



PresPress

November 2020

Presbyterian Church of Novato, 710 Wilson Ave., P.O. Box 631, Novato, CA 94948

“Don’t Prioritize God”

This doesn’t sound like the best title for a pastor’s church newsletter article, does it? It doesn’t sound very inspiring. But bear with me, and I’ll share with you a little secret that will unravel that inquisitive expression that probably crossed your face as you read it (although this is not really a secret as it can be found in that handy dandy Word of God that we all keep on our shelves at home).

I confess, first of all, to being a ‘church nerd.’ I grew up in the church, was active in the church, served as a participant and leader in the church, found a home in the church, found unconditional love in the church that could not be found at school or anywhere else, found a way to express myself in the church, asked my existential questions in the church, and learned about community in church. Church was not just important to me, but taught me that everything else in life – who I was, what I was called to do, how I followed Christ – was more or less about church. And I’m NOT talking about the institutional church, I’m talking about the Body of Christ, the people, God’s family; that wonderful relationship with God and God’s children in the world.

So you might assume God is indeed a priority in my life. And you would be wrong.

I remember a conversation that I had with a few other seminary students a number of years back. It was about our priorities. We talked about family, friendship, making a living, recreation, fun, and discipleship. The consensus of the group was “of course we prioritized God in life” because we were all training to serve God as ministers and church leaders. Inherent in that call was prioritizing God, right? In the years since, I have engaged in many other conversations with friends, parishioners, family, theologians, and even strangers that have had to do with setting priorities, and I have always advocated that we all make God our ‘number one.’

But as I have continued to pour over the words of Jesus, I’ve come to find that prioritizing God in our lives is not what we’re called to do. Prioritizing God is NOT enough. I think the idea and thought process behind making God and our ‘spiritual life’ first is noble and heartfelt and arrived at with the greatest intentions, but it falls short of who God is and who we are called to be.

Making God a priority is not enough. Prioritizing simply what we label as church 'things' is not enough. Worship is not enough. One Sabbath day a week is not enough. Any amount of time that we might set aside just for God, that we might dedicate solely to our spiritual lives, while important, is not enough. Why? Because God doesn't want just a part of our lives, God wants everything: our whole selves, from what we do at church to what we do at school, to what we do at work, to what we do at the grocery store, to who we are. God wants us to live in God, and God in us.

Does that sound overwhelming? Well, saints, let me tell you why it's not. In fact, the opposite is true. Trying to prioritize God and what is labeled 'church things' is mostly to our detriment in our already overloaded, crazy schedules. But living in relationship with God every day, that frees us.

Did you know that most of the pressures and stresses we put on ourselves in life we do because we try to hold on to an illusion of control? We try to control everything. We try to live up to some kind of worldly expectation of us. But the truth is, God loves us unconditionally, without holding our lives up to the microscope looking to see if we have lived up to those crazy plans that we or others have held on to. God wants us to live in God, letting the grace of Christ be our foundation for living, because in grace, we are always of value, precious, worthy of love. We don't have to earn God's love, or respect, or our value as human beings. That's the freeing power of grace.

For me, as a child of God that has been shaped and molded in the church, I will always and forever share with those around me the transformative power of love in the context of a church family, and I will invite people to worship, serve, and share in its life and ministry, because I know that Jesus can be found there. BUT that does not mean faith stops there, or that the church is limited to some institution that has worship, activities, and mission projects. Being church is about God being in relationship with us everywhere and all the time. In fact, if doing more 'church activities' wears us down to the point we are emotionally, spiritually, and physically exhausted, or even broken, maybe it's time to step back from those things and see how we can live in God in the everyday.

The gift of being a part of a church family is not about prioritizing God, and if it becomes that then I think we might be missing the point. Being a part of a church family should not be a burden, or another activity on our hyper-busy schedules, or a place we meet our mission and service quota. I think the gift of a church family is about growing in our relationship with God and with each other so that we can learn what it means to be in relationship with God every day. Can that happen outside the walls of

our congregations? Absolutely. God is not confined in any way. But where else do we pray for one another, read and study the Word of God together, seek to know Jesus and our loving God, nurture our relationship with God with such devotion and intentionality?

For myself, and for a good number of other pastors out there, I confess that I ALWAYS want more people to participate in worship and in the life of the church. And perhaps, in some way, it is selfish on my end. In some small way, I admit I fall to that worldly expectation of pastors: that my success in part depends on numbers. But that's not my main reason. In fact, I hope and pray for more participation and involvement not for my own job security, or to 'grow' the church, or because that's what I'm hired to do. I encourage people to participate in the life of the church because in it I have seen and experienced the grace of God in life-changing, transformative ways; I have grown in my faith and continue to grow in my relationship with Christ in ways that bring me unexplainable peace and joy; I have experienced love that has broken me down and brought me to tears and lifted me up again; and I want others to see and experience and grow in their faith as I have. If God can transform me in the life of the church, God can do it with anyone.

Dear saints, I continue to pray for you, for your families, and for our life and ministry together. You are each unique, and special, and God's beloved. God loves each of you as if you were the only person in all of creation. And all God wants is for us to be in relationship with God, and with each other.

With Care,
Adam



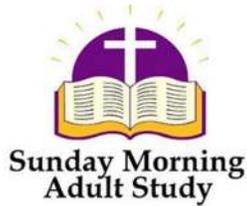
Please join me in welcoming our two new youth interns, Kelsey McIvor and Marilyn Hunt. They will be working 10 hours a week and growing as they learn about the inner workings of youth group. They will also assist with social media communications and building relationships with the youth.

