

Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!

UPDATE

UPDATE

I hope this message finds you well during this season of Advent. I want to take just a moment to update everyone on the congregational meeting that was held Sunday, December 10, 2017 and the stated session meeting which followed afterward.

First, the congregational meeting.

The nominating committee presented a slate for the class of 2020 deacons as follows: Carol Saddington (chair), Bonnie Lew, and Jimmy Bohn.

This new class of deacons will join Uly Cox and Roxann Vallejo who will continue to serve as deacons. The congregation voted in favor of this slate and gave thanks for the work of those who are rolling off of the board of deacons. What a joy it is to have this team of deacons serving the congregation!

The nominating committee also presented a recommendation to the congregation not to fill the two spots on Session which will be vacant when the class of 2017 rolls off. This comes after much discussion about the decrease in membership this year and the desire to have a more appropriately sized Session for the congregation. There will be some very intentional work around restructuring the new seven-member Session to ensure that all committees and areas of ministry are covered.

The other item of business was the quarterly financial report. Please speak with Mary Jo Mojica or Nikkie Shubitz if you would like more information about that report.

And, an update from the stated Session meeting:

Session met with Listening Team members Al Krummenacher and Johnnie Overton to hear their report. The listening team requested that this meeting be an executive Session meeting in order to give the Ruling Elders a chance to hear the information first before presenting the findings to the congregation. Once Session received the report, they decided to give themselves a week to pray over the report and discern how to move forward. No major decisions were made at this time and please know that the members of session agreed to keep the report confidential during this week of discernment. I can assure you that session aims to be as transparent as possible and will be communicating with y'all frequently over the coming weeks.

December 16, 2017



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There will be a **congregational meeting/town hall meeting on January 21st**, when Session will present their plan for moving forward, including the 2018 budget.

A few notes about the near future:

I have been approved by Presbytery to serve as the interim moderator of Session through May 2018. While it is my joy to serve in this role, it is important to know that this is a different role than serving as the interim pastor. I am happy to help as I can, but please know that my position is limited and I won't be able to tend to all of the tasks that a pastor would. The Session will be discerning how to best fill the pastoral vacancy in the coming year.

I will continue to preach in December and Al Krummenacher will be preaching for the first 3 weeks of January. Session and I will be working with the Presbytery to determine what the rest of Spring will look like for the schedule of preachers. We are working to ensure that inspiring and hope-filled messages will continue to be preached each Sunday!

If you have any questions or input as to what you'd like to see, feel free to reach out to me or any member of session.

Thank you, and I hope to see y'all at the Pot-Blessing (not luck!) on Sunday!

Rev. Becca Longino
Interim Moderator of Session
New Covenant Fellowship of Austin
rwlongino@gmail.com
303-588-5905

Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!

“Can These Bones Live?”

Ezekiel 37:1-14 (NRSV)

Rev. Rebecca Longino

New Covenant Fellowship of Austin

December 10th, 2017: 2nd Sunday of Advent

Ezekiel 37:1-14 (NRSV)

¹The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ²He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord God, you know.” ⁴Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. ⁵Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.” ⁷So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” ¹⁰I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. ¹¹Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ ¹²Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act,” says the Lord.

I remember walking into that little cinder block house

with a cloud of confusion floating over my head.

We were supposed to be looking at houses that were bigger than our current house,

we were supposed to be moving up in the world.

Our family of 4 had long outgrown that 900 square foot little house situated across the street from Walgreens and the Dollar Store.

My brother and I were well into our teenage years and in much need of some space.

This was years before the tiny house movement became trendy.

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Our tiny house was anything but trendy.

And so my parents decided it was finally time to look at other houses.

Our realtor took us to houses on the “other side of town”

The side where lawns were nicely manicured and the houses were kept up.

That side of town looked very different than the side I grew up in.

Each time we toured one of those houses, my heart swelled with hope that it would be the one for our family.

That we could finally have a house with more than one bathroom.

Perhaps even an office or den where I could do my homework in peace.

But with each house, my dad came up with reasons it wouldn't work.

The layout was all wrong, or he was sure the foundation needed to be leveled.

My mom, too, was finding all kinds of flaws with each house.

The kitchen was too small, or she didn't want to live on a busy street.

Me? As long as it had more than one bathroom and was still in the boundaries of my high school, I was happy.

