

# CALVIN COMMENTARY



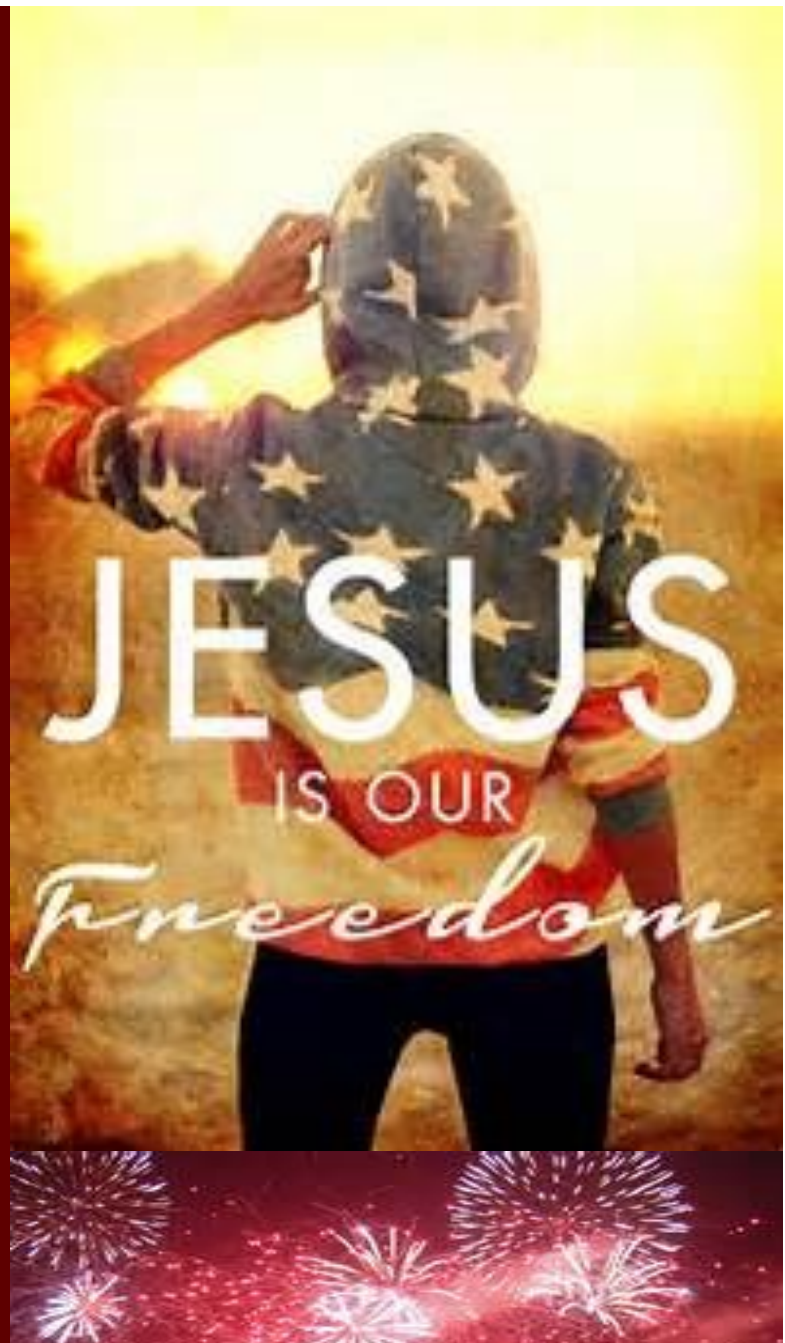
JOHN CALVIN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

JULY 2016

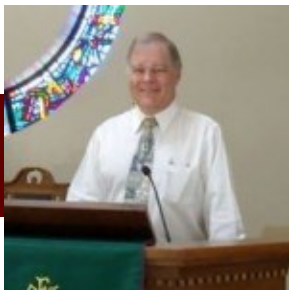
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## In This Issue

- THE STUDY WINDOW
- MUSIC CORNER
- CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
- COMMITTEE NEWS
- JCPC HISTORY
- GENERAL ASSEMBLY NEWS
- BIRTHDAYS/EVENTS



**From**



**The Study Window**

Explanations for church growth and decline abound. Some sociologists highlight the significance of birth rates, demographic changes and other macro trends like the rise of the *nones* (those who are not affiliated with any church or religion). Others remind us of the importance of pastoral leadership. While church leaders need to pay attention to all these theories, none of them account for the vital role that congregational culture plays in growth and decline.

