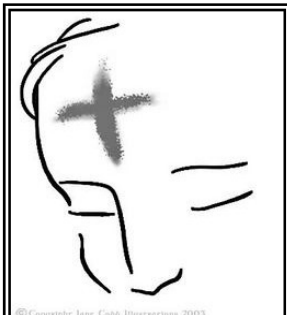




Presbyterian Link



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PASTOR'S CORNER

ASHES

Take it from a former Boy Scout, there is only so much one can do to rekindle a smoldered fire. Once the flames have died out, once the coals have begun to cool,

it takes more wind than most of us can exhale to convince a bunkered fire to be reborn. (Hence, the secret ploy of many a Scout campout in my youth: Linger as long as you can in your tent, hoping that *someone else* would brave the cold morning to re-start a dormant fire.)

Ashes make for little warmth.

The much-maligned doctrine of *total depravity*—a view of ourselves likely too distressing for the overly-therapeutic times in which we live—is a significant limb off of our Presbyterian trunk. Whatever good news we teach about the life-altering grace afforded the world in Jesus Christ, that news is always announced against the din of *bad news* about the state of our selves apart from God. John Calvin described our un-graced souls as dying embers in a long-dormant fire. Sure, there may be a speck of orange glow here or there amidst the ashen gray, but on our own there is not enough life in us to fire the imagination for God or thaw a frigid, inward heart.

I have always taken the “total” in *total depravity* to mean, not that by ourselves we creatures can do no good whatsoever, but that (perhaps even worse) no good we can ever do remains untouched, untainted, unstained by inflating self-interest or depleting deprecation. We are *totally* effected by our common depravity, which threatens whatever dormant image of God remains in us and taints even our best efforts. A bleak picture? Perhaps. Depressing? Yep. But it does serve to put the nightly news into perspective, not to mention those less-than-lovely moments in our own stories we’d rather not air to the world. Like quiescent ashes on a wintry morning, there is in us only a memory of a once-hot source of light and heat.

“... *I who am but dust and ashes.*” —
Genesis 18:27

The Old Testament mentions ashes in numerous narratives, and always they are a sign of mourning and mortality. With ashes Abraham remembers his lowly station in Genesis 18:27; with ashes Tamar grieves the sad state of affairs in 2 Samuel 13:19; with ashes Mordecai wails at the news of Jewish persecution in Esther 4:1; with ashes Job wallows in his dilapidated health in 2:8; the psalmist in his lament “mingles tears with his drink” and “eats ashes like bread” in 102:9. You get the picture. Ash—all that remains from a dead and therefore useless fire—proves to be, when smeared over your mortality, a

REMINDERS FOR FEBRUARY

- February 1 ~ Men’s lunch at Napoli’s
- February 6 ~ Ash Wednesday Service at 7 pm
- February 10 ~ Koinonia lunch following Worship
- February 17 ~ Stated Session Meeting at 6 pm

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PASTOR'S CORNER

poignant symbol for life in earnest need of grace, our lives in dire need of God.

Celebrating God's great love in our lives without coming clean about our grim need for it is like ingesting a bunch of medicine before you even know what ails you. It's apt to be a meaningless act, and maybe even dangerous—the precious, potent grace of God can become a cheap lozenge of sentimentality. No, our own stark mortality is precisely the cradle that holds the gospel. Lose sight of the former and we've no vision for the latter.

As I introspectively spelunk the depths of my own depravity, in honest prayers of confession both public and private, I am unwittingly scoping out the very real estate where the Holy Spirit sets up shop and erects the gospel. Says Calvin, "Every person, on coming to the knowledge of himself, is not only urged to seek God, but is also led as by the hand to find him." Ashes, therefore, not only mark our transience but also our turn toward hope. There is one who can fan the flames of light and life within us, bringing newness and grace with every breath. The prophet imagines just such an act, a gracious exchange: God giving his people "a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness,

the planting of the Lord, to display his glory." (Isaiah 61:3)

This makes sense of why Christians for centuries have marked the 40-day turn toward Easter day with a cross of ash on their foreheads. "I am but dust and ashes," we say to Christ. "I take up the cross of my own mortality and walk toward the day of your resurrection, wanting—needing!—to exchange my death for your life. And as I walk this way, transform me from within. I know oh-so-well the depths of my earnest need; pour into those deep caverns your astonishing new life."

