

# FAITH JOURNEY

AVONDALE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

SUMMER 2012



**Old Taize Church, France**



**“Our faith stories remind us that we belong to God and it is God who directs our journey. We believe that one day we will return to God and the journey will be complete.”**

Dear Friends in Christ,

As Christians, we are a people of faith. As members of Avondale Presbyterian Church we are a community of faith centered in Christ. As such, we live out our faith not in isolation, but in community with others. We share our struggles as well as our successes, striving to understand and discern how God is defining faith in our daily walk of life.



Avondale has a new publication which shares and celebrates our Faith Journey. This publication is not a newsletter or a schedule of upcoming events. Instead, it is a collection of stories about people of faith and the continuing story of how God is shaping their lives.

Our faith stories remind us that we belong to God and it is God who directs our journey. We believe that one day we will return to God and the journey will be complete.

As you read these stories, I encourage you to look anew at how God is at work in the world. Read the stories. Reflect upon them. Talk about them with others. As you learn more about those who are a part of our faith community, I hope you will be called to a deeper fellowship with others and clearly glimpse God's blessings in your own life. God's grace, a most undeserved grace, is the source of all these blessings and that is meant to be shared.

*John Earl*

Senior Pastor

ABOUT THE COVER:

This photograph of Sigrid Sacra was taken during her 2003 trip to Taize, France. She is standing outside the original church at Taize. Thanks to Hannah Stockwell, traveling companion, friend and Avondale member, Sigrid's story is being told.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” Psalm 119:105





## GROWING A GARDEN WITH HARD WORK AND HELP

*by Lynn Wilkerson*

A garden that flourishes needs seeds, rich soil, plenty of sun and quenching rain to help it grow. But it also needs the care of a gardener to nudge it along. Together, all these things create one of God's most profound masterpieces.

Jack McKenzie took on the Common Grounds Garden as his Eagle Scout project. He felt God called him to the project to bring extra help to our homeless neighbors. Seeds of ideas began to form. He decided to add four new planting beds, four new rain barrels, an additional water line and two new benches. It required a lot of time and money. His Avondale family helped him with both.

Many scouts build gardens to add beauty to a place, but Jack's garden is different. It gives him a chance to explain the importance of helping others in need. Seeds scattered sometimes take root and grow. Jack's did.

His fellow scouts helped fill the new beds with soil, made with wood donated from Avondale member, Jeff Meier. Sun fell on the garden. A garden always needs some water. When the newly installed water line, going from the rain barrels at the Family Life

Center, under the road, to the garden, didn't work, he tapped his dad, Greg, and a local plumber to figure out the problem.

Jack and his mom, Cindy, spent many hours working side by side. Strong plants began to sprout from the soil. Many Avondalers helped maintain and harvest the garden. Jack worked closely with Chuck Hendrix (known around Avondale as Mr. Chuck). They spent time together pouring over the garden plans and cutting the wood. Jack's Avondale friends, Josh Oswald, Nate Tomey and Erik Thomson helped out too. Jack's grandparents, Lamar and Marge Hardegree, also provided hours of support. He learned a lot from experienced gardeners.



As the Common Grounds garden is in the midst of another harvest season, Jack is able to stand and survey what he accomplished with

the help of others. Every garden yields a surprise or two. Jack's surprise was the true enjoyment he received in knowing he was helping the homeless. Through his many hours of hard work and the peaceful times he spent in the garden, Jack came to know that God helps us see things in new ways. A garden—it can be beautiful, but it's even more spectacular when it serves others.

# MOM EUDY: GUIDING THE FAITH OF AVONDALE'S YOUTH

by Lisa Miller

For someone who never had children, Betty Eudy has a whole lot of people calling her Mom.

It's a name she earned helping to guide the faith of nearly a generation of Avondale's young people. Betty taught them that you don't just read the Bible, you absorb it. She showed them faith takes study and practice, but also joy and compassion. She emphasized following God requires a relationship with Him and those around you. Betty knew that connection can save you.

