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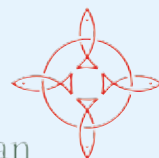
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*Echoes*



# The VOICE

Fifth Avenue  
Presbyterian  
Church



May 2011

## *The Future of the Church*

Lately Scott Black Johnston has been pondering the future—of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, and of the wider community of Christ. One is sailing forward on a strong current; the other has hit rocky water.

As he prepares for FAPC's annual Congregational Meeting on May 1, the senior pastor is confident that parishioners will find their church is not just healthy, "it is brimming with life."

"I am very proud of the people of this church for their faithfulness," he says. "This year we met our pledge goal for the first time in 12 years. That's *huge*. There's more ownership by the members of this church than there has been in two decades."

Beyond the strong balance sheet, there is a renewed vitality in the congregation.

"Good things are happening in all corners of our church life," he says. "The fact that our youth group is asking for a bigger room downstairs, that our arts events are bringing new people through our doors, that we have two new associates and a resident coming on board in the next few months... these are all signs that we are truly embracing the vision that God has for this church."

And what of the wider Presbyterian Church, and of American Protestantism as a whole? What is the "state of the church" in North America?

Dr. Black Johnston addressed those questions at the inaugural Next Conference in Indianapolis in late February. In a sermon to nearly 400 Presbyterians gathered to consider the future of the mainline Church, he asserted that despite declining membership and internecine conflicts, the Church is not dying. Rather, "God has sent it into exile." "We have spent the bulk of our time in the last 30 years," he said, "playing court politics, engaged in protracted legislative battles, and not in caring for the most vulnerable ones in our midst."

For more on the Senior Pastor's perspective on the Church in exile, turn to page 2. For more on the future of FAPC, come to the Congregational Meeting.

### DETAILS

The Congregational Meeting will immediately follow the 11 am worship service on Sunday, May 1. Members and friends will receive the 2010 Annual Report, hear the perspectives of the senior pastor, clerk of session and other church leaders, and vote on a slate of officers for the 2011–12 program year.



The following article is adapted from "Sent Into Exile," a sermon by Scott Black Johnston, delivered on Feb. 28 at the Next Conference, hosted by Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis. His text was Jeremiah 29:1-9.

## SENT INTO EXILE

When the Babylonian army swept down on Jerusalem 600 years before Christ, when invading soldiers carted men, women and children away, including the most influential prophets and priests, and the royal court itself (judges, administrators, King Jeconiah and even the Queen Mum), things got pretty grim on the streets of Jerusalem.

In response to this communal heartbreak, the prophet Jeremiah offered the people an explanation. Standing on a street corner, Jeremiah declared: "God did it."

Again and again in the book of Jeremiah, the prophet calls the people of Judah to look out for the widow, the orphan and the alien in their midst. He was airing one of the most consistent themes in the Bible: the people with land and access to its production are to look out for people without land and without access to its harvest. According to Jeremiah, the people of Judah were not following this divine command; and so, God sent them into exile.

Was the court in Jerusalem made up of cold-hearted jerks who couldn't give a rip for poor people? I doubt it. I bet they had hearts that were as theoretically open to the plight of the downtrodden as our hearts are. It's just that they were busy. The leaders in Judah weren't taking care of the most vulnerable souls in their midst, because they were immersed... in politics.

Today, some within our denomination contend that our Church is deathly ill. Others, like the theologian Stanley Hauerwas, claim, "God is killing Protestantism, and perhaps the Church in America, and we deserve it."

I believe that Jeremiah pushes us to a different conclusion. God is not killing North American Protestantism; *God has sent it into exile.* Why? Because we have spent the bulk of our time in the last 30 years playing court politics, engaged in protracted legislative battles, and not in caring for the most vulnerable ones in our midst.

But wait, we may want to argue, we engaged in politics for good reasons! Right or left of center, we Protestants engaged in politics in our denominations, and in our country, to bring about God's kingdom. But along the way we forgot something. We forgot that power corrupts.

We say that the Church provides an alternative to a world with bankrupt morals, in thrall to commercialism, and bound up in out-of-control rhetoric and violent cycles of extremism. And then we go to General Assembly, and what do we do? We take the most controversial subjects, line people up to debate, have lobbyists running around behind the scenes, and we put them to a vote. Then we go back and worship at churches that are



The Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston

increasingly red congregations or blue congregations, religious manifestations of political parties, and we wonder "Why?"