Ken Evers-Hood has done some studies on how much and in what ways congregational culture affects membership and attendance. Using the “public goods game,” he looked at the level of cooperation in church leadership bodies as a predictor of cooperation in congregations and how that is related to growth and decline.

The public goods game functions like a church potluck. Church potlucks work best when everybody agrees to bring a dish and sticks around to help clean up. But the reality is that some people defect: they show up empty-handed or leave without pitching in. When most people cooperate by sharing food and cleaning up, potlucks go well. When enough people defect, however, folk begin to grumble. Game theorists believe that the public goods game can help measure a community’s level of cooperativeness, which correlates with a group’s ability to thrive.

In larger-membership congregations (over 100), growth correlated strongly with cooperation, reward and the avoidance of punishment. This suggests that leaders in larger-membership congregations would do well to minimize punishment and work to find creative ways to reward members of the community. In larger-membership congregations, groups with the lowest punishment percentages, around 10 percent, experienced the most growth. One might surmise that if a low punishment percentage was effective, one approaching 0 percent would be even better. But this doesn’t seem to be the case.

In smaller-membership congregations, the groups experiencing the most growth had about a 10 percent rate of punishment, similar to that of the flourishing larger congregations. But smaller congregations with the worst growth -- those experiencing steep decline -- hardly punished at all. Anything less than a 10 percent punishment rate correlated with significant numerical decline.

What is clear from this study is that leaders should reflect consciously on the ways they reward and punish the people around them. Church leaders’ rewarding behavior is usually pretty obvious -- public thank-yous, for instance. But we may not realize the subtle, unhealthy ways we punish one another -- being slow to respond to emails or voice mails, using “distancing” body language in meetings, sitting apart from people we wish to discourage. Leaders of larger congregations should exercise the greatest possible caution regarding punitive behavior, which can unravel emergent cooperation. Positive, rewarding behavior marks growing larger-membership congregations.

In smaller-membership congregations, positive, rewarding behavior is just as important as it is in their larger counterparts. But in these smaller contexts, leaders of growing congregations must also be willing to impose healthy discipline on members who are not contributing to the common good, speaking the truth in love when it may be easier, in close quarters, to keep one’s thoughts to oneself.

As important as social trends and pastoral leadership are, game theory underscores that church culture is every bit as important. The church already confesses the priesthood of all believers. The public goods game gives us a way of seeing this scriptural wisdom in action -- that all members of the community contribute to an atmosphere of cooperation.

This leaves us with a question of newfound significance: What are we going to bring to the next church potluck?

**In Christ’s Service  
Rev. Harry Brown**

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**By: William R. Memmott**

## **FROM THE MUSIC CORNER**

Sunday, June 26th, marks the end of the Choir Season. Soloists and the Men's Chorus will sing the five Sundays in August. We thank both the choir and in-house orchestra for outstanding music this past year. Let's toot our horn a bit. In the fall, the choir performed Memmott's "For Such a Time As This" (his oratorio on the Life of Esther -- with orchestra at UNO -- in fulfillment of his Masters Thesis in Composition). At Christmas, the choir sang "A New Generation Sings Christmas" with orchestra, and at Easter they sang the oratorio "Christus" by Felix Mendelssohn. Memmott FINALLY got his Masters Degree. Two of our pillars joined the choir in heaven (they shall be sorely missed): Terry Levet and Linda Hubchen-Regan. Long standing Accompanist Jan Cox retired with Julie Etland replacing her.

After a well-deserved holiday in July, the choir will return in August to sing the remainder of their Season of Hymn Anthems and lead the Old Fashioned Hymn Sing on Sunday, August 28th. Wednesday rehearsals resume on September 7th to prepare for the October Gathering of Choirs, the 50th Anniversary Celebration on October 9th and the Christmas Concert in December (Handel's Christmas section from Messiah with orchestra).

Come on singers and instrumentalists! It's time to join our ranks. There's always a Newcomers Folder in the Choir Room.

Over my many years serving as Organist and Choir Master (since I was 12), I've heard many accolades for the work we do. For this I am truly thankful. But there have always been a few naysayers. I seldom hear them firsthand. My response is always the same: "Is there any truth to their complaints?" Then, make adjustments and file them in the appropriate basket.

