

PHILIP-EYE

THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. PHILIP PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH U.S.A.

Volume 61, Number 3

Houston, Texas

February 7, 2017

Rev. Dr. John W. Wurster
Pastor, Head of Staff

Rev. Keatan King
Associate Pastor

Rev. Dr. Samuel Lanham III
Pastor Emeritus

Omar Rouchon
Ministry Associate

Dr. Randall Swanson
Director of Music

Dr. Matthew Dirst
Organist

Cecy Duarte
Children's Music Associate

Micah Meyers
Art Director

Denise Ferrell
Bookkeeper

Wilbert Parada
Facilities Supervisor

Dimas Parada
Custodian

Lorrie Castle
Office Manager
Newsletter Editor
Philipeye@saintphilip.net

Susan Estill
Editor Emerita

“From Babel to Pentecost: Postmodernism, Christians and Scripture”

A creative thinker, a fresh voice, speaker for the twentieth annual Duerr Lecture Series, **February 26, 27, and 28**, Margaret Aymer is known for her colorful presentation style, full of wisdom and humor. Associate Professor of New Testament at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Dr. Aymer's lectures, “From Babel to Pentecost: Postmodernism, Christians and Scripture,” will look at ways in which postmodernity challenges all Christians and shakes our concretized foundations while calling us to be more faithfully, more deeply, and more passionately engaged both with the Christian scriptures and with the provisional, partial, contextual theologies that arise in Christian communities. Dr. Aymer will preach at both services on Sunday morning, “Rise Up and Fear Not,” Matthew 17:1-9.

Ordained in 2004 by Greater Atlanta Presbytery, Margaret Aymer received the B.A. degree in U.S. History at Harvard University, and the M.Div. and Ph.D. in New Testament and Early Christianity at Union Theological Seminary in New York. In addition she has been awarded the Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa*, by Hood Theological Seminary, Salisbury, NC, (2013) and Doctor of Divinity, *honoris causa*, by Coe College, Cedar Rapids, IA, 2006. Prior to joining the faculty at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary Dr. Aymer was Associate Professor of New Testament at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, GA, from 2004 - 2015. Books published include *James: Diaspora Rhetorics of a Friend of God*, Phoenix Guides to the New Testament, Sheffield Phoenix, 2015, and *First Pure, Then Peaceable: Frederick Douglass, Darkness and the Epistle of James*, Library of New Testament Studies, London, T & T Clark, 2008. In addition to numerous other publications, Dr. Aymer has authored lectionary commentaries for Feasting on the Word, and the award winning *Confessing the Beatitudes*, Horizons Bible Study, 2011. In demand as speaker and preacher, she has presented lectures for The Covenant Network of the Presbyterian Church National Gathering at St. Philip in 2010, and served as Baccalaureate Preacher at Agnes Scott College, Decatur, GA, in 2015. In her leisure time, Dr. Aymer enjoys using her impressive vocal range to sing with the APTS jazz group that call themselves “Faculty Meeting,” joined by her saxophone-playing husband, and other faculty members. She says, “I think doing creative, non-academic work is important for academics because it fuels the imagination.”(The REED, Jan. 2017)

Dr. Aymer will be preaching at the 8:30 and 11:00 worship services on Sunday morning, February 26. All lectures begin at 7:00 p.m. Sunday night's lecture will be held in the Fellowship Hall. Lectures on Monday and Tuesday evenings will take place in Room 209, the Choir Rehearsal Room. The sermon and all lectures will be recorded and available in sets of four CDs. Child care is available for each lecture by calling the church office, 713-622-4807.

The lecture series was established in 1998 in memory of Chris Duerr, with the purpose of bringing the best Reformed scholars and preachers to St. Philip and the wider community each year. Duerr was born and raised in Germany, growing up during the years of World War II. He came to the U.S. in 1950 in the first class of Fulbright Scholars from Germany, studying at Michigan State University. He also studied at the University of Hamburg, Germany, where he received the equivalent of a Master's Degree in political economics. He moved permanently to the States in 1968, becoming a naturalized citizen in 1973. He joined St. Philip in 1979 and later served as a ruling elder.

*Duerr
Lecture
Series*

(cont on page 2)

www.saintphilip.net
yelp * @STPhilipHouston
STAY CONNECTED!