So when we walked into that little cinderblock house, I nearly turned right back around.

It was in worse shape than our current house.

It was smaller than our current house.

And worst yet, it only had one bathroom, just like our current house.

I could see my mom reacting to this house too, but her face did not display confusion like mine did.

Her face displayed annoyance. Because she knew what was going on.

“Look at the size of this lot!” my dad remarked, as he surveyed the backyard, making calculations in his head.

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My mom, meanwhile, stood in the tiny living room, crossing her arms, bracing for the argument that was about to fill that tiny space.

“Yeah. I can see it,” my dad carried on as he wandered through the tiny bedrooms.

I still wasn’t getting it, but my mom clearly was.

Her look of frustration was obvious.

My dad wandered back into the living room and saw my mom’s look of irritation.

“Honey, I know what your thinking...” he said with a coaxing tone.

There it was.

My dad’s vision for this house was starting to emerge and he was inviting us to dream along with him.

But as my mom and I stood in that tiny house, all we could see was that.

A tiny house.

A step in the opposite direction than we’d hoped to go.

My mom and I saw no hope for this house we stood in.

For the people of Israel, they saw no hope for their situation.

Our text from Ezekiel speaks of a people who had been to hell and back.

Forced from their homes.

Forced into exile.

Torn apart by the Babylonian empire.

As they surveyed their situation, all they could see was dried up bones.

“Our hope is lost.” They said. “We are completely cut off.”

They were certain that God had given up on them.

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That their community was destined for destruction.

They saw no way out of this valley they found themselves in.

The exile had been going on for years.

This difficult way of life had become their way of life.

And as far as they were concerned, they would spend eternity in this awful place.

They had lost all hope of returning to the life they knew before.

They had lost all hope that God would restore them.

Their situation shouldn't be too surprising.

God had sent them many messengers.

Many prophets who told them to change their ways or God was going to punish them.

They'd had many chances.

And it seemed God was now following through with those prophecies.

But then, after years of silence, God begins to speak again.

The scripture for today tells us that God speaks to Ezekiel.

This guy who was himself exiled along with many others in his community.

This guy who was not particularly extraordinary.

This guy who would be the one to bring a word of hope to the people.

He has this vision of a valley filled with bones.

Dry bones.

Bones that are beyond life.

Bones on their way to returning to dust.

In this vision, God leads Ezekiel around on a tour of this valley of bones.

And God asks Ezekiel: “Can these bones live?”

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Well, Ezekiel, in his brilliant wisdom doesn't really answer the question.

Instead, he responds to this all-knowing God that God knows.

“You know the answer to that,” Ezekiel responds.

God doesn't offer a simple yes or no.

Instead of telling Ezekiel whether or not these bones can live, God tells Ezekiel to start preaching to them.

To tell them what is going to happen to them.

That God is going to breathe life back into them.

That their protective covering – their skin – is going to reform.

That these dry, brittle bones, would indeed live again.

And as Ezekiel is prophesying these words to those dry bones, the bones start to assemble themselves together.

It's as though they hear these words of hope and start doing the work of rebuilding their lives.

Ezekiel finishes saying what God told him to say, but he sees that these bones, now covered in skin, aren't quite there yet.

They still aren't breathing.

They've done the work of putting themselves back together, but there's one more step.

God tells Ezekiel to call upon the breath.

To tell that breath to enter those bones and make them live again.

Bring life back to those bones.

Ezekiel does as he's told, telling the breath to bring life.

Calling upon the Holy Spirit to restore those bones.

As the Holy Spirit brings that breath, those bones stand up and are transformed.

They are made like new.

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Now of course, this is all just a vision.

Ezekiel is having a dream-like vision in which God is speaking a powerful word of hope.

A word of hope that the people of Israel, like those dry bones, will be restored.

That they will find new life.

That the Holy Spirit will make all things new.

That even though it looks though death has had the final say,
Resurrection will come.

God will make all things new.

There will be times when we find ourselves in a valley of dry bones.

Times when all hope seems to be lost.

Times when can't see how any good can come from the situation.

For the student who couldn't keep those grades up this past semester and the dean put them on probation.

For the family that is being torn apart by painful circumstances.

For the patient admitted to the oncology ward, facing rounds of chemo over the holiday season.

