

THE MESSENGER

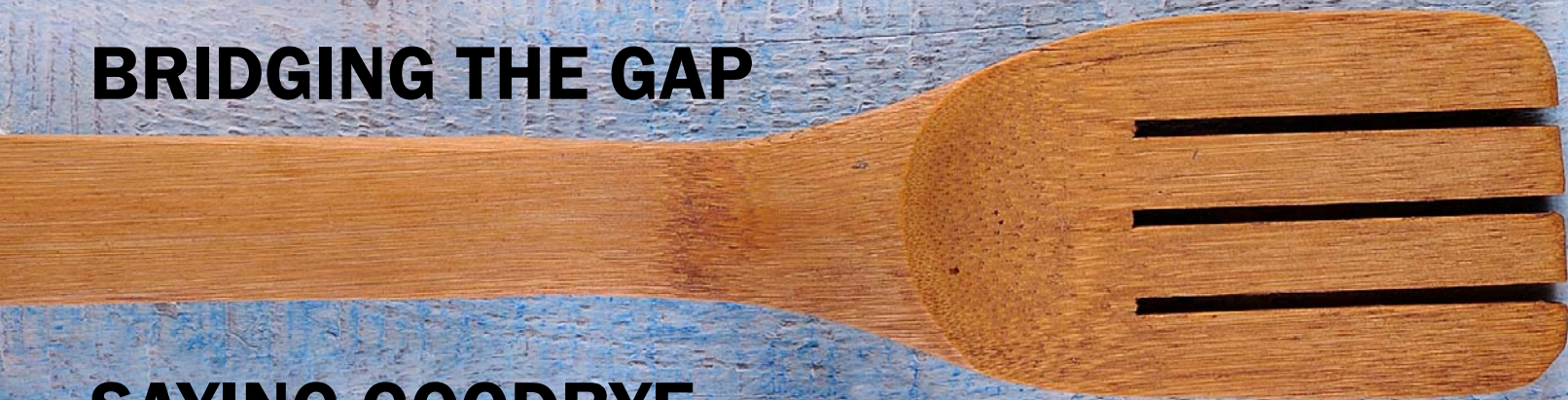
| NEWS FROM FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH FORT COLLINS |



**HAPPILY
EVER AFTER**



BRIDGING THE GAP



**SAYING GOODBYE
IS HARD**

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2016—VOLUME XXXVI—ISSUE 1

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From the Editor | THE TAX COLLECTOR

Two years ago, a tall dose of wisdom, teaching, and heart walked into FPC. Quickly, we learned this humble dog-lover knew how to listen, care, encourage, and lead. He told us stories. He cried with us. He made us pie. He guided our path. Like his beloved border collies, he's walked by our side through rocky mountains and deep pastures. Paul Parsons has been a soothing balm for FPC.

Then, one day last June, I brought my children to Vacation Bible School at FPC. All week, they learned about life in Jesus' hometown. Shepardson Hall became Nazareth with a farmer's market, shops, and even turkeys and goats. Songs and smiles filled the constructed town. And then—the tax collector arrived.



He was mean. He was sinful. He was Paul Parsons! With a twinkle in his eye, he did exactly what Paul has done throughout his life—he taught those kids about Jesus. The kids watched the wretched, greedy tax collector transform with the love of Christ.

Reverend Doctor Paul Parsons has come to the end of his pastoring career. You might say it's time for this border collie to retire. But his ministry is not over. Paul has left a God-sized impact on FPC. Thank you, Pastor Paul. Enjoy those peaceful pastures.