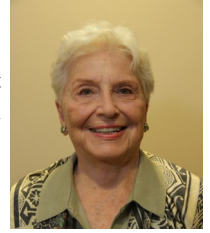
INTRODUCING
THE NEW APP
My ST. PHILIP

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

On January 15 the Session welcomed two new members to the congregation. Please take the time to say hello and welcome them to our church.

SALLY S. ALCORN

Sally S. Alcorn joins St. Philip by letter of transfer from Presbytery of New Covenant (formerly at First Presbyterian Church Houston). Lifelong resident of Houston, Sally attended Lamar High School and graduated from the University of Houston. She is retired and enjoys traveling. Sally indicates that she was drawn to St. Philip by our worship and the ministerial staff. She is the mother of Meredith Alcorn McCarthy.



MEREDITH ALCORN MCCARTHY

Meredith also joins St. Philip by letter of transfer from Presbytery of New Covenant (formerly at First Presbyterian Church Houston).. She grew up in Houston having attended Lee High School and graduated from Southwestern University. She and husband Keith have two grown children named Robert and William. Meredith is a retired Kindergarten teacher and admits to being on the shy side. Meredith enjoys Mah Jongg and traveling. She was drawn to St. Philip by the friendliness of our congregation, our location, and the variety of our programs. She is interested in Missions and Fellowship.

ANNUAL MEETING

The Session has set the annual meeting of the congregation for **February 12** following the 11:00 service. The meeting will be in Fellowship Hall. Items for the docket include a review of 2016, presentation of the 2017 budget, and consideration of changes to the pastors' terms of call. Additionally, the congregation will elect three members to serve a two-year term on the Congregational Nominating Committee (CNC). Those nominated by the current CNC are: Tim Burgess, Bruce Johnson, and Mary Ann Thomas. Additional nominations from the floor are permitted at the meeting with prior consent from those being nominated. The meeting will also include a presentation of possible changes to the church landscape.



DUERR LECTURE SERIES BROWN BAG LUNCH

Men and women are invited to meet with Dr. Margaret Aymer on Monday, **February 27**, at noon in the Dining Room. Please bring a brown bag lunch and enjoy informal conversation with the speaker for the Duerr Lecture Series. Drinks are provided. Bring a friend, all are

welcome, no reservations necessary. Note that there is only one lunch meeting and both men and women are invited.

DUERR LECTURE SERIES (cont)

The Lecture Series was established through generous contributions made in Duerr's memory. While the lectures are free and open to everyone, your gift to ensure the continuation of the series on an annual basis is greatly appreciated. Gifts may be made to the series in honor of or in memory of a friend or loved one. Checks should be made payable to St. Philip, marked "Duerr Lecture Series" and sent to the church office. Contributions may also be made on the St. Philip website: www.saintphilip.net

Come and take part in the lectures for a time of challenging study and spiritual renewal.

CONFIRMATION

The church nurtures those baptized as children and calls them to make public their personal profession of faith and their acceptance of responsibility in the life of the church. Currently we have a group of students who have been partnered with an adult mentor and who have been participating in classes each Sunday, learning about Presbyterian faith and their place in the church. On Easter, **April 16**, after interviews with our session, these students will be confirmed and received into membership of the church. Over the next few newsletters, we would like to introduce you to these students.

Anne Johnson—is the daughter of members Bruce and McNair Johnson. Anne is in the 8th grade at St. John's School, where she plays on the school basketball team. Year-round Anne is part of Houston Express Soccer Club (HESC), a private 501(c)(3) non-profit youth sports club. Through school she went to the Nehemiah Center and worked with the kindergartners. Playing with her dog Ivy is one way she passes time weather permitting. On rainy days you will find her watching a good movie.

In the confirmation classes, they talked about who Presbyterians are; one discussion explained how we bring love and peace and help places and those in need who need that help, Anne said this helped grow her faith. Anne enjoys coming to church and seeing the friendly people here every Sunday.

McNair Johnson: "We are grateful to Keatan and Omar for meeting with the group each week and for the sponsors for making such meaningful connections with each confirmand. Thank you!"

Here is Anne (middle) pictured with Sasha Arlinghaus (left) and Charlotte Murphy (right) during the youth trip to Galveston.



SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOR ALL

ALL SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES BEGIN AT 9:30 A.M.

NURSERY AND PRESCHOOL

8:30 a.m.—12:30 p.m. Infants and children through 4 years old are invited to our Nursery which is staffed by professional childcare providers. Please find our Nursery in Room 106 of the Education Building along the Sunday School Classroom hallway on the first floor. An usher or a greeter will be happy to direct you there.

SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOR ALL AGES

Godly Play (Age 3 to K)—Room 104
 Grades 1, 2, & 3—Room 105 Grades 9-12—Room 205
 Grades 4 & 5—Room 103 Confirmation Class—Room 202
 Grades 6-8—Room 206

Youth Choir/Youth Group meet the second and fourth Sundays of each month. Next gathering is **February 12**.

Youth Choir (Grades 6-12) - 3:30—Choir Room

Youth Group (Grades 6-12) - 4:30—6:30 Youth Room

CHURCH & SOCIETY—Room 201—**February 12** - *Immigrant's Rights and the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas*—The ACLU of Texas is dedicated to reclaiming constitutional and civil rights for all Texans, regardless of immigration status. Immigrants in Texas contribute to our diversity and enrich our economy, but immigrant communities continue to be profiled, harassed, detained, and demonized by extremist politicians and the militarized law enforcement agencies they control. Presented by Edgar Saldivar, Senior Staff Attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas. **February 19** - Mission Sunday at St. Philip - *Mo Moving Beyond the Banks of the Guadalupe*—The mission outreach of Mo Ranch to reach at risk children and youth and to extend summer camping opportunities to Rio Grande Valley children. Presented by Rev. Dick Powell, President and CEO of Mo-Ranch.

BIBLE STUDY – Room 204 – The class is engaged in a study of the book of 1 Samuel which tells of the rise of the kingdom of Israel and the eventual rise of David as their leader, revealing throughout the very human traits of the people involved in the narrative. The Bible study class utilizes the insights of a variety of scholars to expand our understanding of God's message of faithfulness to His people. Nancy Cook and Al Waldrop lead the discussions. All are welcome.

SPa—Room 200 - The SPa (Saint Philip Adults) class is a fellowship of adults from all walks of life who gather for learning and community. It is a conversation/dialogue-based/interactive class. Sharing leadership is easy and fun and, as you probably can tell, we're not a group that is shy about asking questions! We are currently reviewing the revised common lectionary through *Feasting on the Word*. Contact Greg Han at greg@hanmail.me

CHILDREN'S CHAPEL

On the second and fourth Sunday of each month, children in Pre-K through first grade are invited to attend Children's Chapel with Omar Rouchon and a parent-helper following the conversation with children during the 11 o'clock service. In the Children's Chapel, our young disciples learn the whos, whats, wheres, whens and whys of worship, while praying, singing and hearing God's word at an age-appropriate level. Children return to join the congregation in the first few pews on the lectern side

of the church for the last hymn. Please contact Omar Rouchon if you have any questions. The next service is **February 12**.

WEEKDAY CLASSES

MONDAY EVENING STUDY GROUP

Join the discussion in the Dining Room (in the Administration Building, at the south end of campus) **February 13** with St. Philip's Monday evening study group! Besides conversation, our meetings include fellowship, refreshments, and a brief prayer, as we continue our study of *What's the Least I Can Believe and Still Be a Christian?* by Martin Thielen. We will be discussing part 2, "Ten things Christians do need to believe," chapters 11 (Jesus' identity: Who is Jesus?), 12 (Jesus' priority: What matters most?), and 13 (Jesus' grace: Am I accepted?). We meet each second and fourth Monday, from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m. Come even if you haven't done the reading; the discussion is always timely and thought-provoking.

MIDWEEK BIBLE STUDY

John Wurster is leading a study of the Book of Revelation. This final book of the Bible has long puzzled readers with its vivid imagery and apocalyptic themes. Over the coming months, we will read the entire book and piece together its meaning and significance. The class meets at 10:30 a.m. on Wednesday in the Dining Room.