By ourselves we are banked fires; with Christ alive in us, we are simmering with life.

Wednesday, February 6, is Ash Wednesday, the traditional entrance into the 40 day Lenten season leading up to Easter Day. I invite you to join me that evening, 7:00 pm, for an Ash Wednesday service in our sanctuary. It will be a service of worship both solemn and joyous: a solemn reminder of our perpetual need for grace; a joyous celebration that in fact God has given it so freely in Jesus Christ. I hope you'll join us.



A DOZEN PSALMS EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW: LATEST SERIES OF SUNDAY SCHOOL SESSIONS STARTING JAN. 27

"Come," my heart says,
"seek his face!" Your face, LORD,
do I seek.

Psalm 27:8

Many are often caught off guard by the gritty honesty and unfettered joy of the Psalms—that inspired collection of 150 prayers that inhabits the middle of your Bible. Assuming that the Bible is mostly a book for the imparting of beliefs, it does not often occur to people that the Bible also teaches us *how* to believe, i.e. *how to live into this life with God expressed primarily in a language of prayer*. We tend to think of the Bible as being above us, looking down upon us from a superior positions. Perhaps, but in the Psalter one senses that the Bible is also beside us, sharing with us what it knows. In his 12th century hymn *O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*, often sung by us during Lent, Bernard of Clairvaux asks the crucified Christ:

What language shall I borrow, to thank Thee, dearest friend, for this Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end?

It as if the Bible responds to Bernard, and to us: "Here ... borrow these words. Say it like this. Pray in this way." And then it promptly hands us the Psalms—150 assorted prayers both personal and public, individual and communal, exuberant and sad, faithful and faithless. One learns as a child how to speak by listening to others; one learns as a Christians how to pray by listening to the Psalms.

Pastor Ralph invites you join in on a several-week journey through a dozen psalms that everyone should know, a dozen prayers that we can access with some regularity so as to offer the fullness of our lives—joys *and* sorrows—to the living God who makes and mends all things.

Everyone is welcome, young or old. Ours is a church wherein intergenerational relationships abound, and where terms like "adult" are applied very loosely—especially on the younger end. Bring your kids, bring your youth, bring whomever. There are no hard and fast distinctions among us. We'll listen and learn together. If you have never experienced the warmth and wisdom of our Sunday morning 9:00 AM crowd, then you're missing out on one of the best parts of this church's common life. Come join us. (And perhaps we'll get lucky and someone reading this e-mail will bring muffins to share. *You know who you are!*)



MISSION NEWS

FROM MINISTRY BEYOND THE CONGREGATION

The Ministry Beyond the Congregation Committee would like to thank all APC members who donated their time and the food for the Wednesday Second Helping Lunch.

Upcoming Ministry Opportunities

February ~ DAWN donation month

March ~ One Great Hour of Sharing special offering will be collected on Easter Sunday and once again this year will be matched by the ACT for Missions Fund.

PRESBYTERIAN DISASTER ASSISTANCE SEEKS LONG-TERM VOLUNTEERS TO SUPPORT HURRICANE KATRINA AND RITA RECOVERY WORK

Volunteer teams from across the nation continue to travel to Mississippi and Louisiana to put in hours of work reconstructing the homes laid waste by the two major hurricanes of 2005. During mission trips that last from two to six days, these volunteers are housed at six villages that have been set up along the Gulf Coast by the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) and its long-term volunteers. Long-term volunteers come predominately from the ranks of the retired or from the ranks of students on break, new college graduates and other young people seeking to find a meaningful way to begin their work lives. But there are business owners who put the business on hold for a few months or workers whose employers provide leave time for service work, who have found this kind of service fulfilling. These individuals spend from two months to two years managing and/or maintaining the villages, directing the work of short-term volunteers and meeting with homeowners who need help in rebuilding their homes. Currently, PDA is seeking applicants to serve for two or more months as Village Managers and Work site Assignment Managers. Volunteers are provided a place to live and their meals along with a small per diem. Transportation costs to and from the Gulf Coast are reimbursed. To find out more about these opportunities go to this website www.pcusa.org/pda/help.htm and scroll down to *Make Work a Witness*

TAKE NOTE

FLOWER SIGN-UP

A new flower sign up calendar has been posted outside the church office. Please sign up to provide flowers for the sanctuary.