—Cathy Richardson

THE MESSENGER

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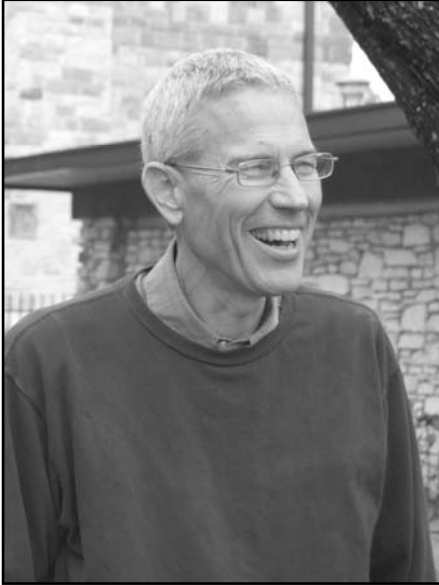
PUBLISHING GUIDELINES | THE MESSENGER is a publication for the people, passions, and mission of First Presbyterian Church Fort Collins. The newsletter seeks to inspire, inform, instruct, challenge, and motivate its readers to become engaged in the ministry of FPC. We pray that adult readers in all life stages will aspire to be faithful disciples for Christ.

Articles that support FPC's purpose and mission will be **accepted on the 15th of each month**. All articles must be sponsored by one of the church's five Centers and are subject to the approval of the Editor. Submissions will be edited for length and suitability.

Article submissions will be accepted via e-mail to crichardson@firstpresfc.org. Contact Editor Cathy Richardson for more information, (970)482-6107.



SAYING GOODBYE IS HARD



Dear friends,

Dan Clader is one of the most important people in my life, my best male friend in all the world. By the providence of God, he came into my life just as my brother was leaving it. Dan taught me how to climb, step by step, side by side, and the experiences that bonded us together so tightly almost all happened in the wilderness. There was the lightning storm on Mt. Shavano where we were almost incinerated, with our ice axes humming to the electrical charges building up and then releasing with bolts of lightning only hundreds of feet away. The day we crammed ourselves up into an ice-filled crack on the backside of Coxcomb Peak, reaching for an unreachable summit. Maroon Peak, North Maroon, Capitol Peak, Little Bear, El Diente, and Mt. Wilson—all of the most dangerous climbs were with Dan—harrowing, glorious days. Raising our daughters and their dogs together, a different kind of wilderness. Along the way, he has come to know me better than any other man, and we

both have a deep love for one another. So, when it came time for me to leave Montrose and move to another call in Kansas City, it almost killed me to leave Dan. Saying goodbye is hard work.

No matter how much I have practiced it, leaving always catches me up short. These days I find myself having to make conscious decisions to do the next right thing, pushing myself when my feet feel encased in concrete. At the end of the day, I experience a tiredness that accumulates from taking the steps of closure. That's because goodbyes with friends are laden with love.

One wouldn't think it would be so hard. I personally celebrate the astonishing things you have accomplished in the last two years. You've come a long way in trusting the leadership of the church, as well as one another. You've returned to truly enjoying each other's company, eating and working together like a family, and you've done a great job of handling the things about which you don't agree. Your financial situation is so much more solid and secure than it was in 2013. The staff has healed a lot, and they have felt your love. The session has given direction for the near term by adopting a vision and setting priorities for what needs to happen as you prepare for a new senior pastor. Your mission outreach is alive and life-giving all over the world. People are dreaming dreams again. It's actually just the right time to leave you.

And even the challenges you face bring joy to me. I picture the church filling up with young adults and young families. New people signing up to volunteer. Receiving direction from the Holy Spirit about what God wants for our beloved Celebration Service on Sundays. People going much deeper in their faith and practice. A culture of generosity being a way of life at FPC. Regular raises for the staff. Having a profound impact on downtown Fort Collins and CSU. When I imagine the fulfillment of dreams like these, I know that deep satisfaction that I have been a small part of something that will grow bigger and more wonderful. That's "new senior pastor" stuff that lies ahead. It's actually exactly the right time to leave you.

But most of all, leaving is hard because all that we have been through together has created bonds of love. We have lived out in the wilderness together. Our friendships have been forged in the hard work of living out the Gospel step by step, side by side. We will never forget you, and Nicole and I will always care about you and pray for you. Because of this, we want to invite you to come to the Annual Congregational Meeting on Sunday evening, January 24, where we will have a chance to say a formal goodbye to First Presbyterian Church. We also want to invite you to come the following Sunday morning, January 31, when I will formally retire from called parish ministry—and you can meet Dan Clader for yourself.