James Davison Hunter, a sociologist at the University of Virginia, argues that over the last 40 years American Protestants have been co-opted by the very political processes we were hoping to influence. We forgot that the third temptation Satan offered Jesus in the desert was to exercise political authority. Is it any wonder that our Lord has chosen this moment to shake us up?

So—what happens in exile?

**In exile, you get perspective.** In 1917, archeologists in Iraq discovered hundreds of tablets from the time of the Babylonian exile. One tablet, now in a museum in Berlin, shows the rations allotted for King Jeconiah and his sons. Do you think heaven's point got made? I am guessing that in Babylon the king and his court no longer had trouble identifying with the poor or the alien in a foreign land. *In exile, you get perspective.*

**In exile, you become more open to your critics.** We tend to write off our critics, both within and beyond the walls of the Church. We should listen to them, because in their criticisms there is often truth. Right now some of our best critics are the Millennials, people ages 18-29, 85% of whom describe American Christians as "hypocritical." *In exile, you need to listen to your critics.*

**Finally, in exile we are called to ask, "What does my faith motivate me to do?"** Being exiled from the corrupting influence of politics might be the best thing that's ever happened to us. It will force us to think about ways *other than legislation* for being faithful.

According to Scripture, Jeremiah wrote a letter to the exiles in Babylon with a bit of advice from God. It was a sermon for people who no longer had the power and influence they once had. The letter said, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

Could it be that those same marching orders apply to us today?

## THE ARTISTS' WAY



By Katie Farber

Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church has a long history of supporting both the arts and the homeless, and beginning on May 15 those two paths converge with an exhibition of works by homeless and formerly homeless artists.

The Arts and Our Faith Committee will present a show of artwork from The Pathways Art and Writing Workshop, an initiative of the Pathways to Housing organization. FAPC is a longtime partner of Pathways to Housing, a nonprofit organization that has been around for 19 years providing non-traditional assistance to the homeless through a program called Housing First, which focuses on addressing homelessness among individuals with substance abuse and psychiatric problems.

The Pathways Art and Writing Workshop—led by artist, writer and filmmaker Rachael Romero—helps those who are a part of the program express themselves through art.

"The Pathways Art and Writing Workshop is a painters' studio, a writers' space, a melting pot of self-discovery and an exuberant sing-along," Romero says. "People make art, and in doing so, they find community and recover themselves."

The artists come from varied and remarkable backgrounds, notably Dr. Marc Bittetto, whose "skulls" series will be shown at FAPC. Bittetto, who has been blind since childhood, holds a Ph.D. in robotics.

Karen Johnson, a member of the Arts and Our Faith Committee and a former member of the Benevolence Committee, organized the exhibition. Pathways to Housing has received support from FAPC's benevolence grants, and several of the Pathways artists have taken part in our outreach events, including Monique Fagan Smith, whose work will be featured in the exhibition.

Twenty-one pieces by eight artists will be showcased in the Gallery through Aug. 7. Romero and several of the artists will attend an opening day reception on May 15 following the 11 am worship service. For more information on the Art and Writing Workshop, visit <http://artpathways.info>.

Katie Farber is a member of FAPC and a frequent contributor to The VOICE.



The Pathways to Housing Art Exhibition will feature 21 works by eight artists including Gary Peabody (tree with houses, top); Monique Fagan Smith (leaves, right); and Juan Nolasco (bird, left). "Art," says Nolasco, "helps us to find the divine in ourselves."



## MISSIONARY, TEACHER, WRITER



During a writing career that spans four decades, Katherine Paterson has received the National Book Award, the Newbery Medal, the Edgar Allan Poe Special Award, the Hans Christian Andersen Medal and numerous other honors. Her books include *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977), *The Great Gilly Hopkins* (1979) and *Rebels of the Heavenly Kingdom* (1983).

On Sunday, May 1, we will welcome distinguished author Katherine Paterson to Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. She will read excerpts from a selection of her award-winning novels. She will then engage in a conversation with the congregation.

By Jean Erish

A Presbyterian, teacher and missionary, as well as an author, Katherine Paterson has crossed many cultures and faiths. Little wonder that her books do the same.

Frequently Paterson's characters have suffered loss, ill-treatment and hardship, yet, in the end, they are able to overcome adversity. As she explains, "a Christian hope inspires me. Your books come out of who you are."

The daughter of missionaries, Paterson was born in China and spent several years there until the hostilities of the Second World War forced her family to return to the United States. Later, after finishing her graduate studies at the Presbyterian School of Christian Education, she decided to return to China as a missionary. "I was prompted to do mission work not only because I grew up in that kind of family, but because I cared about the people." Again, in 1957, China was closed to her, and a friend persuaded her to go to Japan instead.

