

The News of San Fernando Presbytery

Every Church a Mission Center

June 2007

Words from Wendy

*Thoughts from Mission
Advocate Wendy Gist*

Woodland Hills Church Makes Progress Through Multi-Generational Ministries

When Revs. Kellie and Bob Thomson arrived as co-pastors at Woodland Hills Presbyterian Church in early 2003, they found a faithful congregation averaging between 50-60 in worship, but few children and youth to point toward the congregation's future.

In the ensuing years, the ministry they share has gone well. Changes have been most noticeable during this past year. An influx of young families with children has resulted in 22 kids under the age of 5. They can't attribute that to one particular thing, says Bob, but one thing is clearly emphasized — kids are welcome in worship. The congregation doesn't mind noise or disruptions, and they work to make their service family friendly. The congregation now has a children's choir, along with an adult choir and praise team. The church has been including different styles of music in worship and accepting them with grace and a positive attitude. In addition, projection and sound system improvements were given through special gifts. Worship attendance, which was 50-60 five years ago, has seen a 50% increase and now averages 70-80.

The congregation's "Church Fest" in September was designed to welcome the community. It featured games, face-painting, and food. Because of the event, people saw the church who hadn't seen it before. Two or three families came from that day. While youth group attendance is small right now, the congregation is not waiting for its toddlers to grow older. Kellie Thomson is working with youth to attract new participants. Every week she does a junior high outreach event called "cup stacking." This a timed race to stack cups in a certain pattern. She does this outside the church when

school is out across the street at Hale Middle School.

Current youth activities at the church are intended to bring kids in and get a youth group through the "back door." And emphasis on spirituality will come later as young people become more comfortable in a church setting.



Bob Thomson says that the church's pre-school has made great strides in recent years and is going strong. Enrollment has doubled in size in the past year, with 34 kids participating regularly and a new director on board.

Bob says that he and Kellie are most gratified by the fact that when they came they found a church open to doing whatever it took to reach people for Christ. The congregation also received a five-year grant from the denomination that has helped to stabilize income during this redevelopment phase.

Both of the pastors participate in a covenant group which includes the pastors of First Presbyterian, Encino; the Canoga Park Church; Kirk o' the Valley; and St. James, Tarzana.

While the contemporary realities of life in Los Angeles create significant challenges for smaller congregations, it is clear that with faith, energy, openness to change and partnership with the denomination, small churches can make a comeback in the 21st century.

What is it like to live on \$21 worth of food for a week? In May four Members of Congress tried to do just that as part of the Food Stamp Challenge organized by the House Hunger Caucus, which hopes to raise awareness about hunger in the U.S.. The average Food Stamp recipient receives \$21/week in federal assistance, which breaks down to \$3 a day or \$1 a meal.

GOP Rep. Jo Ann Emerson and Dem. Rep. Jim McGovern chair the House Hunger Caucus, and though they encouraged all of Congress to take the one-week challenge, only two representatives joined them. Even so, the challenge drew the attention of the media, exposed elected leaders to the painful choices and hardships of people relying upon Food Stamps, and produced awkward and humorous moments as representatives struggled with caffeine withdrawal and gazed longingly at products they could no longer afford. One representative, feeling weak and afraid he'd be unable to deliver a speech, broke the agreement to eat a pork chop and bought a bag of peanuts at an airport. Later, while traveling back to Washington, D.C., airport security confiscated jars of peanut butter and jelly from his carry-on bags leaving him with nothing but a small bag of cornmeal to eat in the final days. "When you're living on food stamps, you're really one event away from disaster," he said.

While we might dismiss hidden snacks and unauthorized meals as congressional excess or just another reason to shake our heads at people in Washington, such acts of desperation shine a light upon the difficulties hungry and poor people face across the country. What is the role of the church amidst hunger and pain? How can we change the landscape in a lasting way?

*In peace,
Wendy*

New Evangelism Convocation Offers Many Resources for Reaching the Unchurched



Why attend the National Presbyterian Evangelism Conference?

This first of its kind conference brings together Presbyterians from across the church and others interested in small, rural and urban ministries, and multicultural ministries. New church development, congregational transformation, and health ministries are integral parts of this conference as well.

You'll hear from dynamic speakers and workshop leaders, and participate in engaging discussions.

