and church members are encouraged to join the class. It will meet at 6:30 pm on Wednesday nights beginning August 19 at the main CCSF campus on Ocean Avenue at Phelan. The course will briefly cover all of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, studying them using historical-critical and academic methods. The instructor is Erwin Barron, PhD, a Presbyterian minister who is also a City College English professor. If you're interested or want to find out more information, brochures are available in the church office, or you can look for English 48K at the website, [www.ccsf.edu](http://www.ccsf.edu). Registration is underway now.

### **The Officers of Old First Presbyterian Church**

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#### **Session**

George Becker, personnel; Michael Berg, mission and giving; Pam Byers, community-building; Bill Campbell, mission and giving; Hsiaochien Chuang, worship; Barry Clagett, finance; Gregory Free, treasurer; Harriet MacLean, planning; Jeanne Kirkwood, clerk of session; Jean Olson, mission and giving; Linda Reyder, worship; Randy Smith, planning; Sally Spencer, elder at large; Steve Taber, operations; Betty Voris, community-building; Priscilla Yu, Christian education

#### **Board of Deacons**

Cindy Burt, Sam Cheng, Craig Kehne, Diane Lewis, Diane Molberg, Bryan Nichols, Leota Parker, Glen Potter, AnnieScott Rogers, and Jian Wang

**REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY: THE SUNDAYS IN JULY AND AUGUST, 2014**

Date	Day	1 <sup>st</sup> Reading	Psalm	2 <sup>nd</sup> Reading	Gospel Reading
July 6	Ordinary 4	Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67	45:10-17	Romans 7:15-25a	Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30
July 13	Ordinary 5	Genesis 25:19-34	119:105-112	Romans 8:1-11	Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23
July 20	Ordinary 6	Genesis 28:10-19a	139:1-12, 23-24	Romans 8:12-25	Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43
July 27	Ordinary 7	Genesis 29:15-28	105:1-11, 45b or 128	Romans 8:26-39	Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52
August 3	Ordinary 8	Genesis 32:22-31	17:1-7, 15	Romans 9:1-5	Matthew 14:13-21
August 10	Ordinary 9	Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28	105:1-6, 16-22, 45b	Romans 10:5-15	Matthew 14:22-33
August 17	Ordinary 10	Genesis 45:1-15	133	Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32	Matthew 15:(10-20) 21-28
August 24	Ordinary 11	Exodus 1:8-2:10	124	Romans 12:1-8	Matthew 16:13-20
August 31	Ordinary 12	Exodus 3:1-15	105:1-6, 23-26, 45b	Romans 12:9-21	Matthew 16:21-28

**DATES TO NOTE**

Sunday	July 13	Book Discussion, 9:30 am, Munro Room
Sunday	July 13	Board of Deacons, 12:30 pm, Munro Room
Saturday	July 19	Presbyterian Women, 12:00 noon, Library
Sunday	July 20	Book Discussion, Dutch-Treat Lunch after Coffee Hour
Saturday	July 26	Old First Staffs the Interfaith Food Pantry
Saturday	July 26	Saturday Community Dinner, Fellowship Hall
Friday	August 1	Old First Concerts: Don Pearson, organ, 8:00 pm, Sanctuary
Sunday	August 3	Guest Preachers Cinda and Steve Gorman, 11:00 am, Sanctuary
Sunday	August 3	Autumn Picnic, after Worship, Fellowship Hall
Sunday	August 10	Deadline for Submissions for September Issue of <i>Shared Life</i>
Saturday	August 16	Stewardship Seminar, 10:00 am
Sunday	August 17	Guest Preacher Kenneth McFayden, 11:00 am, Sanctuary
Saturday	August 23	All Faiths Staff the Interfaith Food Pantry
Saturday	August 23	Saturday Community Dinner, Fellowship Hall
Tuesday	August 26	Session, 7:00 pm, Munro Room