She spent four years in Hokushima, on the island of Shikoku, going to language school and working for the pastors of the then-United Church of Christ (an umbrella designation for all churches, imposed by the government of Japan, later lifted).

"I preached, taught Sunday school, English Bible studies—did anything the pastors wanted me to do," she says. "It was wonderful. I grew to love the people and the country." In her

book, *The Master Puppeteer* (1976), Paterson writes about some of the places she came to know while living in Japan.

Of her missionary experience, she says, "I was more ministered to than ministering. I received more than I gave." Paterson believes that young people should have the opportunity to do mission outreach, to get to know people of other cultures and different ways of life. "It is a life-changing experience."

Paterson's first novel, *The Sign of the Chrysanthemum*, was published in 1976. Since then she has written more than 30 books and been the recipient of many prestigious literary awards, including the National Book Award, the Edgar Allan Poe Special Award, the Newbery Medal, the Hans Christian Andersen Medal, and the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. Her popular book, *The Bridge to Terabithia*, has twice been made into a film.

In 2010, Paterson was appointed the United States National Ambassador for Young People's Literature. She is currently serving as vice president of the National Children's Book and Literacy Alliance, a nonprofit organization that advocates for literacy, literature and libraries.

When asked which of her books are closest to her heart she replies, "I love every one of them!"

We look forward to welcoming Katherine Paterson on May 1. It will be a very special occasion.

Jean Erish is a longtime member of FAPC and a frequent contributor to The VOICE.

### DETAILS

The Adult Education event, "A Conversation with Katherine Paterson," will begin at 12:30 pm on Sunday, May 1, in Jones Auditorium.



## THE BOYS ARE BACK IN TOWN

### Jacob Have I Loved

*Jacob Have I Loved*, winner of the 1981 Newbery Medal, is a story of sibling rivalry. Its protagonist is Sara Louise Bradshaw, a teenager who comes of age on the Maryland shore in the 1940s. The book takes its name from St. Paul's reference to the rivalry between brothers Jacob and Esau in the Book of Genesis: "As it is written, 'Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.'" (Romans 9:13) An excerpt follows.



Hate. That was the forbidden word. I hated my sister. I, who belonged to a religion which taught that simply to be angry with another made one liable to the judgment of God and that to hate was the equivalent of murder.

...

Sometimes I would rage at God, at his monstrous almighty injustice. But my raging always turned to remorse. My wickedness was unforgivable, yet I begged the Lord to have mercy on me, a sinner. Hadn't God forgiven David who had not only committed murder, but adultery as well? And then I would remember that David was one of God's pets. God always found a way to let his pets get by with murder. How about Moses? How about Paul, holding the coats while Stephen was stoned?

I would search the Scriptures, but not for enlightenment or instruction. I was looking for some tiny shred of evidence that I was not to be eternally damned for hating my sister. Repent and be saved! But as fast as I would repent, resolving never again to hate, some demon would slip into my soul, tug at the corner, and whisper, "See the look on your mother's face as she listens to Caroline practice? Has she ever looked at you that way?" And I would know she hadn't.



Nate Mahrer and John Chadwell

After a long absence, a Men's Fellowship Group has returned to Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church.

Following on a couple of informal get-togethers (including beer and basketball during the Final Four in March), the group plans a kickoff event on May 3 with a special guest—senior pastor Scott Black Johnston.

"We want to have a discussion with Scott about what it means to be a man of faith in New York City," says John Chadwell, who hatched the idea of a new men's group with Nate Mahrer during the officers' retreat last June. "How do you express your faith in a way that is true to yourself, but also is welcoming and engaging to others?"

Those questions drew a dozen men to an initial planning meeting in February, where they debated the mission of their new group and tossed around suggestions for future activities. From those discussions, a vision began to take shape.

"Fellowship is the most important component of this group, but there will be a service component also," Chadwell says. "The third aspect is faith formation. We believe that, through fellowship with one another, we will begin to express our faith *through* each other, and become more comfortable talking with others about that."

The men also look to be a connector with other fellowship groups and ministries at FAPC, a new channel for communicating, collaborating and enlisting volunteers. Chadwell says that, despite the name, the Men's Fellowship Group welcomes everyone to the May 3 conversation with the senior pastor and to future events as well. Plans are in the works for a big event in the fall—stay tuned.