It has been one of the greatest honors of my life to serve you. Nicole and I are going to retire to Westcliffe, Colorado, and we hope not that you will move with us, but that you will come see us!

With abiding love,
Paul Parsons

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

A PASTOR'S WIFE'S FAREWELL TO FPC



When you got Paul Parsons as your Interim Senior Pastor, you got decades of experience in biblical study, leadership, conflict resolution, and pastoral care. And when you got me as your pastor's wife, you got a complete and total rookie!

I thank you all from the bottom of my heart for the many ways you welcomed me warmly to your gatherings and groups, to your homes and out for coffee. You have been gracious and patient with me while I tried to figure out where I best fit—as a newlywed and church member, as an introvert who also loves to listen to people's hearts, and as a homebody and writer.

Over the last several months, you've probably noticed I've been gone quite a lot. If you've asked Paul where I've been, you'll know I've been down in our home in Westcliffe pursuing a lifelong dream of writing a novel. It has been an incredible season for me! A crazy mix of steady, disciplined work alongside an unpredictable, spontaneous creativity. Fiction writing is mostly about showing up. You have to keep doing the heavy lifting of words, sentences and punctuation, while at the same time

staying attentive and agile to inspiration. It takes a daily commitment to trust and patience.

While I've been writing, I have learned to trust that the story is bigger than I am, and that as Madeline L'engle has said, I am just here to serve the work. I've learned to trust that even when I don't know what happens next in the plot, I don't have to force it; the solution will emerge if I continue to listen. I have learned to trust that my novel wants to be written as much as I want to write it; I only have to listen with full attention, the way I would listen to a beloved friend.

In other words, while writing this book, I have learned a lot about prayer and living in step with the Spirit of God! His story is bigger. I am here to serve it. I'm not in control of what happens next, but the One who does is telling the story at exactly the right pace. I get the joy of listening to it unfold.

Another way to say all this is that the spiritual life is a creative process, a lifelong engagement with beauty and mystery, with trial and error, with diligent practice and breathtaking

surprise. And I, for one, cannot get enough of it!

I finished a full manuscript of my little novel in mid-December, but I don't know what comes next for it. Maybe it will have a larger audience someday, maybe not. But my process will be the same. Trust. Listen. Then put words to the next right step when it appears.

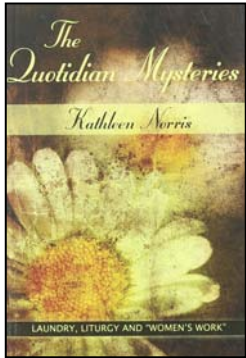
As Paul and I say goodbye to you all, I can't help but feel the parallels. You all have an adventure story written on your hearts, scribed, in part, during our time among you. It has been an incredible season for Paul and me! And while you may not know exactly what comes next, I believe you know what to do: trust and listen. The Author of your story will show you the next right step, and the words for it.

I don't know what that story will be for you, but I know this for sure: as long as the Word-made-flesh is writing it, you have a guaranteed happily-ever-after ending.

—Nicole Parsons

TOP FIVE BOOKS FOR MOTHERS

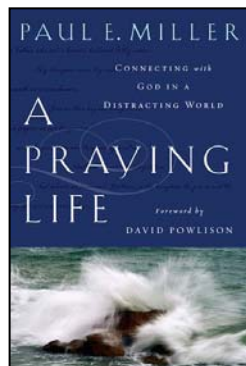
Much of Amy Julia Becker's writing, on her blog and in her books, revolves around being a mother of three young children, including Penny, a daughter with Down syndrome. Becker's latest release, *Small Talk: Learning From My Children About What Matters Most* (Zondervan), compiles vignettes on revealing and poignant conversations with her kids about birth, death, resurrection, and everything in between. Here, Becker names five books that every mother should read.