So, onward and upward -- fight the good fight and sing your heart out!

***Soli Deo Gloria***

# WHAT'S HAPPENING IN CHRISTIAN-ED?

## Mo-Ranch Summer Camp 2016!

We at John Calvin Presbyterian Church are proud to see three members of our youth, Portia Robinson, Maggie Walker and Sabastian Zea, attending Mo-Ranch's Summer Camp this year, along with children from other Presbyterian churches. Mo-Ranch, established in 1977, is a premier co-ed camp nestled in the beauty of God's nature on almost 500 acres of Texas Hill Country. The camp is full of adventure, fun, and a place where a child will grow in character, faith and confidence through meaningful relationships in a Christian setting.





# Vacation Bible School



That's what the children will learn during the last week of July in Vacation Bible School! And here are the wonderful church members who will guide them: *Sophia Hill, Cynthia Palmisano, Carolyn Calvin, Barbara McHan, Jananne Lankard, Lorraine Hicks, Julie Etland, Judy Tracey, Wayne Tracey, Debbie Russo, Julie Hebert, Maureen Nelson, Barbara Egan, Kit Melchert, Barbara Taylor, and Ginny Thomas.*



Registration is still open. Forms are online and in the office (ages 3 – grade 3). We always welcome new volunteers (July 25-29, 9:00 AM – noon). Contact Linda Lowry or the church office.

# PROGRAM OF HOPE REPORT



## Stair Reading Program Graduation

John Calvin Presbyterian Church has completed another successful year as a host for the STAIR reading program. Every Monday and Wednesday afternoon, second and third graders from Alice Birney Elementary School flocked to the Fellowship Hall to read, read, and read some more! Richard Britson, Sandy Cranfill, Sue Crawford, Linda Lowry, Lenny Nelson, and Beverly Ross represented the church as tutors this year. Other tutors were Susan Johanson, Kweilyn Murphy, Francis DiFranco, Jean Meyer, Josie Daspit, John Galbraith, Connie McMullen, and Betty Spurlock.

On May 11<sup>th</sup>, eight children graduated from John Calvin's STAIR program. Led by Melinda Early, the program director, each child recited a funny poem for their families in attendance. Melinda talked a little about each child and gave them a Certificate for completing the year. Then tutors, families, and students visited and had refreshments. The gratitude expressed by the children and their families was overwhelming! Just one more way John Calvin is ministering to our community!

STAIR<sup>®</sup>  
@  
JCPC



# 50 years ago...

## .... did you know?

Fifty years ago, families starting joining a new Presbyterian church being formed in Metairie, called John Calvin. As today, these young families were interested in programs to benefit their young children.

What could be better than to start a Playschool for these children and those in the growing local community?

The first building built for the new church included 4 classrooms. Soon thereafter, in the fall of 1970, with borrowed books and toys, the John Calvin Playschool was started, utilizing these classrooms. The philosophy of this new school then, and still today is: "Play as an integral part of childhood learning" – that through play, children develop social skill, creativity, self-confidence, positive attitude toward school, self-discipline, and curiosity about the world around them.

The first classes met two mornings a week for 2 through 4 year olds, and the response was so great that these quickly grew to five mornings a week for 2 through 5 year olds. In 1973, with the growing Playschool and competing pressures from other groups needing space, a Christian Education Building was built adding 4 more classrooms. Through the years the Playschool grew to include morning and afternoon classes and Kindergarten classes (there was no kindergarten in the local schools at the time). Today, however, the schedule has since settled down to 2 or 3 day classes for 1 year olds, 2, 3, or 5 day classes for 2 year olds, 3 and 5 day classes for 3 year olds, and pre-Kindergarten, pre-Kindergarten plus, and transitional Kindergarten for 4 year olds, all in the morning. Today's children enjoy music and body movement, bible time, and art classes! Of course, Summer Camp has been popular for years!

John Calvin Playschool has been significant institution in the community since it's beginning, growing into a premier program drawing children from 4 parishes and nearly always filled to capacity. There are stories about the early days when parents would arrive at midnight before registration day to secure their children's enrollment. The church began putting out folding chairs for their comfort, and some even brought their RV's for greater comfort while waiting!

