Shepherding Groups at our Church

I learned recently that not everyone understands how our Shepherding Groups work. And so I thought that I would take a moment to tell you about Shepherding Groups at our church.

Currently, we have 5 Ruling Elders and 2 Teaching Elders serving on the Session. Each elder serving on the Session has a Shepherding Group. Consequently, we have 7 Shepherding Groups.

We also have 208 communicant members, 1 associate member, and about 35 non-communicant members. Each communicant member (and associate member) is a member of a Shepherding Group. Naturally, we keep families together, so that husbands, wives, and children are all in the same Shepherding Group.

So, how does one become part of a Shepherding Group? When a person is interviewed and received into communicant membership at the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church, he or she (along with any family members) is assigned to a Shepherding Elder. We try to place communicant members into Shepherding Groups where the elder has regular contact with the member, perhaps in a Growth Group, Adult Christian Education & Fellowship class, or ministry. The more contact an elder has with a member, the better. We also try to keep the Shepherding Groups roughly the same size so that no one elder is overburdened with too many members. (Continued page 2)
Most Shepherding Groups average about 25 communicant members. My Shepherding Group is a little different because all the officers are in my group, as well as those members who have moved away from our church but have not yet joined another church. And so there are about 55 members in my group.

Sometimes members are assigned to a new Shepherding Group. This usually happens when an elder goes on sabbatical, becomes a Ruling Elder Emeritus, or relocates to another city or church.

The purpose of the Shepherding Groups is to enable the elders to take responsibility for the spiritual care for a small group of communicant members (and their children). Shepherding members involved knowing them, feeding them, leading them, and protecting them. This can be more easily accomplished when Shepherding Elders are able to get to know a smaller group of members.

Practically, each elder tries to stay in contact with members of his Shepherding Group on a regular basis. He will get to know you, pray for you, and encourage you in the things of the Lord. If you ever have a concern, you are encouraged to contact your Shepherding Elder.

I hope this explains our system of pastoral care using the Shepherding Groups a little better. A list with all the Shepherding Groups and their members will be made available in the church bulletin on May 1. Please talk to me or any elder about questions or concerns you may have about Shepherding Groups.

What is the meaning of life? You may have heard this question asked by friends or neighbors, or you may have pondered this yourself. I actually had to write a paper on this in one of my classes in college. After we turned in the papers, we had a class discussion on the different takes on the meaning of life in class. Every person had to speak about what they thought that the meaning of life was and how that determined the decisions that they made. As I listened to people talk about what they believed, more often than not, there was disconnect between what they said they believed and how that impacted their decisions. Many people, including Christians in the group, seemed to say that they believed one thing, but functioned in daily life under a different belief.
Many said that they believed in God, but their lives showed that they, not God, were at the center of it. Some said that they did not believe in worshipping anything, yet a simple examination of their habits would show a clear idol that they were worshipping. Today, let’s examine what we say that we believe and how that changes our life.

As Christians, we know that we believe in God. However, sometimes Christians fail to make a connection between our beliefs and our actions. We say that we believe the Bible and that God is our God, but our decisions show something else is driving us. So what does the Bible say that we are to believe? What, according to the Bible, is the meaning of life? Let’s look at the text, which we know is true because it is authored by God (2 Timothy 3:16), to see what we were created for.

Why were all things created? Revelation 4:11 and Romans 11:36 tell us that God created all things and they exist for him. 1 Corinthians 10:31, Psalm 73:24-28, and John 17:21-24 tell us that it is our duty, our destiny, and our joy to glorify God in all that we do. So, what is the primary purpose, or chief end, of man? The Westminster Shorter Catechism says, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” Our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. To quote Johannes Vos, end means “the purpose for which something exists.” We exist to glorify God. Stop and think about what that means. Our sole purpose for being here is to glorify and enjoy God. The reason that we are here, the true meaning of life, is to glorify and enjoy God. Notice that this statement does not say our meaning in life is personal enjoyment or pleasure. That would make our purpose to be within ourselves, which it is not. Since all things exist for God, we cannot have been made to enjoy ourselves. This statement also does not say that our chief end is the good for the greatest number of people. Instead, it says that our purpose in life, our chief end, is to glorify and enjoy God. We will never find happiness outside of God because we were created to find our happiness in him. As Augustine said in his Confessions, “Thou hast created us for Thyself, O God, and our heart is restless until it finds repose in Thee.” We are created for glorifying and enjoying God and will not find true happiness until that is what we do.