The Quotidian Mysteries

by Kathleen Norris

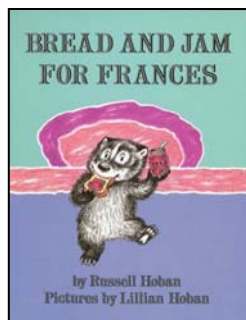
Although Norris does not have children of her own, her short book on domestic duties teaches me something new every time I read it. Norris doesn't overlook the tedium of housework (and, by extension, some aspects of childrearing), but she imbues chores and duties with value and purpose. Norris connects the repetitive nature of our lives to the significance of our daily walk with God. When I read her words, they remind me of God's grace in our everyday lives.



A Praying Life

by Paul E. Miller

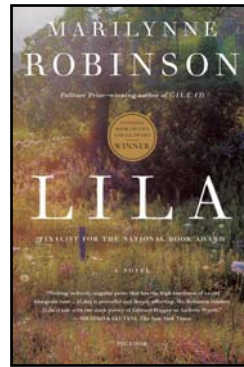
As the father of six kids, ministry leader Miller understands the reality of prayer in the midst of family life. His conversational style and willingness to share personal stories helps mothers understand even the most mundane day as part of God's good work in the world. Miller offers a practical way to pray using prayer cards. I created cards during years of sporadic prayer, and they remain testimonies of God's faithfulness to our family.



Bread and Jam for Frances

by Russell Hoban

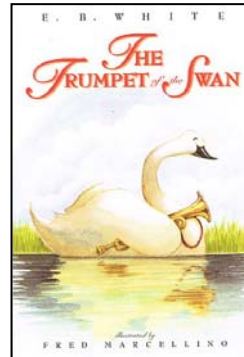
Children love Frances, the prototypical self-consumed, whimsical, and exasperating child who is embodied in the classic series as a young badger. This and other Frances books encourage parents to hang in there with kids who, say, want to eat bread and jam with every meal and have no interest in spaghetti and meatballs. With made-up songs, misspelled words, and wry humor, Hoban's series—penned 50 years ago—is a treat for parent and child alike.



Lila

by Marilynne Robinson

Robinson was nominated for the National Book Award for *Lila*, her third novel in a trilogy that began with the critically acclaimed *Gilead* and *Home*. Each book takes place in the fictional Iowa town of Gilead, from the perspective of a different character. *Lila* may be my favorite, as it combines reflections about God as the Good Parent with the story of a young woman who becomes a mother. In prose beautiful and haunting, *Lila* glimmers with hope without ever becoming sentimental.



The Trumpet of the Swan

by E.B. White

A lesser-known classic by the author of *Charlotte's Web*, this children's story offers a subtle commentary on good parenting. White weaves together the world of Sam, an adolescent boy, and Louis, an adolescent swan, as they grow up. Louis develops perseverance, tenacity, and generosity as a result of being different. His parents provide great support while secretly worrying that he will never fit in, make friends, or get married. Louis proves them wrong, giving every anxious, loving mother a reason for hope.

—Amy Julia Becker

This article first appeared in January/February 2015 issue of *Christianity Today*. Used by permission of *Christianity Today*, Carol Stream, IL 60188.

A map of the Dominican Republic is shown with a magnifying glass over Santo Domingo. A blue pushpin is stuck into the map at Santo Domingo. The magnifying glass has a wooden handle with a floral design. The map shows various geographical features like the Cordillera Central, La Vega, and La Romana. The title 'GOD'S LAND AND GOD'S PEOPLE' is written in large, bold, black letters in the top right corner of the image area.

GOD'S LAND AND GOD'S PEOPLE

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC VISION TRIP INSPIRES TEAM TO PLANT WITH PURPOSE

Between July 26 and 31, 2015, seven FPC members journeyed to several villages in the Dominican Republic as a vision team in support of the program Plant With Purpose (PWP). The mission of the nonprofit organization is to reverse deforestation and poverty around the world through the integration of environmental restoration, economic empowerment, and spiritual renewal. Besides planting trees, our role involved championing the progress of the villagers and learning from them so that we may be inspired to better care for God's land and God's people.

Glowing faces and beaming smiles greeted us as we walked into El Zamo, a farming community in the Dominican Republic. We stepped gingerly to avoid slipping as we explored the steep hillside where Pappolo grew plants to support his family: banana, avocado, lime, coffee, and others foreign to us. Later, we met Josefa, a grandmotherly

woman who had fermented, dried, roasted, and mashed her harvested cacao nibs. I traded my hot-pink umbrella for luscious-smelling hunks of chocolate.