Koinonia Luncheon for February

The February Koinonia Luncheon will be a Crock-pot soup, Chili, and Cornbread meal immediately following worship service on February 10.

Sign up on the sheet outside the church office to bring soup, chili, cornbread or dessert.

Out-of-town *Link* Recipients

If you would like to receive your *Link* by email, please contact Carolyn Doss, at 434-369-5286, and provide her with your email address.

You can also read and download the *Link* as well as other church-related information at the Altavista Presbyterian Church website www.altapres.org

Upcoming Events

- A family movie night will be held on March 7, 2008. Watch the Sunday bulletins and March *Link* for details.
- A Sunday afternoon event at Smith Mountain Lake is planned for the summer.

Wanted

by Altavista Elementary School Students

Labels for Education and Box Tops 4 Education

Have you noticed the large Campbell Soup Can in the hallway outside the church office? The can is the collection point for labels/ UPC codes, caps, lids, and 10 cent box top coupons from food products which schools can exchange for free educational equipment.

Labels for Education

Clip the UPC Code from the following Campbell products:

Campbell soups, Soup at Hand, Chunky Soup, Healthy Request,
Supper Bakes, Select, Franco American, Pepperidge Farm, Swanson and Market Day.

Save the Caps from V8 beverages.

Save the lids from Prego Pasta Sauces.

For more information log onto www.campbellsoup.com and look under the Labels for Education Tab.

Box Tops 4 Education

Look for the **10 cent Box Tops Coupon** on hundreds of your favorite products. You can find Box Tops on brands such as Cheerios, Betty Crocker, Pillsbury, Ziploc, Kleenex, Scott, Hefty, and more.

For more information log on to www.boxtops4education.com.

All UPC codes, Caps, Lids, and 10 cent Coupons should be dropped in the large Campbell Soup can in the hall outside the Church office

FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

	December 2007	YTD
Pledges	\$13,621.70	\$137,165.44
Non-Pledges	\$660.00	\$4,024.00
Plate Offering	\$891.59	\$8,103.91
Total Expenses	\$13,030.00	\$143,163.74

Altavista Presbyterian Church Session Highlights

January 20, 2008

- Moderator Rob Gilliam called the meeting to order and opened the meeting with prayer. He then led the Session in a Responsive Reading from Psalm 8. Sang-il Lee provided a scripture meditation from the Book of James.
- The minutes of the December 16, 2007 Stated Session meeting were adopted as presented.
- Thank you notes from Carolyn Doss, Stephanie Moehlenkamp, and Connie Southerland were passed around so that Session members could read them individually.
- The non-financial sections of the 2007 Statistical Report. Approved a motion to adopt the 2007 Statistical Report except for the Financial sections.
- ACT for Mission fund expenditures for the month of December were:

Sheltered Workshop	\$ 650.00
Holiday meals for local families	\$ 225.00
Fellowship meal	\$ 193.00
Franny's House	\$2,200.00
Altavista Adult Day Care Center	<u>\$1,500.00</u>
	\$4,768.00
- Approved a motion to match the One Great Hour of Sharing special offering, which will be collected on Easter Sunday, with ACT for Mission funds, provided there are sufficient funds received from the ACT for Missions Trust to fund this activity.
- Approved a motion to match the Elpis Center summer camp tuition offering, which will be collected in May, with ACT for Mission funds, provided there are sufficient funds received from the ACT for Mission Trust to fund this activity.
- Approved a motion that the ACT for Missions Trust fund account be reviewed by the Ministry Support Committee quarterly and reported to the Session quarterly.
- The updated Directory will be completed by the end of February, 2008.
- Koinonia lunches will be held following Worship on February 10, April 13, and June 8, 2008.
- A family movie night will be held on March 7, 2008
- There will be a summer Sunday afternoon event at Smith Mountain Lake.
- Ralph Woods will be our organist for the month of February, 2008.
- Reviewed the December, 2007 financial report.
- Joys and concerns of the congregation were listed. Moderator Rob led prayers of intercession for those named, concluding with the Lord's Prayer.



