

# WOODLAWN WINDOW

January 2018

Woodlawn Presbyterian Church  
2612 12th Street North  
St. Petersburg, Florida 33704

John F. Underwood, Pastor  
Telephone No.: (727)822-4477  
Internet: [www.woodlawnchurch.net](http://www.woodlawnchurch.net)  
E-mail: [office@woodlawnchurch.net](mailto:office@woodlawnchurch.net)

Dear Friends,

How do you celebrate New Year's Eve?

Nowadays Judie and I usually watch the New Year come in at home. Our typical ritual includes watching the great glass ball come down in Times Square, raising a glass of champagne, and sharing a kiss. Since we have come to Florida we have also begun watching the city's family fireworks display at 9:00 and the full-scale celebration at midnight.

It is quite a different set of traditions from the New Year rituals of my childhood. The family celebration in those days was distinctly solemn, as befitted a pastor's household of the 1950s and 60s. When midnight drew near Mother and Father would gather the family in the living room where we would form a prayer circle. As the clock hands swept past the old year and into the new, Father would entrust the transition into the hands of God, prayerfully releasing the old year with all the best and worst it had brought and prayerfully greeting the new with all the opportunity and peril it would offer. Following the prayer, we would take small scraps of paper and (instead of resolutions) we would write confessions of things we wanted to leave behind as the New Year began. We then burned them in a small, three-legged, cast iron kettle, just a couple of inches tall and wide. Finally, we would share a glass of Presbyterian eggnog and maybe some other treats. Not long after midnight we would go to bed, quite ready for sleep. In the morning, on New Year's Day, we would watch the Rose Parade together, have a

special New Year dinner, and indulge the ritual of urging on various football teams as we watched one bowl game after another.

Strangely enough, New Year is a quite an arbitrary holiday. On the one hand, the cycle of a year is indisputably real. The further north and south of the equator one travels, the more real the cycle becomes. Southern states have a relatively modest shift of light and temperature. Northern states see more flowers in spring and foliage in autumn, and must cope with snow in January and sunburn in July. Those who live even further north see days that are so long as to give a midnight sun at the summer solstice and so short as to give no sun at all at the winter solstice. On the other

hand, the place of New Year's Day in that cycle is decidedly random. It is random scientifically: the New Year begins at some arbitrary point in the path of the earth around the sun, not at its Zenith, or nadir, or any other orbitally significant place. It is random theologically: the holiday does not have a strong theological link to the church year; it does not mark the beginning of the Christian Year on the first Sunday of Advent, or Jesus' birth at Christmas. It is random globally: it is not as if the cultures of the world all celebrated the same New Year. The western world's New Year has had different starting times over the centuries (it has been March 1, for example, and March 25, and so on.). Lunar-based celebrations (e.g. Chinese or Jewish New Years) are



different from one year to another. In 2017, Koreans, Vietnamese, and Chinese celebrated on January 28, Mongolians on February 28, Iranians on March 20, Hindus on March 28, Sri Lankans on April 13, Ethiopians on September 11, Jews on September 20, and Muslims on September 22. A culture's New Year may or may not be random—some cultures may have specific reasons for beginning on a particular date—but it is still decidedly arbitrary. (Likewise, it is arbitrary to define the start of a day as sunset, sunrise, or midnight. The beginnings of weeks and months are more arbitrary still.)

While I find all that to be an intellectual oddity, I also find it to be a theological blessing. It is a reminder that a new beginning can come any time! No one has to wait for a special occasion or a landmark day. We don't need fireworks or a holiday or a ritual of New Year's resolutions to experience a new beginning. There is real theological truth in a saying that may seem remarkably trite—today (or tomorrow or any day at all) can indeed be the first day of the rest of your life—the first day of a new life, of a life that can be as new as you and God are willing to make it.

All such thoughts aside, may the coming New Year bring you abundant blessing from God.

Pastor John

---

## Faith Community News

*"Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all the people."*

Luke 2:10



It is thought shorter days and less daylight may trigger a chemical change in the brain referred to as SAD or seasonal affective disorder. The average age for people who suffer from SAD is 18 to 30, but it can affect anyone. It is estimated 10 million Americans are affected and another 1 to 2 million have mild episodes. December through February are the most severe months for SAD. Women experience depression 2 times as often as men.

Hopkinsmedicine.org/healthlibrary lists the common symptoms of SAD: increased sleep and daytime drowsiness, loss of interest and pleasure in activities formerly enjoyed, social withdrawal and increased sensitivity to rejection, irritability and anxiety. There can be feelings of guilt and hopelessness, fatigue, or low energy level, decreased sex drive, decreased ability to focus or concentrate and trouble thinking clearly. Other symptoms include increased appetite, especially for sweets and carbohydrates, weight gain, and physical problems, such as headaches. Symptoms tend to come back and then improve at about the same time each year.