So how does that apply to us today? Ideally, every decision will be made in light of what is most glorifying to God. When we prepare dinner, we can do it with a thankful heart that God has provided. When we drive to work, we can spend that time praying, either for the people in the cars around us or for people on our prayer lists. When someone frustrates us, instead of getting angry with them, we can pray for them that God will bless them. The question that we have to ask ourselves is: when we are making decisions, what do we think about? Do we think about what would glorify God the most or do we think about what our preference would be? We were created to glorify God. There is no question in a Christian’s mind as to what the meaning of life is, only as to whether or not they are seeking to fulfill that meaning. I pray that we would all be more mindful of our purpose in life and seek to glorify God in every way that we can. God bless and have a great month!
On April 23, the Women’s Ministry held its spring Sister-to-Sister gathering at the home of Deborah and Rick Donaldson. The event is an opportunity for women to get together and enjoy small group fellowship, get better acquainted, and an opportunity to pray for one another through the selection of prayer partners. Rick and Deborah recently completed a large kitchen renovation and we were honored to be the first group to enjoy it. In keeping with all of their hard work, our theme for the event was **Renew, Refresh, and Restore.** Nancy Kirkpatrick, our event coordinator, gave the devotional which focused on restoration. She referred to Psalms 23 and 51 in her comments. Additionally, Nancy shared with us her recent knee replacement as her personal restoration. Oh, I forgot to mention the food which was delicious. Each of us brought a dish to share and we never know until we get there, who is bringing what! Always a surprise. We could have all salads, all desserts, or bread and butter! A wonderful, thoughtful time was had by all. Thank you Deborah and Nancy!

**Update on Purses with a Purpose:** We are very thankful and grateful for the tremendous response we are receiving. With an overwhelming response of purses, we are now concentrating on the items to be put into the purses. For a complete listing, check the Women’s Ministry bulletin board located outside the nursery. There will be a “packing party” on May 14 to pair up the products with a handbag. Stay tuned for time and location.

What’s next? **Father’s Day Diaper Drive:** May 8 – June 19, we will be collecting diapers (newborn to size 5), gently used baby clothes, baby bath products, baby gear, and bottled water for the Assure Women’s Center. The crib will be located in the hallway where the PWP items are now located.

All women are invited to our monthly Women’s Ministry (WM15) meetings which are usually held on the second Sunday at 12:00; but because Mother’s Day falls on the second Sunday, we are moving our meeting to the third **Sunday, May 15.** Come join us!
The Christian walk is filled with a-ha moments. You know, those moments when you see something you’ve known to be true suddenly take on deeper meaning due to a struggle, challenge, conviction, or simply a question the Lord places in your life. I had such an experience recently when meeting a newly assigned member of my shepherding group. I’m sure I approached our meeting like I did most lunch meetings: placed it on the calendar and gave it maybe five minutes thought beforehand as I rushed to send a few emails and told my assistant I’d be back by one o’clock. And given the nature of this meeting, I probably reminded myself during the elevator ride to ask the usual questions about how things were going and how I could pray for this person.

Suffice it to say, I was caught off guard when my lunch date preempted my routine questions by asking me (quite directly!), “So, what can I expect from you as my shepherding elder?”

Suffice it to say, also, that I stumbled with my answer. I probably mentioned something about how I could pray for this person and answer questions about our local church or the Bible. I hopefully said something about doing whatever I could do to help those under my care in their walk with the Lord. Regardless of how I answered the question, however, the Lord really used that question to remind me of the significance of my calling and how prone I am to simply go through the motions in life rather than approaching this office with the love, care, and faithfulness that it requires.

Our Book of Church Order summarizes the Biblical duties of the office of the elder rather succinctly, as it charges the elder:
To watch diligently over the flock committed to his charge, that no corruption of doctrine or of morals enter therein, and take oversight not only of the spiritual interests of the particular church, but also the Church generally when called thereunto. They should visit the people at their homes, especially the sick. They should instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourner, nourish and guard the children of the Church. They should set a worthy example to the flock entrusted to their care by their zeal to evangelize the unconverted and make disciples. All those duties which private Christians are bound to discharge by the law of love are especially incumbent upon them by divine vocation, and are to be discharged as official duties. They should pray with and for the people, being careful and diligent in seeking the fruit of the preached Word among the flock (PCA Book of Church Order, 8-3.)