FOR AND ABOUT KIDS

SUMMER CAMP



Are you getting tired of this cold weather? Are you ready for some summer fun? Consider attending a session or two at Camp Hat Creek. There are camping experiences for children from rising 1st graders through high school seniors. New this year is a weekend Family Camp (July 5th & 6th). This would be a great way to introduce your children to camping or to share your children's camp experiences as a family. If your registration is postmarked by April 30, you will receive an Early Bird Discount. There are also scholarships available. If you are interested, or just want more information, please see Carolyn at church, or Martha Moore. Summer will be here before you know it!

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

Even though we're really feeling the winter chill, the Worship and Discipleship Committee is thinking about Vacation Bible School. If you have ideas--themes, times, resources--please let us know. We also desperately need someone, or two, who would be willing to coordinate the program. We promise that you will get lots of help and the wonderful children that we have deserve a quality program. Now is the time start making plans--should we have our own program, should we join other churches in a community effort, should we try something completely different--perhaps a drama or musical production? The sky's the limit. Please think about it, and pray about it, and let us know if you are willing to make this commitment. We really need you and everyone's creative ideas! You can contact Martha Moore, Sang-il Lee, or Jenny Roark. We can't wait to hear from you!



CHILDREN'S CHURCH

Just a reminder that we still need assistants for Children's Church. There is a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board in the hallway. Please join us for at least one Sunday. It means so much to the children to get to know and work with the members of our church family. And beware, you may find it a blessing to you, too!

Important Addresses

Frances Harvey
Wilburn Gardens
3500 Meckins Drive #319
Fredericksburg, VA 22407

Cecil Wills
Odd Fellows Home of Virginia
600 Elmwood Drive
Lynchburg, VA 24503

Ruth Knight
12411 Gayton Road # 125
Richmond, VA 23238

MARK YOUR CALENDAR**FEBRUARY 2008**

February 1 Friday
11:45 Presbyterian Men's Lunch at Napoli's

February 27 Wednesday
9:30 am Prayer Fellowship
12:10 Lenten Luncheon

February 3 Sunday
Communion
2 Cents-A-Meal Offering
Canned Food Sunday

February 5 Tuesday
10 am Circle I meets in Parlor
7 pm Circle II meets in Parlor

February 6 Wednesday
9:30 am Prayer Fellowship
12:10 Lenten Luncheon
7 p.m. Ash Wednesday Service

February 10 Sunday
1st Sunday in Lent
Koinonia Luncheon immediately after Worship

February 13 Wednesday
9:30 am Prayer Fellowship
12:10 Lenten Luncheon

February 17 Sunday
2nd Sunday in Lent
6 pm Stated Session Meeting

February 20 Wednesday
9:30 am Prayer Fellowship
12:10 Lenten Luncheon

WOMEN'S LENTEN RETREAT

Camp & Conference Ministries of Presbytery of the Peaks is sponsoring a retreat just for women on Friday, February 22-Saturday, February 23, 2008 at the Retreat Center at Camp Hat Creek. The leader will be Judy L. Rogers from New Hope Presbyterian and the theme is "Come to the Well". Registration and fellowship time begins at 4:00 PM. Dinner is at 6:30 PM. The program begins at 7:00 PM. The Retreat ends after lunch on Saturday. The cost is \$60.00 per person (double or triple occupancy) and \$84.00 for a single room. Deadline for registration is Wednesday, February 13, 2008.

Please call Carolyn at church or Martha Moore, 821-1533 if you are interested in attending.





**ALTAVISTA PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**

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Website: www.altapres.org
Return service requested

PRESBYTERIAN LINK

FEBRUARY 2008

BIRTHDAYS



- 2 Al Smith
- 2 Faith Mari Tucker
- 2 Bill Ferguson
- 2 Darrell Shelton
- 5 Alex Eubank
- 18 Chandler McCrickard
- 18 Charlotte Mabry
- 19 Cheryl Doss
- 19 Emma McCrickard
- 21 Brian McCrickard
- 21 Doug Hecht
- 22 Dianne Emmett
- 25 Kyler Bogert
- 28 Kiernan deBernard

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*Previous Links can be found on the
website
www.altapres.org*

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