Leading the youth wasn't a job Betty wanted. In 1970, she had her fourth miscarriage and the doctor told her no more. She didn't want to leave the house. After a few months, Avondale's minister at that time, Tommy MacLean, came to her with an offer: come teach the high schoolers. Betty told him, "You know, I can't teach kids." But he said he needed her. She recognized it as a plot to get her out of the house. She told him, "I'll have to talk to the Lord God about that."



In September of 1970 she started teaching high school Sunday School. The first class, she said, was murder. The big boys called her "Teach." But things couldn't have been that bad. A few months later, the minister asked her to lead the youth in their Sunday night activities. And she accepted wholeheartedly.



She made memorizing Bible verses into games. She got the youth their own house on the church grounds. She took them on beach trips. She listened to their break-up stories. She taught them how to be honest with God and with each other. She showed them how to forgive. She prayed with them and she told them that being a Christian meant making a decision to get off the fence and follow God. Many did.

"I remember my first youth group beach trip in the 7th grade. There were pillow fights and water balloon fights. You knew God was present. Mom Eudy was a magnet for us all. She reminded us how to love one another."

Julie Sitton McGrath

It was about a year into leading the youth that Betty knew she had made it. One Sunday evening, a group of 7th and 8th graders came up to her. "Mrs, Eudy, would you mind terribly if we call you Mom Eudy? You're our mom away from home." Betty says she completely lost it then. She hugged them and cried. The name stuck around and so did Betty. She led the youth for seventeen years up until 1987.

Even now, she gets letters addressed to "Mom Eudy" and her former charges stop by and drop off groceries. Betty keeps them in her prayers. She knows how to be frank with God, she knows how to listen and wait, and she knows how to trust the people around her.

If you ask God for something, she says, you'll always receive an answer. Sometimes it's the one you want, sometimes it's a flat-out no, and sometimes it's something completely different.



"One of my favorite memories is when Mom Eudy led us in a foot washing experience. It turned into two or three hours of hugs and tears as about 30 of us sat in a circle and served others. That's one of the highlights of my journey with the Holy Spirit."

Joe McCoy

# PREPARING FOR A MOMENT

by Hannah Stockwell

Imagine a chapel one spring morning filled with worshipers from all over the world. They pray and quietly sing the same song in many different languages. The words and rhythms repeat and the light is still soft. They've come to the Taize community in France to come closer to God and feel the mystery of faith that's easy to miss in the daily grind.



Sigrid Sacra sits on a bench in the back looking out on all that's taking place. The past decade has been a painful one for her. Her husband Kenneth developed serious lung problems and her daughter Karen was diagnosed with breast cancer. She nursed both of them and both died; her husband, then her daughter six years later. That's the heaviness she's come here with. Sigrid listens to the prayers; and then, suddenly, as though God has flipped a switch, a brilliant light comes through the windows at the top of the chapel walls and the room is bathed in a rich yellow. In that moment, she feels a sense of renewal and peace.

Moments like this are a gift of grace, but they can take effort to notice. Sigrid had not come to that moment unprepared. She came searching for it and when it happened, she understood it.

Sigrid discovered just how strong her faith was during those years of family illness. They were busy years. She taught at Ashley Park Elementary School while she was caring for Kenneth, and later at Myers Park Presbyterian Church Weekday School when Karen became ill. As a way to find quiet, she turned off the car radio as she drove to work each morning and used that time to pray for strength.

Karen was determined to beat her cancer and Sigrid felt she had to be at least as strong. They'd go to Avondale's Taize service together and when Karen was too ill to come, she and Sigrid would hold their own service at home. Kenneth died in 1997 and Karen in 2003, just a few months before Sigrid made the trip to Taize, France. Sigrid says through those years her belief never faded; she was never angry with God. Instead, her faith was steady and she says she understood, "Today is enough for today."