Kelsey has been a faithful participant in youth group since middle school. She attended San Marin High and now attends UC Berkeley where she is majoring in Global Studies.

Marilynn has also been faithfully attending youth group since middle school. She also attended San Marin High and now attends Cal Poly San Luis Obispo where she is majoring in Landscape Architecture.

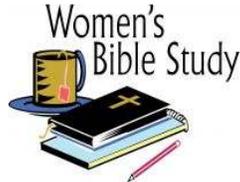
Both have attended several mission trips and led the LOG retreat. I look forward to working with them as they bring enthusiasm and many new ideas to the PCN Youth Program.





Sunday Morning
Adult Study

The Sunday morning adult Bible study class is meeting via Zoom from 8 to 9 a.m. All are welcome to join! If you are interested in attending, please contact Larry Dacquisto at (415) 577-2115 or email larrydacquisto@gmail.com.



Women's
Bible Study

First and Second Samuel

Thursday morning Women's Bible Study has resumed its weekly study of 1 & 2 Samuel via Zoom from 9:30 to 11 a.m. Bible study leaders will continue to be Carol Dacquisto and Melodie Baird. To be added to our Zoom contact list, email Carol Dacquisto at dacqmom@aol.com or call her at 415-892-2070 for more information.



Session Highlights October 2020

Update of the Personnel Policies Manual
Job description for an Interim Technology Director
Reactivating membership for Hal Wood

The Personnel Committee announced the hiring of Marilyn Hunt and Kelsey McIvor as Youth Ministry Interns.

Kathy Takemoto, Clerk of Session



The Deacons would like to thank for following Meal Train Angels for coming to the aid of Marilyn Bentley as she recovers and gains strength: Audrey Boland, Kathy Botko, Sandi Class, Carrie Ford, Elaine Harris, Patty Reed, Kristen Rush and Kay Walker.

May God continue to bless all of you and your generous hearts.

Becky Praun, Meal Train Coordinator



The Deacons are proud to announce we had another successful blood drive on Sunday, October 4th, 2020.

Vitalant Blood Center reported 26 donors and 40 units of blood. Wow! An outstanding group of Novato and PCN donors!

Thank you to the volunteers that set up Trevitt Hall, checked in donors and helped clean up and re-sanitize Trevitt Hall: Bill Bradfield, Les Church, Brad and Kimberly Praun, Sandy Fong, Janalee Holmes, Audrey Boland and Brook Stahley.

Thank you, thank you everyone!!

The Deacons would like to extend a BIG THANK YOU to our fellow Deacon, Carol Robinson, who has been covering for Tammi in the church front office.

She has been keeping the Deacons updated with prayers and concerns of our PCN Family. We appreciate all Carol's extra talents and time.

Thank you, Carol!!!!

PCN Deacons



MEN'S BIBLE STUDY

Come join us for study and fellowship. We meet every **Wednesday at 7:30 a.m.** via Zoom. We have started a new study called "Old Testament Characters." The author writes "It is my prayer that we might be better participants in the shaping of God's drama today by our careful reflection on the successes and failures of the men and women who have gone before us." All men are welcome. To be added to the Zoom contact list, contact Phil Dougherty at (415) 328-6674 or email phild@dhis.com for more information.



Here's an important number to jot down: (415) 472-0911. This is the **non-injury** lift assist phone number from the Novato Fire Department. If you or someone you know has fallen and you can't lift him/her, the fire department will come help!



If, during this unprecedented time, you find yourself in need of someone to talk to, the Stephen Ministers are here to listen, and all conversations are confidential. Please contact Jane Sime at (415) 497-5158 or Gail Penfield at (415) 897-7929 for more information.



Community Outreach for PCN

We would like your help in spreading the word about PCN's online activities during this time of sheltering in place. Please share PCN info on your social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, NextDoor, etc.). Share links to the music videos, worship services, children's sermons, etc. This will help broaden our outreach. With everyone having to shelter in place, it's a good time to get the word out about our congregation and what God is up to through us!

A Quasquicentennial Celebration is Happening in 2021!

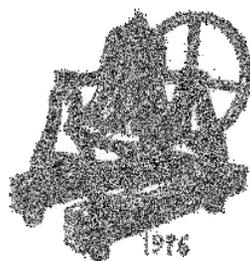
What's a quasquicentennial? It's a 125th anniversary. PCN will celebrate its 125th anniversary in 2021.

In preparation, please send a memory which can be included in a commemorative booklet for this special occasion. You can write about anything, but here are a few prompts:

- How you came to faith in Christ
- The first time you came to PCN
- Your favorite Sunday school, VBS, or youth group memory
- Fun fellowship activities and church friends
- Mission trips you have attended
- Children can write a poem or draw a picture
- Your wedding at PCN

Everyone is encouraged to participate to create a unique keepsake booklet. Email a Word document, or send your memory in an email to kathy.takemoto@outlook.com. Drawings/writings by children can be left in the clerk mail slot in the church office.

Patty Reed and the Program & Fellowship Committee would love to hear your ideas to celebrate this special occasion. Contact Patty at pdreed@sbcglobal.net.



Drawing of the church bell by Mae Wygant done in 1976