



Alexandria Presbyterian Church ♦ January-February 2009

Upcoming Dates

Nursery White-Glove Cleaning Day
January 31

Newcomer's Fellowship
January 31

Protas Superbowl Party
February 1

Inquirer's Class
February 6-7

Table Talk Dinners
February 7

Protas Winter Retreat
February 13-16

Palm Sunday
April 5

Maundy Thursday
April 9

Easter Sunday Joint Service
April 12



The Year of Study by Elder Marc Allen

"For too many of us, *church, worship, and Sabbath-ing* comprise attendance at worship only. We're in and out. God has made clear how much more His kingdom involves." I reuse these words from an APC article on adult education that I penned in September. They are even more relevant now. Then, I was writing to exhort you to engage in an APC Sunday School class as part of your regular Sabbath fare. Now, with APC's new year, her elders have decided on **Christian Education** as the 2009 church-wide ministry focus.

2008 was the Year of the Word at APC. Many of us took that exhortation as a call to read through the Bible, Genesis to Revelation. For others, it meant a commitment to re-engaging in self- or group-Bible study around particular sections of the Bible. For some, it meant a renewed remembrance that the Bible is vital, essential, to our daily lives.

Why have we focused on **Christian Education**, and why now?

Consciously or not, we all long to taste the deepest fruit of Spirit power. We set our hearts on peace, confidence, knowledge, comfort, and security. But only God can deliver the fulfillment. What your elders have experienced in our own lives, what we have witnessed in others' lives, and what we see taught clearly in God's Word, is that God's fulfillment of all these blessings requires His claim being established over all of a person: Heart, Mind, Body, and Soul. Mind is integral. It is not like a subcomponent to a stereo system, that can be unplugged with no effect. There is no faith without reason. Indeed, God Himself is all Reason. He is Truth. And Reason is nothing more (and nothing less) than the process of thought leading toward Truth.

None of us would suggest that faith is *dependent* on man's reason. Faith is a gift from God. It depends on nothing other than His grace and charity. But where faith lives, God's capture will include Heart, Mind, Body and Soul.

Matthew 22:37: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."

Mark 12:30: "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."

The Year of Study acknowledges how much more we have to learn about God, about ourselves, and about this relationship. It acknowledges that we are to love God with all of our mind. It exhorts us to dive into the arms of the Lord's ministries that are waiting to help us pursue greater knowledge of Him. And this is a perfect time to dive in. Many of our offerings are just getting started. Examples follow; consider if one or two of these could be new additions for you this year:

Regularly attend *Sunday School* (see the September newsletter for the call to Sunday School education; extra copies at the Information Booth in the Fellowship Hall). The new quarter starts in March.

Plunge into *self-study* of a topic to which God leads you, guided by books, study guides, or sermon tapes.

Grab a book from our new *Book Table* and read. Return to the Book Table two more books in its place, so that others can benefit from material you have found helpful.

Re-evaluate your *Covenant Fellowship Group* or *Women's Bible Study* rhythms to ensure that meaty discussion of Biblical material and topics is an important part of your weekly fellowship; if you're not in a CFG or Bible Study, consider getting in one!

Married folk: Don't delay; take up a Christian study topic with your spouse.

The Year of Study will also proceed in some new ways. We intend to introduce a series of Occasional Lectures on an array of Christian Education topics. Your input on topics is crucial. The teaching needs to speak to topics in our lives where confusion, darkness, or just emptiness reign. Please let me or any of the elders know your thoughts. Where a lecture taps an evidently deeper vein of interest, we will plan to use future Sunday Schools for more study.

Which brings me back to Sunday School! APC has been blessed with a rich supply of teachers. By that grace, we have been able to expand our offerings from 3 classes to 4 each quarter. Now, in one quarter, study is led on subjects ranging from the Gospel import of Handel's Messiah, to Christian relationships to OT and NT Books of the Bible, to Worldviews and their impact on life. The growing range of subjects, styles, and teachers is intentional. We pray for members to build year long curricula for themselves that speak to their own spiritual needs and interests. We desire members to balance studies of life application topics with studies of books of the Bible with studies of theological concepts. Building a righteous balance requires us each sometimes to step out of our comfort zone; attending a life application class when our forte is theology; or attending a theological philosophy class when our sweet spot is life application. Naturally, this challenges. But it is a responsibility we each owe to the Lord, as He continues to grow and transform us through His Word and its application to our lives.

In this, the Year of Study, let me encourage you anew to take on these responsibilities. Rest assured, your elders stand at the ready to talk with you about how to think about study, including "what and how to." We are particularly ready to talk on this subject, because we will be going through it right there with you. For every elder, this will be a year that challenges us and our own habits, as much as you. So, as we call you to faithful study, know that you should equally exhort us in the same way. Together, we will pursue the wonderful fruits God has in store for us!

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Alexandria Presbyterian Church is a welcoming community of believers, rejoicing in the gospel, transformed by its power, and responding with grateful hearts in service to our God and world. We long to taste the glory of God in such an astonishing way that the city of Alexandria will be drawn to the majesty and mercy of our great God. It is our desire that our worship will serve as an authentic model to our city of the possibilities for transformation of individuals, families and a city encountering the glory and grace of God.



Who? What? Why?