### DETAILS

The kickoff event for the Men's Fellowship Group, featuring a conversation with Scott Black Johnston, will begin at 6:30 pm on Tuesday, May 3, in Jones Auditorium. Attendees are encouraged to come early for the Congregational Supper starting at 5:30 pm in Bonnell Hall.

# EGYPTIAN FAIR TRADE



In May, the much-anticipated sale of Egyptian handmade crafts at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church will go on as planned. But just a few months ago, Suzan and Nimet Habachy were not so sure.

Popular uprisings against the Mubarak government had sparked episodes of violence throughout Egypt, disrupting manufacturing and trade. "With all the unrest, we didn't know if our suppliers would be able to produce the merchandise we needed and to send it to us in time," Suzan says. In late February, she sent an email to inquire.

For more than 20 years, the Egyptian-born Habachy sisters have provided a market in New York City for indigent artisans from their native country. In 2010, Suzane led a group of 12 women from FAPC on a mission trip to Egypt, where they met the Zabbaleen, desperately poor Coptic Christians who make a subsistence living as the garbage pickers of Cairo.

But the Zabbaleen are not without hope. With help from the Association for the Protection of the Environment (APE), a Cairo-based, non-governmental organization, Zabbaleen women and girls have developed the skills to transform remnants from Egyptian textile mills into rugs, quilts and bags, and to recycle discarded paper into notecards and stationery. They sell their products to finance the construction of schools and houses, creating new promise for their children's future.

Because the Zabbaleen artisans rely heavily on money from abroad, the women on the mission trip were determined that the Habachy sisters' next sale would be hosted at the church. But politics intervened, prompting Suzan's anxious email to Cairo.

Meanwhile, APE staff had worries of their own. Weeks of demonstrations and violence had indeed taken a toll on the Zabbaleen, who had been forced to cut back on production. As local markets dwindled, the sales outlook darkened. APE promised the Zabbaleen artisans to do all it could to secure overseas markets, and advised the women to pray. Then Suzan's email arrived.

"Dear Suzy," came the immediate response. "Your email came to us as a miracle from God. We cannot thank you enough. Please tell all the ladies of Fifth Avenue."

## DETAILS

The Egyptian Craft Sale, benefiting the women and girls of the Moqattam community in Cairo, will be held Tuesday, May 3 through Thursday, May 5 in the Christian Education Center. The sale will be open from 11 am to 8 pm each day. For more information about the Habachy family and their response to the recent revolution in Egypt, see the March 2011 issue of The VOICE.



Habachy Hall in the Moqattam area of Cairo was named in honor of Suzan Habachy (above) and her sister Nimet, recognizing their support of the Zabbaleen artisans.



An array of handcrafted merchandise—produced entirely from waste paper and textile remnants—will be on sale at FAPC May 3-5. Proceeds from the sale will help provide for education and housing for the Zabbaleen, an impoverished community of Coptic Christians in Cairo. The sale is the fulfillment of a vision for the women who took part in FAPC's mission trip to Egypt in 2010 (far right).



## Buckle Up, Angels

As the scaffolding on West 55th Street will soon attest, the stained glass window in the balcony of Kirkland Chapel is about to be repaired. The 85-year-old window—depicting Jesus surrounded by seven archangels—has suffered breaks, cracks and buckling in its lower panes (*The VOICE*, December 2010). Repairs will begin soon after Easter. A sidewalk bridge will be in place in front of the 55th Street entrance as the repairs proceed.



## Finding Our First Fellow

A five-member committee led by Jerry Claiborne (left) will soon begin reviewing applications and interviewing candidates for FAPC's first pastoral resident. As reported in the April 2011 issue of *The VOICE*, FAPC is now part of the Lilly Fellows Program, a residency program for new ministers created and funded by the Lilly Endowment. Joining Claiborne on the selection committee are Mary Rose Main, chair of the Personnel Committee; and FAPC members Paige Penze, Devin Robinson and Chad Stubbs. Our first Lilly Fellow is expected to be on board by July 1. Committee members will meet regularly with the new minister to provide support and counsel throughout the two years of the residency.



## The Heavens and the Earth

Last fall, associate pastor Randy Weber's Celtic Spirituality class explored days one, two and three of the creation narrative (*The VOICE*, October 2010). Now it's time for the rest of the story. Beginning Sunday, May 1, Rev. Weber's four-week Adult Education course will consider days four through seven—all through the lens of the Celtic spiritual tradition. The class meets weekly (through May 22) at 9:30 am in the Boardroom. The early timeslot is intentional, Rev. Weber says: "It is a wonderful way to get centered and ready for worship at 11 am."