These valleys of dry bones can cause us to lose all hope.

Some might even say that New Covenant Fellowship of Austin is currently in a valley of dry bones.

As we look around and see that friends who have been part of this community since nearly the beginning have left.

And their absence is felt deeply and painfully.

As we look at numbers on the finance report.

And wonder how a balanced budget can be possible.

We are left to ask: Can these bones live?

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December 10th, 2017: 2nd Sunday of Advent

It could be easy to think that this valley of dry bones will be the church's demise.

But only if we forget to look around at the ways the Holy Spirit is at work.

Only if we fail to see how God is breathing new life into this community of faith.

I can tell you a few ways I've been seeing God at work here.

God has prompted a family to join as new members just last month,
Bringing with them new life to this congregation.

Blessing this church with their presence and reminding us that we are called to a life of community and journeying with each other through difficult times.

God has nudged a few folks who feel called to serve the church in new or different ways,

Bringing with them their gifts of service to this congregation,

Reminding this church that we are each gifted with talents which we can use to bless the church and others.

And God has driven many conversations about the future of this church,

Bringing with them talk of hope and plans and dreams for this racially diverse body of Christ,

Encouraging this church to join God in this challenging call.

These are just a few of the ways that the Holy Spirit is still at work,

Breathing life into seemingly hopeless dry bones.

Casting a vision for what God is calling this community to be and do.

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When my mom and I stood in that tiny living room of that tiny cinderblock house,

We had no hope for that house.

We couldn't see how it would meet the needs of our family.

We were ready to walk out in search of a bigger and better house.

But then my dad walked in and declared “It has good bones!”

He went on about the foundation being solid, the walls in good shape for supporting more weight.

My dad could see beyond that tiny rectangle of cinderblocks,

As he envisioned adding out the back and the side

Popping up and putting a second floor on it.

My dad could see how knocking a few of the walls down would create new space,

That our family could create the house that would meet our needs.

That vision helped us turn that tiny, inadequate house into the home my parents still live in.

The home that the four of us built together.

The home that still feels like home every time I go back to Colorado.

As this church looks toward the future,

Let us trust that God has a vision for this church that we can't fully see yet.

Let us be open to the ways that the Holy Spirit is at work in this congregation.

Let us be open to the transformation God is planning for this community.

Trusting that God can indeed make these bones live.

Amen.

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2017 Matching Grant




**I CAN'T
KEEP CALM**
We Are
**SO CLOSE TO
OUR GOAL!!**

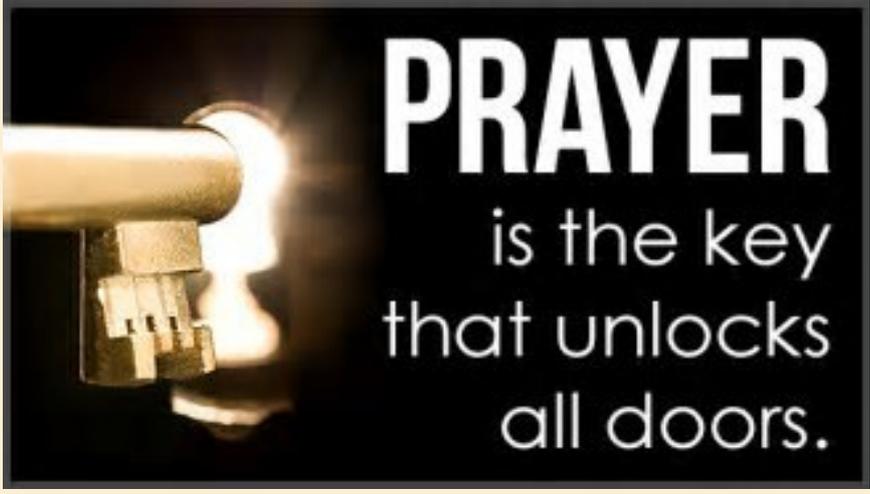


Matching Grant to Date:	\$ 10,823.00
Leadership Pledges	\$ 200.00
Balance Due to Meet \$15,000 Match	\$ 3, 977.00



Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!