How’s that for a weighty job description? With respect to the first few duties, it’s easy to read the list legalistically. Sure, I’ve done that once this year. Check. I pray for this person regularly. And yes, I remember that person is really struggling with this problem, and I tried to visit this person a few times and was able to connect with that person recently. Good job, Doug! (Continued page 6)
But then we get to the sentence about “set[ting] a worthy example to the flock entrusted to their care by their zeal to evangelize the unconverted and make disciples,” and my collar starts to feel a little tighter. Actually, I have to stop and take a breath. Okay, maybe I’m not doing enough. And as if that’s not convicting enough, next comes the general charge to set an example with respect to all duties that Christians are called to “discharge by the duties of love!” Now, I’m on my knees in prayer.

Of course, the Bible has a lot of heavy stuff to say about shepherds, too. Indeed, throughout the story of redemption, God called a series of shepherds to watch over his people. Moses and David, for example, the most prominent shepherds of the Old Testament, were called by God to leave attending to sheep in the fields to shepherd God’s people. One could argue that both men failed in their callings. Maybe it would be fairer to say that they were not perfect in carrying out their duties, and their shortcomings served at least one important function in pointing forward to the one true Shepherd who would lead his flock perfectly as he lived a life of humility and laid down his life for them. Jesus, of course, is the example of the true Shepherd the Bible gives us, and he set a divine standard for the office of elder. That is why, technically, elders are “under-shepherds,” because Jesus is the one true shepherd, and elders are called to shepherd under Jesus.

So, that, in a nutshell, is what your elder can do for you, and why and how he can and should do it. And what if you’re inclined to ask not what your elder can do for you, but what you can do for your elder (which, gratefully, was also a question posed to me during the lunch meeting mentioned above)? To paraphrase Hebrews 13:17, the key thing you can do for your elders is to pray for them. Given the job description we see above, the reason for this should be pretty clear, but the writer of Hebrews still reminds us that it’s because your elders will stand before God one day and give an account of how they watched over you. Ponder that for a moment (meanwhile, I’ll be on my knees praying again).

While we’re all called to humble submission within God’s church, I’d like to suggest that one way we can all do a better job of submitting to our leaders is to really understand the job description we looked at above. Make sure your elders are doing their duties. Let us know how we can really pray for you. We know that life is not always good or easy, and we do not expect to have those under our care always respond that it is. We all can expect to struggle at times. It’s a sure sign that God loves us and is working in our lives. Let’s thank him that by his grace he provides shepherds under Jesus to lead us until the day our Lord returns.
Happy Mother’s Day

Psalm 31: 25 & 28-29 “She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come... Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.”

May Anniversaries

1 — Jason & Rebekah Skopp
8 — Todd & Cathy Gartman
8 — Joe & Nancy Kirkpatrick
9 — John & Gloria Andel
11 — Mark & Wendy McLeod
25 — Richard & Michelle Hunter
27 — Cris & Caroline Coffey
28 — Rick & Linda Hallstrand

May Birthdays

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I’m a door? Huh?

A song that has remained a favorite of mine the past couple of years is Jason Gray’s “With Every Act of Love.” He uses a couple of verses to set the stage by describing situations that are familiar to many of us – seeing someone holding a cardboard sign at a stoplight and two people struggling to communicate and forgive. But in the chorus, he prays a prayer and then flips on the lights to show how “we bring the kingdom come.”

Oh, we bring the kingdom come  
Oh, with every act of love  
Jesus, help us carry you  
Alive in us, your light shines through  
With every act of love  
We bring the kingdom come

We often hear/talk/sing about building God’s kingdom here on earth and sometimes that’s just an overwhelming thought. Words like “kingdom” and “earth” are BIG things, hard to explain and equally hard to see how we/I fit into the story. For me, this song simplifies kingdom building with five words – “With every act of love.”