The conference will be held August 31 - September 3 in Nashville. You can register at:

<http://www.pcusa.org/evangelism/registration.htm>

Newhall Youth Travel to Guatemala for a Taste of Mission Work

For spring break, five youths from the First Presbyterian Church of Newhall, Santa Clarita, California went on an odyssey of service in Guatemala. The three boys and two girls from the church's youth program spent a week helping to build a school dormitory and leading a vacation Bible school. Rev. Joel Mitchell, Associate Pastor at First Pres, led the group that worked with two ministries located near Huehuetenango, Guatemala.

Sixty local children attended the vacation Bible school in the small village of San Lorenzo. The kids ranged from babies to 12 year old, and they were from local churches in the area. All the activities were led by the Newhall youths, including singing, games, story reading, and crafts. Joel confided, "Our Spanish language abilities were average to poor, but we did fine. The kids were great leaders." Joel explained that the young mission workers found creative ways to cross the language barrier.

Nearby, the five youths helped build a dormitory at the Berea Bible Institute. For two days, they carried buckets of concrete to where the dormitory was being built and used it to cement rows of blocks for the walls. They also participated in the service of a local church in San Lorenzo. The five youths sang two Christian songs. Aside from getting a taste of missionary work in Guatemala, the Newhall youth had a chance to experience a way of life that is different from what they know at home. "I think the kids appreciate living in the United States. They have more advantages than a lot of kids. They saw it first hand in Guatemala," Pastor Joel explained.

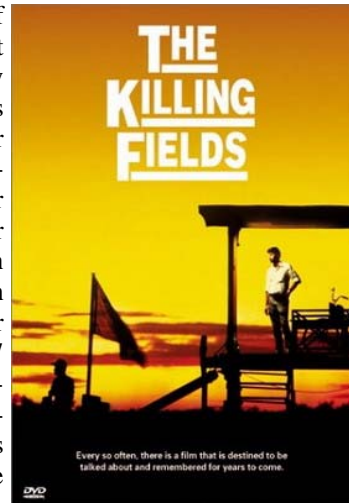
When Satan Ruled Paradise: A Christian Journey Through the Killing Fields of Cambodia

by Rev. Curtis Webster

Wednesdays, July 11th, - August 8th, 7:00 p.m.

First Presbyterian Church of Encino

In April 1975, with the fall of Phnom Penh to the insurgent Khmer Rouge army, the tiny nation of Cambodia was plunged into a reign of terror that did not end until the Vietnamese army drove the Khmer Rouge back to the Thai border in 1979. Out of a population of approximately nine million at the beginning of the Khmer Rouge regime, at least 1.7 million died as a result of executions, starvation, and disease. Cambodia today bears the deep and ugly scars of the Khmer Rouge.



Although prosecutions for war crimes followed with relative quickness after World War II, the Rwandan genocide, and the atrocities in Yugoslavia, justice has been slow in coming to the senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge. This year, a tribunal run jointly by the United Nations and the Royal Government of Cambodia is slated to begin trying the architects of the Killing Fields of Cambodia for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

I would like to explore the Khmer Rouge through a distinctly Christian lens in a five-week adult education class. The Khmer Rouge has much to teach us about the evil that is inherent in systems of power. Most of those who committed atrocities during this period were not monsters, but were ordinary men and women who fell under the spell of an evil institution. None of us is immune from potential exploitation by institutional evil.

Using film clips, Scripture, excerpts from several fine history books that have been written about the Khmer Rouge, and interviews which I plan to conduct when I go to Phnom Penh this June, the class would explore the historical and cultural forces which resulted in the Khmer Rouge and seek to identify the "precursors to evil" common to all genocides (including Nazi Germany, Rwanda, Yugoslavia, and others) and ask what our Christian faith tells us about preventing and combating institutional evil.

The class would be preceded by two showings of the Academy Award-winning 1984 film, "The Killing Fields." Each showing of "The Killing Fields" would be accompanied by a discussion period. These showings would take place sometime in June or July.

There will be dinner at 6:00 p.m. (for a nominal sum) and the class begins promptly at 7:00. We will ask for an offering during the class which will go to Cambodia-related charities. For more information call the church at (818) 788-1147.

A Report from the Cradle of Presbyterians

By Carol Kasperson

This year we spent Good Friday in Stirling, Scotland. Stirling is a beautiful, hilly small town, with a University, a castle and one of the oldest churches in Scotland. This is the church where we attended Good Friday services. It is The Church of The Holy Rude (yes, it is spelled Rude, not Rood, as you would expect, but it still means cross to we Americans).

The church was first built in 1129 A.D. but was destroyed by fire in 1406. It was rebuilt and basically completed in 1414 with some additions to the Choir (eastern) part in 1507 and 1546. Still considerably older than the Presbytery of San Fernando.