PRAYER AND PRAISE



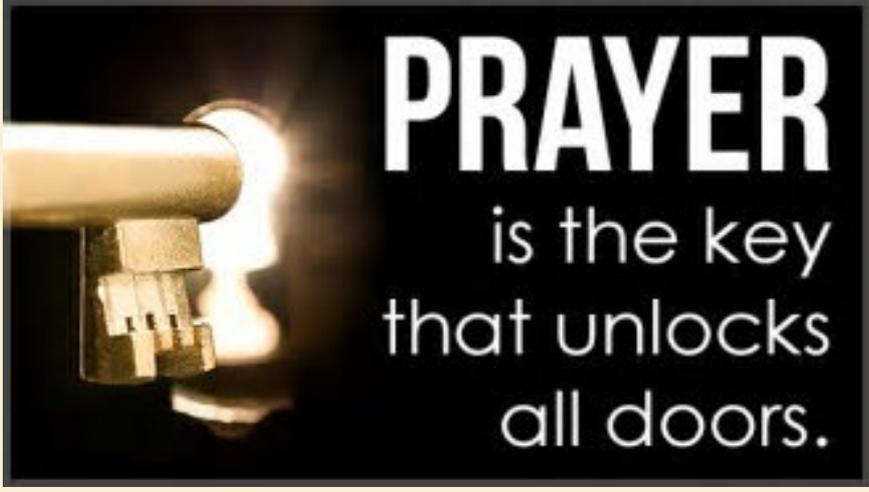
Thanksgiving for Becca's preaching, Trish describing as follows:

“She's not James, but she's as good as James, my high compliment.” Praise the Lord!

- ⇒ Thanksgiving for Mary Ann encountering former members Mike and Misti, with prayer and praise that they seem to be doing well. Prayers for Destiny's family as they continue to grieve and heal from a recent death in her family. Praise that Paula just got a job as a nurse's assistant. Lift up Mary Ann as she prepares to leave later this month, with praise and thanksgiving for the welcome she feels whenever she returns to worship with us at NCF.
- ⇒ Praise for Caly's return from the Valley where she enjoyed her mother's huge birthday celebration and appreciated seeing folks she hadn't seen in three decades. Lift up Caly's younger sister Helena for healing as she was recently diagnosed with hypertension. Praise for Saul's excellent portrayal of King Henry in a Shakespearean play Thursday evening.
- ⇒ Traveling mercies for Danita's family traveling to New Orleans, leaving her home at the “Casa Verde Homestead” to take care of the dog. Prayers for Schuyler and Maša's safe return with their babies; and traveling mercies for Ivy, Donovan, and Iyana as well.
- ⇒ Prayers on behalf of all the anxious students at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary as Monday marks the beginning of their final examinations.
- ⇒ Thanksgiving and prayers for Jimmy's continued healing from a weeklong illness. Lift up Sofia and Said as they are now suffering with it too.
- ⇒ Prayers for the dozens of children in the Austin area displaced by illness and who desperately need foster care, and prayers of encouragement and support for folks who may feel called to this ministry of childcare, as Kimberly and Jimmy have.

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PRAYER AND PRAISE



- ⇒ Lift up students at local high schools who have finals this week, especially Mary and Randy's children who are finding great challenge in their junior and eighth grade years. Encouragement for Mary and traveling mercies for the family heading down to League City this afternoon (and back this evening) as she works through the process of obtaining her judging certificate. With such a late night return, lift up prayers for energy for the rest of the week.
- ⇒ Praise for yesterday's end-of-season celebration for the football and cheer families, and for this personal ministry that Randy and Mary have been leading, touching the lives of many children, especially some who need the encouragement and sense of belonging and accomplishment that these activities provide.
- ⇒ Thanksgiving that "Frankenstein," the company that oversees our office equipment, made sure that everything was in working order to prepare for today's worship. Praise for today's service and for Becca's wonderful sermon.
- ⇒ Praise for the sermon, the music, and the vibrancy in today's worship service.
- ⇒ Lift up all who continue to mourn the loss of Pastor Lee and other loved ones, as well as all who are going through difficult family circumstances. Praise for our members and friends who continue to support this church that is racially diverse, fully inclusive, and with vibrant worship, qualities that are really hard to find elsewhere, understanding that no church is perfect. Praise for the individuals in this church who like Becca's dad have had that vision and who have held steadfast.* Thanksgiving for the opportunity to worship here during the Advent season.