By Adam LeRoy

Who = 6-12th grade sinners (it's true, sorry to be the one to break it you)

What = take the WINTER RETREAT CHALLENGE below

Why = to glorify GOD and to invite others to do the same

Is the "good news" that great if we don't share it? It's a fair question to ask, because we tend to share what we cherish and are most excited about. Most of us have received the gift of grace in both our heads and our hearts, but it takes another step to move that message of God's work in our life to the outside, to a dying world. Teen leadership is posing a **CHALLENGE, "Invite one (1) friend to join you on our Winter Retreat, February 13-16th."** This might sound easy, given the ridiculously fun nature of our retreat—skiing, a mountain swing, friends,

a huge fireplace—but I invite you folks in the pews to recall the last time you invited a friend to worship at APC. It's not that easy to take a risk.

We want to see God's unchanging Truth empower a collision course of discipleship and evangelism with the purpose of seeing changed lives. Please pray for this retreat: that our teens will encounter our Savior, and for God's perfect will to be revealed.

"The Gospel is like a lion. It doesn't need to be protected, it needs to be turned loose." *Unknown*

PROTAS is a dynamic, teen-led, relationship-based youth community with the goal of *teens becoming stronger disciples of Christ as they reach out to their lost friends*. We do this through exciting outreach events, relevant and challenging instruction from a biblically-reformed perspective, and loving Christ-like service to those in need. All with the oversight and relationships of adult mentors and parents.



The Algebra of Effort (V+M+R=?), revisited

by Elder Chris Joyce

I penned this article last year. As we approach our annual congregational meeting regarding the budget (Sunday February 1, 11:30am in the Fellowship Hall),

I decided to pull it out and see how it read, one year later.

Every organization has a formula that drives effort: **resources** (i.e., talent, time, money) applied to **objects** (e.g., products, services, ministries) in the context of **vision**. What differentiates institutions is how they order these elements in their own particular formula.

An illustration: walk around a university campus. Some have a clear design signature that knits buildings, walkways and landscaping together in a compelling, attractive flow. You can see that *vision* was at the forefront in making choices. Visit another campus, and you find a potpourri of architectural styles, colors, materials...an eclectic mix of bricks, mortar, steel and shrubbery that says...what? You discover *resources* are the root cause of all that design confusion—not their lack, but their primary in that institution's formula. Resources were in the front seat, before mission and vision. Donor dollars drove the building program. Their institutional formula: "We'll build whatever the donors will pay for."

What's that have to do with APC? Quite a bit. Your Session approaches this topic as *vision* drives *ministry* drives *resources*. Vision—to reach this city with the good news of the gospel and see our city transformed by that power—drives everything. Ministry, be it

Covenant Fellowship Groups, Protas, Adult Education, Sonship, Mercy, Music, Shepherding, etc., derive from that vision. Individual ministries may grow or fade, but the common thread remains. Vision is the glue that binds these ministries together. Vision also provides the standard by which we measure ministry effectiveness. Is that particular effort yielding gospel impact? Is there another ministry investment that might have greater impact?

These questions drive the third element: resource allocation. The budget that we present to the congregation each year represents the best, prayerfully considered judgment of your Session. It captures how we will invest your kingdom-giving in specific ministry applications, those we believe will have the maximum impact in changed and changing lives. The budget is an outcome, at the end of our formula. It's not at the front-end, determining what we will do and/or how we will do it.

It's a challenging process. We've all seen examples of resource-driven institutions, where the dollars overdrive the decision making. You've also seen examples where ministry drives everything else—a particular program takes on a life of its own, independent of vision and/or resources. Such mismatches yield disappointing outcomes.

Let's pray that APC keeps things in the right order. Pray that we would see God's vision for His church. Pray that we all give gladly and generously to invest in that vision. Pray that we invest in ministries that translate that vision into gospel action. Finally, pray that we allocate the right amount of resources—time, talent, focus, money—to realize His Vision.



Children's Chatter by Leslie Bridge

Teaching our children about the Christian Faith and about a relationship with Jesus is challenging. It's easy to

believe that if they are enrolled in Sunday School, go to church and attend some other kind of program like Explorers, they will surely get all they need. Yet we all know that is only part of their development. There is so much more they catch by being around believers, having teens and adults interacting with them. I consider it a wonderful privilege to be involved in helping teach the APC children about our faith and our Savior.

Teaching requires intentionality. It means having a vision for children's growth, a plan and a sensitivity to how the Spirit is working in a child's

life. These are not things that come automatically to any of us. These are skills we work at and pray for. I'm grateful for the resources that are available to help me give our volunteers what they need to do an excellent job in providing Biblical instruction to our APC children. God has gifted our volunteers with many of the skills needed to teach the children, and sensitivity that connects the message with each child's heart.

One of the resources I was pointed to recently (for teaching the Catechism to the children in a way that is relevant and understandable to them) is Susan Hunt's book, Big Truths for Little Kids. What I like most about this tool is the emphasis on *application* of the principle the kids are learning in the context of a story. The story itself is primarily about two children and how they interact with the unbelievers around them. It is very relevant to our children's experiences and certainly helps them see how to live for God. This is one illustration of effective intentionality in teaching that I believe assists our kids in learning about their faith.

APC Giving at a Glance

Giving (through December)	\$1,041,261
Budget (2008)	\$1,090,000
Shortfall	\$-48,739 (-4%)

****For January giving, please see your bulletin on February 1.****

SUNDAY MORNING SCHEDULE:

Holy Worship – 8:50am ✦ Time of Fellowship & Coffee – 10:30am ✦ Sunday School for All Ages – 11:00am
Communion Celebrated the Second Sunday of Each Month