The Church of The Holy Rude

The real importance of this particular church lies in the fact that James VI of Scotland (James I of the United Kingdom and he of the King James Version of the Bible), was crowned here in July 1567, when he was only 13 months old. Gives you some idea of what happened to his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, who was languishing in prison at the time. John Knox preached the sermon

at James' coronation. James probably missed most of it at his age.

The Good Friday service was considerably more formal than those in California. Heavily robed minister, beadle and choir director. It was somber and the sermon was passionate and moving. The sad part was that there were probably only about 30 people in this huge edifice, 13 of whom were in the choir and 3 of whom were staff. It made me sad. After all, this is Scotland, the home of the founders of Presbyterianism. We were later given to understand that there was some revival going on in parts of Scotland...we didn't see it.

Easter was much brighter and happy (shouldn't it always be?). We had worked our way back to London and attended services, where else, The American Church in London. The church was for all intents full and even though some of the members had either returned home for Holy Week or were enjoying exotic sights in Europe during the school break, there were a number of visitors...from all different countries. The sermon was inspired (I am just a little prejudiced here), the choir magnificent, and the whole service blessed. A particular blessing to me was a young Arabic man who, when introducing himself to the congregation, said that he had come to the church to see what Easter meant. After the service when some of the congregation went up to sing the Halleluja Chorus, he joined them. It's hard to tell what God is doing. He is full of surprises and blessings.

Check out the blog of Carol's son-in-law John D'Elia, now the Senior Minister of The American Church in London:

<http://ministryintheuk.blogspot.com>.

PWS Summer Conference In July

Presbyterian Women in the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii Summer Conference will be held at Chapman University in Orange, CA on Friday, July 20, beginning at 11:30 a.m. with a box lunch and closing at noon on Sunday, July 22, following worship and communion.



The Conference theme is "Hearing God's Call," and the Rev. Elizabeth Nordquist is the plenary speaker. The Rev. Martha Thorson will introduce the 2007-2008 *Horizons* Bible Study, "Above and Beyond: Hearing God's Call in Jonah and Ruth."

Friday afternoon will feature a choice of three forums. A variety of workshops will be offered on Saturday morning and afternoon. Dr. Joanna Medawar Nacheff, Director of Choral Activities at El Camino College, will present the Saturday evening entertainment.

The early registration fee (before June 20) for a full-time participant is \$190, full-time commuter - \$55, one-day commuter - \$30. Meals may be purchased by the commuters, if desired. Contact Sara Bauer for a conference brochure with registration form (818-363-7247 or bh654@lafn.org).

Update on Jan Sperry

Presbytery Stated Clerk Jan Sperry continues her recuperation from recent back surgery. Please keep Jan in your prayers for a full recovery.

The Last Word

When we are saying our last word to a person, we never know if we are ever going to meet again. Therefore, it would be good to make it a habit to make our last word one of thoughtfulness and understanding. Some last words can bring a warm glow and illuminate the whole day, while a thoughtless remark can spoil the next 24 hours. So let us strive to make our last word one that we can cherish and remember without regret.

Phil Skarin

The Presbytery of San Fernando
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
14225 Roscoe Blvd.
Panorama City, CA 91402

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At the Presbytery meeting on May 22nd, I was reminded, once again, how lucky we are to have a representative of the PRESBYTERIAN FOUNDATION at our finger tips. JILL HAMMER was present with a display, brochures and her presence to answer questions on the spot. The Foundation office is located at the Glendale office facility. Her number is (818) 638-8182. Give her a call. She is highly qualified to help us.

The Spirit of Wholeness in Christ: A Racial Ethnic Multicultural Event

July 12–14, 2007
Los Angeles Airport Marriott Hotel



The purpose of *The Spirit of Wholeness in Christ* event is to affirm the authenticity of God's people working together in solidarity, focusing on education, justice and inclusiveness in multicultural settings in the life of the church and society.

Come join us to * celebrate diversity
* take advantage of learning opportunities
* be equipped to do ministry in diverse settings
* participate in multicultural and racial ethnic ministry opportunities
* experience multicultural worship
* and enjoy multicultural music and dance.

This event is family oriented — bring the kids! To register online, go to:
<http://www.elca.org/multicultural/spirit.html>

The Presbytery of San Fernando News is published monthly by the Communication & Church Support Committee of the Presbytery. Contributions are welcomed. Deadline for each issue is the 25th of the preceding month.

Dr. Gerald O North
Executive Presbyter

Rev. Ken Baker, Editor