Wherever we went during our PWP vision trip, remarkable Dominicans welcomed and greeted us. Children scampered nearby, spreading laughter or lowering their eyes in shyness. Mothers and fathers cuddled round-faced babes, whose spiking braids were decorated with colorful beads. Village women prepared tasty dishes—chicken with herbs, rice, boiled plantains, yucca root, fruit, ensalada ruso (Russian potato salad)—either arranged on indoor tables or under a magnificent spreading tree. Talented musicians entertained and shared their culture with drums, accordions, guitars, and metal-scraper percussion instruments. Locals and visitors danced until dripping with salty perspiration.

Farmers led us over grassy hills, dusty roads, or through a river on the way to their farm communities. We visited outdoor tree nurseries where seedlings grew and then partnered with our new friends for planting. On lush-grown slopes, our friends dug holes for avocado, yucca, lime, mandarin, cacao, and orange seedlings. Patting the brown, crumbly soil, we enclosed the roots for each plant. These villagers showed us their practice of "sustainable farming," nurturing the land, preventing soil erosion, and feeding their families and community.

PWP, also known as Floresta, is God-centered, and evidence of God's love radiated wherever we went. Every event we attended opened with prayer, giving thanks for all the Lord provides and asking for continued guidance, safety, and health. This was also true for the Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) meetings. VSLAs are a critical part of the economic-empowerment

aspect of PWP. During these meetings, we witnessed VSLA members deposit Dominican Republic pesos into their accounts. Three community members held keys for the padlocks to the metal box containing each member's savings. Once members brought forward their savings for the week, the padlocks were secured.

VSLA members touched us with their many testimonials:

"Before belonging to the group, I knew nothing about how to save money. The first cycle I saved 23,000 DR pesos (524 USD) and bought blocks to build my home. Before this group, I didn't save my money. Now I do," said Felipa Neva.

Dolores Frias also spoke: "With my loan, I plant trees, cassava, and other crops. I earn money to buy supplies for my Johnny Cake business. I take Johnny Cakes to the school and sell them to the children for lunch. With that money, I am able to survive. With the loans, I built a beautiful bathroom."

Seated in a shady spot, we witnessed a youth bible study group led by 14-year-old Marisol. Dressed in a full-length dress of brilliant blue fabric, she directed the study of the creation in Genesis. The perhaps 20 youth who attended willingly answered questions relating to the scripture lesson. Praying together and hearing the hymns of praise that followed, we truly felt the presence of the Holy Spirit.

During our visit, we observed the directors of the Dominican PWP office interacting with and advising their own people as they traveled from community to community. Progress toward healthy sustainability in the communities we visited stems from fine leadership of the PWP director team. We are especially grateful to staff members Carlos Dista, Estela Rodriguez, Durbel Lora, Marcos Almonte, and Lisiana Mendez, who were instrumental in connecting us with the people. We also appreciated Becky Rosaler, Marketing and Events Coordinator, and



Donna Lebert, Executive Assistant, from the San Diego, California office. They helped organize our itinerary and accompanied us to the Dominican Republic.

Since its founding in 1984, PWP has experimented with numerous formats and procedures. When one effort failed, another idea emerged until successes,

one after another, became apparent, and the present format was developed. As Executive Director Scott Sabin says, "To really love our neighbors we must address both their spiritual and physical needs. We need to invest ourselves in their lives, just as Christ invested himself in the lives of his disciples."

(Continued on p. 8)



and Carol Alford extends our gratefulness for the opportunity to represent FPC Fort Collins in the Dominican Republic. Before our trip, we grappled with the concepts of taking care of God's creation and helping those less-fortunate. Too often in attempting to care for our planet and alleviate poverty, we hurt more than we help. In reading *When Helping Hurts* (by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert) and Sabin's *Tending to Eden*, we struggled with questions such as "How can we as individuals and as a church make positive impacts toward healing a hurting planet and helping the impoverished in our world?"