Treatment may include exposure to sunlight or light therapy. As little as 15 to 30 minutes may be effective, especially early in the day. Psychotherapy to identify stressful situations and prescription medicines to correct chemical imbalances may be suggested.

There are things you can do yourself. Set realistic goals, try to be with other people, get regular exercise, and eat healthy, well balanced meals. Expect your mood to get better slowly. Feeling better takes time. Focus on the positive. Seek help from a mental health professional.

Wendy Siedlecki RN, Faith Community Nurse

## ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Another year has begun and the Admin Committee is already working on our new projects. Though we have some things left over from 2017, we are considering several projects that need to be done as soon as possible in the new year.

Due to the new roof that became a priority last year, some things had to wait and the time has come for us to bring them up again for discussion. Hutchinson Hall has been on our list for several years and has been put aside for various reasons, but now must move to the forefront. Though we have kept the

outside of the building in good repair, we have much to do on the inside.

We now have two AA groups and two Girl Scout Troops meeting regularly in the building and it is in need of a total remodeling. For some time we have known that the bathrooms were in need of a total make over. Everything in the bathrooms is at least 60 years old and pretty much worn out. The floors will have to be replaced as will the toilets and sinks. The ceilings need to be lowered and, of course, the walls will have to be repainted.

As you can see, we are talking about a complete remodeling of the bathrooms. Of course, that is only the beginning of the work that needs to be done in Hutchinson Hall. Depending on the future use of the building, we will have to do much more in the

## IS MY NEW WILL IN CYBERSPACE?

**The holidays.** This brings to mind family, festivities and food.

**The new year.** This brings to mind the upcoming tax season, and changes to wills or trusts following the holidays.

Over the many years of my law practice, I have seen certain trends. The most prevalent one is the client who calls the first week of January and says, "My son (or daughter) got into an argument with my third wife at Christmas dinner

rest of the building to make it more serviceable and comfortable for those who use it.

Our other work goes on: daily we have work to do in the office; repairs and maintenance of the building goes on; paying of bills; answering all the phone calls; and the other activities of any office.

We ask for your prayers as we do this important work for Woodlawn.

The Administration Committee:

Mary Lee King, Chairman;

Janie Hodgson,

Doreen Means;

Dale Baldwin;

Jim Sirmons;

and Mike Baker.

and I want them removed from my will." I had a client, who has since passed, who would call me every January and set up an appointment to amend his trust. This occurred every year for 8 years. It was as if he had done a performance review on his children and second wife during the holidays and was making changes based upon this review.

It has become very easy to prepare your own will or other estate planning documents by using forms from an office supply store or forms obtained on an internet website. The problem is that often these forms are not state specific and without an attorney being present during the

signing of the documents, they may not be executed in conformance with Florida law. As a result, after a person dies, their wishes may or may not be recognized. For instance, if the will is invalidated, then, instead of one child being left out of the will, they may inherit as much as the individual's favorite child.

An even newer way to prepare documents is by way of an electronic will. Although the ability to prepare a will electronically was most recently vetoed by Governor Scott, there are some states which already allow electronic wills. Most attorneys believe that it is only a matter of time before electronic wills will be permitted in Florida.

So, what is an electronic will and why should I care? Like office supply forms, an individual would prepare their own will, and no attorney

would be involved in the preparation or execution of the document. The individual would sign the document online and the "original" would be maintained by the custodian of the document (the company who sold the document to the signor). An annual fee would be paid for the custodian to maintain this document. In the states which already permit electronic wills, the annual fees are no less than \$50 per year. Therefore, a will which might have cost \$250 for an attorney to prepare could

easily cost significantly more than that over the individual's lifetime.

Another issue which is on the horizon is remote notarization. Currently, in the state of Florida, in order for a document to be notarized, the signor and the notary must be in the same room and the signor must provide proof of their identity, such as a driver's license or Florida ID card. In the context of wills or trusts, without a notary being physically present to observe the individual, this may lead to fraud and undue influence.

I know that change is inevitable, however, it is wise to learn about the options concerning preparation or amendment of your estate planning documents. It is important to be able to make an educated decision about preparing a document yourself or engaging a law firm. When people say, "I can do it myself", I caution them as I have above and add, that I would not attempt to perform brain surgery on myself.

(Editor's Note: Mary E. King, Attorney at Law, attended Woodlawn Presbyterian Church as a child. She has been providing legal service at no cost to Woodlawn for some years, as well as currently. Her practice involves: Wills, Trusts, [Estates and IRS Resolution](#). [You can reach her at: 941-906-7585 or \[MKING@KINGLAWPL.COM\]\(mailto:MKING@KINGLAWPL.COM\).](#))

---

## HAVE YOU REMEMBERED

### WEDNESDAYS at WOODLAWN

On January 3rd please join us for dinner and then we are going to take down the Christmas decorations and put them back in storage. There are jobs available for all levels of physical ability. "Many hands make light the work."

## THE CHURCH IN YOUR WILL?