An “act of love” is something ALL of us can do throughout our regular day in many different scenarios. It doesn’t have to be grandiose and it is never beyond our means. But it does require us to step outside of ourselves and adopt an attitude of serving rather than being served by others.

But that isn’t even my favorite part of the song. The bridge lyric is the part that knocks my socks off – check it out:

God put a million, million doors in the world for his love to walk through

One of those doors is you

I’m a door? You’re a door? Yes, we are. God put us where we are and that’s where he wants his light shining. We don’t have to understand (or question) anything beyond that simple fact.

How different would the world be if every “door” chose to open in love rather than hate…..with a kind word instead of a harsh word….with seeking the blessing in a situation instead of seeking the worst case scenario? We tend to complicate things, when something as simple as a smile or a kind word will make all the difference.

THIS is how God’s kingdom comes – not through some big proclamation or event, but by allowing his light to shine through each of us. Simple, you say? Yes, it is. So stop overthinking the situation and DO something. Every act of love builds God’s kingdom. Be a GREAT door!

Summer Choir

Wow – this year is flying by and before you know it, summer will arrive. As the Choirs take a well-deserved break from weekly rehearsals in June and July, we will again have Summer Choir. This is a great time for you to get together with friends to sing and “test drive” choir. Summer Choir has one rehearsal to learn a great song and present it during Sunday worship. Here are the dates:

June Rehearsal Wed, June 22nd  
Sing in Worship, June 26th  
July Rehearsal Wed, July 20th  
Sing in Worship, July 24th

Can you name this tune . . .  
Son of God – slain for us  
What a love! What a cost!

Contact Debi Hensley at dbh@macfar.com
This month, the Missions Committee offers the final in a series of interviews with TBPC members who have been on previous mission trips to Cherokee. Our hope has been to share perspectives from a diverse, cross-section of people and hopefully inspire others to go on the next trip. This month, Colby Tomasello shares his thoughts, and some practical advice, about going to Cherokee on his first mission trip.

Q: **What were your expectations before going to Cherokee?**  
A: I honestly don't remember my expectations. I had never been on a missions trip before, so I really had no idea.

Q: **What did you like most about the trip?**  
A: Being able to meet with people from around the U.S. and worship God together was pretty amazing. I liked working with members of our church to spread the word and be a blessing to the Cherokee in the area. White-water rafting was pretty great, too.

Q: **Has the trip changed your thinking concerning missions work?**  
A: A little bit. I learned that to be a blessing you don't always have to be actively speaking the gospel directly. Just by hanging out with the kids and spreading the gospel in the process, God can expand his kingdom.

Q: **How has this trip impacted your thinking since coming back?**  
A: It has shown me how other cultures interact with the gospel and how all people groups are open to the word of God.

Q: **Do you plan on going back?**  
A: If I am fortunate enough to go back, I would definitely go. It was an experience of a lifetime and really grew my faith. If you can, definitely go. Bring some bug spray though.

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**Join our Team in Cherokee North Carolina**  
**July 30 - August 6**

We encourage you to pray about joining us this summer on our short-term mission trip to Cherokee, NC (July 30 – August 6). Please let us know if you are interested. Team meetings and fundraising will begin soon. Please contact Melissa at [office@tampabaypresbterian.org](mailto:office@tampabaypresbterian.org) or call the office at 813-973-2484 to express interest.
On April 9th, the Men’s Ministry had their second annual TBPC Golf Tournament at Pebble Creek. It was a beautiful day for golf: partly cloudy with the temperature around 80 degrees and we played a best ball scramble. It was a day of great fellowship for the men who have asked for another golf outing in the fall.

Three four man teams fought for the first place prize, but there were also individual winners on designated holes for longest drive and closest to the pin. Closest to the pin was won by Ken Pothoven on the front nine and by Todd Bayley on the back nine. Longest drive winners were Jeff Montoney on the 7th hole, and Brian Carrier on the final one.

The Men’s Ministry would like to thank all the golfers who participated and made it a very successful event. We especially thank Scott Wallace and Jody Kenyon for attending and helping us complete a full four man team. We hope they enjoyed the golf tournament and look forward to possibly having them visit our church.