We believe PWP is on the right track in reaching into the world to help those less-fortunate. As a vision team we hope to continue our support in various ways. Presently, our church, through Missions & Outreach, designates consistent support for the rural community of Loma Verde, one of the communities we visited. In addition, some individuals in our church give added support to PWP or contribute to the community of Maisal, where we were privileged to experience the harvesting of cacao.

At home, we can do more to care for the gift of our Lord's creation. A small beginning of environmental stewardship involves recycling, limiting use of water and resources, choosing less-wasteful packaging, composting, biking, walking or carpooling, turning down the thermostat—the list goes on. As a church we can have a Creation Stewardship Sunday with teachings and activities on creation care; pray for those who are impoverished because of degraded environments; collect wheelchairs, walkers, scooters, and tub and shower benches to be borrowed when members have had surgery; or participate in a study group involving the book *Tending to Eden*.

Walking among our brothers and sisters in the Dominican Republic, feeling their hand of friendship, and learning from their accomplishments has awakened the desire to search out ways to be more effective stewards.

Today, personnel recognize the importance of creating a community partnership that utilizes local communities to solve their own problems and that is God-centered.

PWP and communities work toward

- local ownership of their own solutions
- tree planting
- sustainable farming

- soil protection
- church mobilization
- use of appropriate technology
- microfinance
- training
- watershed
- maintaining dignity.

Our vision trip team of Cindy Frost, Janet Schuchmann, Walt Schuchmann, Chloe Ellison, BJ Stoner, Nedra Raber,

We hope you visit the PWP Website (plantwithpurpose.org). Learn of its history, its purposes, and ways you can help. Read the meaningful and touching stories on the blog. Pray for PWP and ask the Lord for guidance in healing creation and loving our neighbors. We invite you also to contribute financially to this fine program.

Think on these things:

- The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Genesis 2:15)
- God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)
- We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. (Romans 8:22)
- Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music. (Psalm 98:4)
- Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this, Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:30–31)
- He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done. (Proverbs 19:17)
- If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (1 John 3:17–18)

—Carol Alford



The vast majority of the world’s poorest people (those scraping by on less than \$1.25 a day) live in rural areas and depend completely on the land to survive. Most are smallholder farming families who

need what is grown on their land to put food on the table and earn income for basic essentials. PWP currently works in more than 435 communities in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Mexico, Tanzania, and Thailand. PWP is currently exploring new programs in additional countries as well.

Presently PWP works with 3,260 families in 67 communities within the Dominican Republic. There are 97 VSLAs creating a culture of savings with \$441,086 currently being managed by these groups. Nearly 5.5 million trees have been planted in efforts to reforest barren hillsides and improve crop productivity throughout rural areas of the Dominican Republic. Visit plantwithpurpose.org for more information.

Look for the PWP class at MX this spring:



Caring for Creation and Loving our Neighbor

Teachers: Dean Biggins and PWP Mission Team

What is the theological basis for caring for the environment? What does environmental stewardship have to do with “loving our neighbors?” What are practical ways to respond to the vicious cycles of environmental degradation and its impact on the global poor? How do we respond to poverty in empowering ways that don’t create dependency? These are just some of the questions that will be discussed as we learn from PWP’s Executive Director, Scott Sabin, as we read and discuss his book, *Tending to Eden: Environmental Stewardship for God’s People*.



SAVE THE DATE

for *Egypt: Joseph's Journey from Prison to Palace* Vacation Bible School this summer. Kids will be transported to ancient Egypt where they'll meet Bible-times heroes, visit the Egyptian marketplace and spend time exploring firsthand the unique culture of Joseph's world.

VBS 2016 will take place during the second week of June this year: June 13–17.
Look for registration and fun volunteer opportunities coming soon!

A CHURCH OF CHARACTER DILIGENCE

“Diligence is doing a task with the motivation of love and an attitude of joy.”
–from *The Power for True Success: How to Build Character in Your Life*

The character quality for January is DILIGENCE (versus slothfulness). Diligence can be defined as investing my time and energy to complete each task assigned to me.