## Shelter Success Story

Originally intended to operate through March, the temporary shelter on West 108th Street has proved such a success that its doors will remain open until May 1. The shelter—a collaborative effort by FAPC, Church of the Ascension and the West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing (WSFSSH)—was created to provide a winter refuge for eight to 12 of the homeless men who had been sleeping on the FAPC steps (*The VOICE*, March 2011). "Our guests are receiving safe lodging, warm meals and regular case management, and are working toward housing," says the Rev. Kate Dunn, who leads FAPC's pastoral care and outreach ministries. "Our hope is that by the time the project ends, all of the guests will be placed in transitional or permanent housing."



## Upcoming Events

# MAY JUN

### MAY

- 1 **Celtic Spirituality: The 7 Days of Creation.** The Rev. Randy Weber returns with a series of Adult Education classes focused on the fourth through seventh days of creation from the Book of Genesis. This four-part course continues every Sunday through May 22. 9:30 am, Boardroom.  
**Congregational Meeting.** The annual meeting, including a 2010 financial review, reports of the governing boards and election of officers for the 2011–12 program year. Immediately following the 11 am worship service, Sanctuary.  
**A Conversation with Katherine Paterson.** The award-winning novelist (*Bridge to Terabithia*, *Jacob Have I Loved*) headlines this Adult Education event. Paterson will read selected passages from her young-adult novels and engage in a conversation with the audience, moderated by senior pastor Scott Black Johnston. 12:30 pm, Jones Auditorium.
- 2 **Mom's Bible Study.** Sponsored by Family Ministries, this study group meets at 9:30 am on the first Monday of the month. For information, contact Mollie Duggal ([mollieduggal@yahoo.com](mailto:mollieduggal@yahoo.com)).
- 3-5 **Egyptian Craft Sale.** Sponsored by the 12 women of FAPC who participated in the mission trip to Egypt in 2010, this sale of handmade crafts benefits indigent artisans in Cairo. 11 am – 8 pm, Christian Education Center.
- 6-8 **NEXT Spring Retreat.** FAPC's young adults return to the Jersey Shore for sunshine, recreation and exploring the question, "What's the least I can believe and still be considered a Christian?" For information, contact Charlene Han Powell ([cpowell@fapc.org](mailto:cpowell@fapc.org)).
- 14 **Parents Night Out.** 3:30 pm, Christian Education Center.
- 15 **Demystifying Advance Directives.** FAPC's social worker, Emily Dunlap, leads this Adult Education workshop on health care proxies, wills, living wills and powers of attorney—and why we all need them. 9:30 am, Corning Logan Room.  
**Pathways to Housing Art Exhibition.** A showcase of 21 works by eight artists who have made, or are making, the transition from homelessness to housing. Sponsored by the Arts and Our Faith Committee. The Gallery, through Aug. 7.  
**Congregational Reception.** A special event to honor individuals who have been members of FAPC for more than 40 years. 12:30 pm, Bonnell Hall.

- 17 **Employment Advisory.** 6:30 pm, Corning Logan Room.
- 22 **Bowery Mission.** Worship service and dinner led by FAPC volunteers. 5:45 pm, 227 Bowery, between Prince and Rivington Streets.
- 30 **Memorial Day holiday.** Building closed.

### JUNE

- 3-5 **Family Ministries Camp.** A weekend of fellowship and fun at Holmes Presbyterian Camp in Dutchess County for families who want to deepen their faith, enjoy God's creation and foster community. Families with children (infants to teens) are encouraged to attend. For information, contact Charlene Han Powell ([cpowell@fapc.org](mailto:cpowell@fapc.org)).
- 10-11 **FAPC Officers Retreat.** Stony Point Conference Center, Rockland County, NY.



Members of the FAPC Youth Group show off the labyrinth they created on a recent hike through Central Park. FAPC members John and Treva Chadwell invited members of the Youth Group to join their family outings two years ago; hiking through the parks and along the avenues of New York City has become a staple of the church's youth program since then. Hikers meet up at the 55th Street entrance on the third Sunday of the month, right after the 11 am worship service. After a quick lunch, the group hits the streets for a few hours of discovery. The next hike—on Sunday, May 15—will explore the diversity of Tenth Street, from east to west.

Cover Art: Balcony window (detail), The Kirkland Chapel.