We also look forward to the next Men’s Ministry event which will be attending a Ray’s baseball game together the evening of Friday, May 13, 2016. The cost is $40 per person which will include group transportation from the church, admission to the game, and a meal. This event is sponsored each year to bring family members together to enjoy fellowship and any who would like to attend are invited to participate. Please contact Brian Carrier to RSVP.

The Men’s Ministry appreciates the fun and fellowship we enjoy with our Christian brothers and sisters and look forward to other events throughout the year.
I was a metallurgical engineer in China and allowed to retire early for working on the dangerous fields. When preparing to immigrate to America with my wife Yisha, I went to a bank in Beijing to exchange money. A few words printed on US dollars caused my great attention, “IN GOD WE TRUST.” Since our childhood, Yisha and I were taught the opposite. We sang a song from elementary school to college: “Never Savior exist, neither God. All depend on our own.”

Around 1986, my wife and I were trying to ease the pain of life. We began to practice Qigong. It is a method based on an old Chinese religion known as Dao. We meditated as well as imagined our body and heaven becoming one, an original idea from an ancient Chinese philosophian Lao-Zi. In 1993, we joined a group based mainly on Buddha’s teaching. We both became vegetarians and meditated every day, calling upon Buddha’s name. We were taught to avoid any meat food, any alcohol including beer, and not kill any animals including pest like mosquito.

From 2002-2006 our daughter, Eva, studied at a college in Bangkok, Thailand. She told us an America girl taught her English and introduced her to the Bible as well. I asked her to bring me a copy. She brought us versions in Chinese and simple English. I read the Bible as a history book of Israel. The story of Jesus dying on the cross made us cry. At the time, we didn’t understand why Jesus had to die and the meaning of Christ’s resurrection. At the end of 2009, we came to America.

We met and lived with our daughter in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Eva earned her Master’s degree at the state university. In the Spring of 2010, our friends, a couple who were classmates with us in China, invited us to their home in Los Angeles. Staying at a hotel, we found that every room had a Bible. Our friends brought us to a Chinese church party, which was the first time we attended a church. I was surprised there were so many church in Las Cruces. I thought that in China we had no choice of religion but now in America we were finding there were too many choices. It looks like falling into a maze. I was confused and said to my wife: “I need to study new things to know Christianity.”

We faced a double challenge—both faith and language. I started to read information online, learning the history of Christianity, and reading the Bible both in Chinese version and English version. I had studied the history of Christianity. I knew the Protestants separated from the Catholics. And, that America was built actually by Christians pursuing the freedom to worship God. Early America settlers were Puritans who believed in: God’s authority, salvation through faith alone. They trusted the Bible was the word of God pursued a holy life. America is blessed by God for those who believe Jesus.

(Continued page 12)
In 2011, we started attending Christ the King, a PCA church in El Paso. We worshiped God and listened to the gospel preaching by Pastor Chuck. He arranged a particular gospel video with Chinese subtitle for us. He gave us a Study Bible, Chinese version. I learnt more about the reform church from the Sunday school. I told my wife we must have faith in Jesus. On our own, we can do nothing about our sin, save only by the grace of God. Christ’s blood covers the guilt of those who believe Him. There is no salvation in other religions. There is no redemption if we do not believe in our Savior, Jesus alone.

I believed. And, I thought we should be baptized very soon. My wife said I should be baptized, but she needed to wait. I said no, we must baptize together. I had many struggle too, because of our sinful nature. By the Grace of God, we don’t need to become perfect first. By the Grace of God, we don't need to become perfect first, but repent our sin and trust in Jesus first. We practiced and had tried other paths. It is impossible to us be cleansed and saved through man' doing, as taught by other religions. Yisha agreed. Pastor Chuck asked his classmate Chen, a pastor in a reformed church in Orlando, to help us understood the vows of baptism in Chinese. On Easter of 2011 both my wife and I took vows and were baptized.

We are very happy to enter the God’s family and very thankful for salvation grace from God’s mercy.

Psalm 123: 1 – 2:

To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens! Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he has mercy upon us.

Editor’s Note: The same verses are copied below from the Chinese Contemporary Bible.

诗篇 1 在天上做王的耶和华啊！我仰望你。

2 我们要仰望我们的上帝耶和华，如同仆人仰望主人、婢女仰望主母，一直到蒙祂怜悯。