Don't you find that it is so much easier to start a project than it is to finish it? The excitement of something new gives us fresh momentum to start, but we

need something more to ensure that we complete what we have started. We need to make a commitment. Before you even begin your new project, commit yourself to complete it. To be practical about it, evaluate the time and energy it will take to complete the task before you begin. In spiritual matters, seek the Lord before you begin. He has promised that His strength will sustain us in everything that He chooses for us to be involved in.

We not only want to complete all our projects, we want to complete them accurately and thoroughly. Each day, ask yourself, “Have I done my very best today?” Best doesn't mean perfect, but it does mean that you have given your best efforts within the time allotted for each task.

Our homes should be places of rest and comfort. That's what we want them to be. Often, however, we only choose the easy and fun things to do around the home. The more difficult tasks we will “do later!” Many times though, the “later” never comes, which compounds the disorder, and along with it, our stress. We can be winners at home if each member of the family will choose to be diligent in the daily tasks that need to be done. If each family member is diligent at home, the orderly environment that we create will ultimately increase the enjoyment, comfort, rest, and nurture of the entire family.

BRIDGING THE GAP

WELCOMING REV. DR. JEFF HOFFMEYER

As our church's Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) continues to search for the senior pastor God is calling to FPC, Pastor Paul Parsons' retirement is rapidly approaching (February 5). Last fall, Session realized there would be a gap between the time when Pastor Paul retires and when a new senior pastor is called. Starting in November they formed a search team to look for a "bridge" senior pastor, a full-time senior pastor to "bridge-the-gap" between our interim and our next senior pastor.

With great excitement, we announce the calling of Reverend Dr. Jeff Hoffmeyer as our Bridge Senior Pastor; he will take office on February 1. Originally from Boulder, Dr. Hoffmeyer is a Colorado native and an avid Broncos fan. His experience as both Pastor for Congregational Life (in Sacramento, CA) and Interim Pastor (Valmont Community Church in Boulder) makes him an ideal match for FPC. Most recently Dr. Hoffmeyer completed his PhD in Theology from Berkley's Graduate Theological Union (Dissertation on Beauty and the Doctrine of Atonement).

Everyone who met Jeff on his interviews and visits to our church admired his energy and his passion for the Gospel. The bridge selection team felt that his focus on both prayer, communication, and community is the winning combination that we need for our church in this period of transition.

Dr. Hoffmeyer's wife Heather is an OB-GYN physician in Boulder, and they have two children, Eleanore and Andersen. Read more at jeffhoffmeyer.com. Please join me in welcoming Jeff, Heather, and their family to FPC!

—John Cawley
Chair,
Bridge Pastor Search Committee



WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE COMING WEEKS?

Monday, January 18:

Session Teaching and Prayer

Session will prepare for the Annual Congregational Meeting and for the transfer of duties and authority from Paul to Jeff.

Sunday, January 24:

Annual Congregational Meeting

We will begin with a shared meal, enjoying one another's community. Paul and Nicole will give a formal goodbye to FPC, and he will share a short "State of the Church" message. Jeff Hoffmeyer, the bridge Senior Pastor, will be introduced. In the receiving of the Annual Report (part 1), the financial position of the church will be shared and discussed. A number of changes to the Church By-Laws will be voted on.

Monday, January 25:

Session Business Meeting

The Session will take all final, appropriate actions for the transition of leadership.

Sunday, January 31: Worship

There will be one combined worship service at 10:00 AM, in which Paul will retire from active, called pastoral ministry. This will be followed by a reception.

Monday, February 1:

A New Chapter Begins

Dr. Jeff Hoffmeyer will begin his duties as the Bridge Senior Pastor of FPC.



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Reverend Doctor Paul H Parsons

ANNOUNCES HIS RETIREMENT FROM CALLED PARISH MINISTRY

OFFICIATING HIS FINAL WORSHIP SERVICE
SUNDAY, JANUARY 31, 2016 AT TEN O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
531 S COLLEGE AVENUE, FORT COLLINS, COLORADO

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FELLOWSHIP FOLLOWING IN SHEPARDSON HALL