Through it all, the Playschool has been and continues to be a very special and important mission of John Calvin Presbyterian Church. It is a testament to its positive influence that many who went through its doors as toddlers have brought their own children and grandchildren back to be enrolled. Many families have found a church home at John Calvin due to their children's experiences or even their own experiences back when they were small. Have you noticed that when John Calvin is mentioned anywhere in the area people know about the Playschool and it's excellent reputation. Certainly a mission we can be proud of!

But what about the fire and how did we survive? And what happened during Katrina? Stay tuned for next month's installment on the history of John Calvin Presbyterian Church as we celebrate 50 years serving Christ and this community.



**J. HERBERT NELSON**
**THIRD-GENERATION PRESBYTERIAN PASTOR  
IS ELECTED AS STATED CLERK OF THE PC(USA)  
BY THE COMMISSIONERS TO THE  
222ND GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2016**
**NELSON IS THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN TO LEAD THE NATION'S LARGEST REFORMED BODY**
**CALIFORNIA PASTOR INSTRUCTS WORSHIPERS:  
"BE RECONCILED TO GOD. NOW."**
**By Eva Stimson**

PORTLAND – Reconciliation has vertical and horizontal dimensions—and “the vertical orients the horizontal,” Jerry Andrews, pastor of [First Presbyterian Church in San Diego](#), told Presbyterians gathered for worship on Friday, the final full day of the [222nd General Assembly \(2016\)](#).

Preaching on 2 Corinthians 5:16–6:2, Andrews said the Apostle Paul calls us to “be reconciled to God.”

“The command is not to get along with each other – though that’s really good advice,” he said. “The command is to be made right with God.”

Layering his sermon with insights from John Calvin and St. Augustine as well as the Apostle Paul, Andrews systematically unpacked the text he called “the theological core” of 2 Corinthians. He noted that Calvin considered that text’s teaching about reconciliation “the most profound in all of Paul.”

The text also talks about “a new creation of all things” by God through Christ, Andrews said. The old way of thinking, he said, would have stressed the divisions between Paul, the “old Jew,” and the new converts in Corinth, “a bunch of barely baptized barbarians.” The new message, he said, is that such divisions in the church and the world can only be healed by God. “God reconciles, not the church. Not ever,” he said. “We have been entrusted with the message of reconciliation.”



And Jesus is the mediator of our reconciliation, he continued. Unlike a moderator, an impartial person who brings together two parties in a dispute but is not connected to either party, a mediator is “one who *is in his person* both parties.”

The new creation is not primarily about individual salvation, he said: “Salvation is very personal, but never private. The gospel is profoundly intimate but also public.”

Paul says that now is the “acceptable time” for reconciliation with God, Andrews pointed out. He quoted the Nike slogan: “Just do it!” And Shakespeare: “There is a tide in the affairs of men.” And Elvis: “It’s now or never.”

Andrews, who calls himself an evangelical, said some evangelicals stress the urgency of salvation by warning, “Jesus may come back before lunch.” But the ultimate message, he said, is this: “Be reconciled to God. Now.”

Reinforcing that message, worshipers sang the gospel favorite “Just As I Am” as a call to confession, pausing after each stanza for silent reflection.

Then Andrews and Jenny Warner, associate pastor of [First Presbyterian Church in Bend, Oregon](#), called worshipers to the communion table with these words:

“You need not be wise, you need not be perfect, you need not be decent or orderly, to join the feast.”





## JULY BIRTHDAYS

Palermo, Andrew 07/02

Mundell, Sandy 07/08

Wade, Mike 07/12

Corcoran, Kate 07/13

Bagwell, Jan 07/17

Morrell, Mel 07/19

Garland, Emily 07/21

Laporte, Langley 07/22

Kron, Kelly 07/23

Fernandez, Amy M. 07/25

Cardinale, Amy 07/29

Hebert, Christian 07/29

Ashmore, Richard 07/07

Rich, Madeline 07/09

Nelson, Erica 07/13

Corcoran, Layne 07/13

Ashurst, Dian 07/18

Bush, Joshua 07/19

Stropolo, Wyatt 07/21

Hill, Sofia 07/22

Prince, Ray 07/25

Robinson, Portia 07/28

Malsbary, Robert 07/29

Ferguson, Jeff 07/31

# **John Calvin Presbyterian Church**



*“Freed by the Fire, Renewed by the Flood, and Empowered by the Spirit”*