Sigrid came to Taize looking for a release from all that she was feeling. In that moment of glorious sunshine, late spring snow and beautiful music, God was helping her to find that. Of course, a moment needs to be noticed, but it also needs to be prolonged. I was in that chapel too. We both thought that moment was ours alone to see and feel. Only later did we realize we had both felt God's peace and fulfillment flooding in upon us. We talk about that moment often.



# PAINTING AS A LEAP OF FAITH

by Jane Summey Mullennix



kids from Avondale Adventures. Of course, they had some help. Artist Greg Barnes sketched the murals in pencil and helped guide their paint brushes.

Like the story of Samuel, Greg's career is a case of "Yes, Lord, I'm listening." Painting wasn't his first career, although it's always been a part of his life. He studied the fine arts in college, but then began working as a technical illustrator. After fifteen years, Greg realized he was just going through the motions. Nine-eleven happened and he felt God calling him away from that work. He just had to trust Him.

Becoming a full-time painter was a huge risk. He had two young children to support and no ready market for his art. "At the beginning, God knew he needed to hold my hand. I was completely dependent on Him. I thought I knew what faith was, but it takes you to a whole new level when you don't know where the mortgage money is coming from," says Greg. "At those times, I knew God wanted me to press right into Him and trust. But still it's no fun to go through that."

Greg began painting portraits; ten years later he has had success selling his paintings and has also received national recognition. Greg always had a steady beat inside him calling him to painting. "I knew it was God saying, 'Just be patient,'" says Greg.

"Now I see everything I do as a step toward my ultimate purpose."

You can see more of Greg's paintings at [www.barnesstudios.com](http://www.barnesstudios.com) and at his studio at Sharon Corners Shopping Center in South Park.

*"I always had a steady beat inside me."*

With 9-11, that beat became his dominant rhythm.

If you've been in the children's Sunday school area recently, you've seen them - four murals that show how God relies on children to communicate his word. There is Moses as a baby, Jesus advising his elders in the temple, and Jesus as a grown man welcoming the children. And then there's Samuel who as a young boy heard God's call and said, "Yes, Lord, I'm listening."

These murals aren't perfect. The figures are all recognizable, but the paint doesn't keep to clean lines and there are a few smudges. After all, it's the work of some untrained painters, the



Faith Journey is published by Avondale Presbyterian Church and is distributed twice a year. Additional copies are available in the church office. The Communications Committee oversees the development and production of this magazine. Anyone interested in sharing their own faith story, or being a contributing writer for Faith Journey is asked to contact Lisa Miller at 248-770-7400 or lamiller55@gmail.com.

### Contributors to this Edition:



Lynn Wilkerson and her husband Fred have been members of Avondale since 1988. She shares her gift and passion for music as the children's choir director. She is involved with many mission ministries, including the weekly meal ministry and the Avondale Common Gardens. Her children Joy and Jed are both grown and still involved at Avondale.



Lisa Miller joined Avondale in 2008. She grew up in Michigan and went to school in Chicago. She moved to Charlotte in 2006 to work as a reporter for WFAE. She covers education, but has also reported on such varied topics as alligator hunting and cankerworms.



Hannah Stockwell, whose parents were Avondale charter members, grew up at Avondale as a child. After she and her husband, Henry, lived in the Panama Canal area for 30 years, they reunited with Avondale in 1997. She serves as class leader of SABBATHHOUSE and recently became a Labyrinth facilitator. She has two daughters and four grandchildren.

### Church Staff

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Jane Summey Mullennix has served as Parish Associate, Education and Family Ministry at Avondale since 2007. She was ordained in 1986 at the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee. Between 1988 and 2006, Jane served in several associate pastor and chaplain positions throughout Charlotte. She and her husband, Dale, have two children; Aaron (27) and Amanda Jane (12).



Laura Meier took many of the photographs for Faith Journey. She is the granddaughter of a Methodist minister and has been a member of Avondale since 2000. Laura and her husband, Jeff, have two sons Jay and Ben. Laura is a professional photographer. You can see more of her work at her website [www.laurajmeier.com](http://www.laurajmeier.com).