**You are welcome and encouraged to listen to Becca's sermon on Ezekiel 37:1-14 – "Can These Bones Live?"*

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**Luck is good....but,
BLESSINGS ARE BETTER!!!!!!**

Genesis Presbyterian Church will be joining us!!!!

YEAH



2017 Holiday Pot Blessings

**(not luck)...share; and, bless us...
with your favorite holiday goodies.**

**Sunday, December 17th,
immediately following worship service.**

December 16, 2017



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SUNDAY MORNINGS

NCFA SUNDAY WORSHIP

Sunday, December 17th

Rev. Rebecca Weaver-Longino

Interim Session Moderator-Preaching



NCFA SUNDAY WORSHIP AT 10:15am

We would love to have you and your family come share in the **CELEBRATION OF THE GOOD NEWS!**

We are worshipping in the Fellowship Hall of Genesis Presbyterian Church on the Wilshire Campus starting at 10:15 a.m.

New Covenant Fellowship of Austin PC(U.S.A.) is a racially diverse community informed by the Bible, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and motivated to share God's love with all. In response to God's love, we are called to equip disciples to faithfully serve, to encourage seekers to joyfully commit, and to implore all to worship our Lord, as we love our neighbors, grow in grace, and live by faith.

JOIN US IN THE CELEBRATION OF THE GOOD NEWS

Real Church...
Real People...
Real Simple...

Real Church...
Real People...
Real Simple...

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GENESIS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
GENESIS

INVITES EVERYONE AT NCFA TO



On December 17, the choir will present a two-part cantata, with new arrangements of some familiar carols. On the 10th there will be four Advent Carols, and on the 17th there will be four Christmas Carols.



On December 31st, Genesis worship service will consist of singing Christmas Carols.

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ADVENT 2017

□ Devotional Coloring!

- Children's Illustrated Ministry Bible Study and posters on Wednesday evenings**
- You can also color posters before and after worship service during the Advent Season**
- Food and Fellowship 6:30 PM**
- Bible Study 7:00 PM**

Advent in Narnia

- Weekly Church School study**
 - led by Nikkie Shubitz**
- Daily family devotional available suggested donation: \$10.00**

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DECEMBER

- 12-1 Favour Unegbu
- 12-2 Connie Jones
Sam Okyere-Mireku
- 12-3 Cathy Angell
- 12-9 William Moreno
- 12-12 Destiny Edwards
- 12-15 Pat Nemir
- 12-16 Elizabeth Smith
- 12-22 Chuck Coffman
- 12-22 Christian Mojica
- 12-24 Sherrena Lee
- 12-28 Randy Mojica

Session Members

- *Rev. Rebecca Longino
Interim Session Moderator
- *Elder Nikkie Shubitz
Clerk of Session
- * Elder Cathy Angell
Administration & Personnel
- * Elder Zaira Amado
Buildings & Grounds
- *Elder Randy Mojica
Children and Youth
- *Elder George Washington IV
Discipleship & Men's/Women's Ministry
- *Elder Mary Jo Mojica
Finance & Stewardship
- *Elder Robert Booth
Congregational Life/
Lay Ministry
- *Elder Kimberly Hall
Missions/Evangelism
- *Elder Viola Lee
Worship & Membership

Deacons

- Ulysses Cox
- Rey Mojica
- Ashley Phillips
- Scott Phillips
- Roxann Vallejo

DECEMBER 2017

17th

3rd Sunday of Advent

- 9:30am Praise Team Rehearsal
- 10:15am Worship at Wilshire Blvd.

Rev. Rebecca Longino, Preaching
Sunday School—Nursery & Ages 3-5
(Room. 1A & 1B);

10:45am Children & Junior/Senior High
(Room 8-Narnia)

12:15pm Christmas Pot Blessings Luncheon—Good News Genesis Presbyterian Church will be joining us!

20th

- 6:30pm Fellowship Dinner
- 7:00pm Advent Journey Bible Study & coloring

24th

4th Sunday of Advent

- 9:30am Praise Team Rehearsal
- 10:15am Worship at Wilshire Blvd.

Rev. Rebecca Longino, Preaching
Sunday School—Nursery & Ages 3-5
(Room. 1A & 1B);

10:45am Children & Junior/Senior High
(Room 8-Narnia)

25-26th

Merry Christmas—Office will be closed.