PRESBYTERIAN MEN'S WEEKLY FELLOWSHIP

Join the Men's Weekly Fellowship each Friday. They meet on Fridays in the Conference Room at noon. The book that they are discussing is *What's the Least I Can Believe and Still Be a Christian? A Guide to What Matters Most* by Martin Thielen. Please contact Robert Estill about copies of the book reestill@sbcglobal.net. The men who wish to participate should bring a bag lunch; refreshments will be provided. Men of all ages are welcome to participate in the self-led group. The group wraps up promptly at 1:00 p.m.

MONTHLY BOOK GROUP

A monthly interest group for women who like to read books, socialize, and have a night out meets the second Thursday of each month at 7:00 p.m. at a member's home. Our next meeting is **February 9** at the home of Melissa Aldrich. The book we will be discussing is *The Language of Flowers* by Vanessa Diffenbaugh. We will also talk about book nominations and the 2017 timeline. This self-led, interactive group produces lively discussions and wonderful fellowship. For more information go to: <http://saintphilip.net/BookGroup.html> or Sarah O'Dell at sarah.odell6@gmail.com

PW CIRCLES

- Sunday Circle—3rd Sunday of the month after 11 a.m. service in the Dining Room
- Monday Morning Saints—2nd Monday of the month at 10 a.m. in the Dining Room
- Wednesday Morning Circle—4th Wednesday of the month at 10 a.m. in the Parlor
- Wednesday Evening Circle—1st Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m. in the Dining Room



From Keatan King, Associate Pastor

✦ I remember the first time I stepped into the Kids Against Hunger packing room in action. The merry meal-packers, wrist-deep in buckets of rice and soy, chanted “1-2-3-4” over the din of laughter and Motown classics. Everyone’s uniform was the same: an apron, a hairnet, and a broad smile. How could a room so silly be undertaking a duty so serious, I wondered. They know they are feeding thousands of hungry people in Houston, Texas, right? But then, I put on an apron and a hairnet. I packed my first few meals. And I discovered the smile comes from the infectious

love born of helping a neighbor I may never meet who will eat well.

- ✦ I remember driving into the industrial, monochrome Port of Houston. The blazing Texas sun and merciless Houston humidity bore down on us in a bleak lot. Yet in the midst of the concrete, warehouse-lined landscape stood a humble, hospitable oasis: the Seafarers Center. Once inside, the cool air refreshed us, the scent of a hearty meal enticed us, and the loving embrace of the chaplains welcomed us. All of this goodness is set aside, hallowed for those who work harder than what is fair, regardless of their nationality, creed, race, or tongue.
- ✦ I remember peering into the art studio of Amazing Place in awe. Patient and purposeful was each artist’s brushstroke across canvas. Beyond this room emanating creativity and tranquility, the wall displayed the work of clients. Exquisite paintings revealed the souls of those facing dementia. They could paint any subject in the world, I thought, and they all depict flowers and landscapes and children. The piece of each artist exposed an inner life which declared, “I am here, and I choose beauty.”
- ✦ Many growing seasons have come and gone, the appointed times for sowing and reaping repeat, and still the sight of the verdant, tender stalks of the Community Garden causes me to chuckle. Standing tall and proud amid our retail metropolis, the plants seem to know something the skyscrapers do not: true riches come from sharing the fruits of life to all, at no cost. For me, each tomato grown and happily given away by CCSC is a funny, little joke played on the Galleria.

All of these moments abide in my heart and mind because something of their extraordinary power left a mark on me. Among kale and peppers, in soy and rice, between the canvas and acrylics, through smiles and handshakes, the eyes of my heart saw what I, and all of us, long to behold. Right now, in plain sight, God’s kingdom of peace and justice is shining brightly among our sinful world. The kingdom is coming forth like Jesus said it usually does: in seeds and small treasures and ordinary places. The mission partners of St. Philip are proof that the promises which Christ made are true and can be trusted.

Christ sees community, like our mission partners and the Church itself, as the privileged place he chooses to offer his love, healing, and resurrection power. This is Christ’s promise: “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” This is Christ’s plan: “he sent disciples on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.”

Jesus, through his body and life, his very presence and power freely offered, models a way of life for us to exhibit. Christ calls our community, as his body, to join in that pattern of body and life freely offered. One way we can answer that call is by working with the mission partners that St. Philip supports by freely offering our congregational body and life, our presence and power on Mission Day. I have witnessed in our mission partners’ work the body and life of Christ freely offered, and it has changed my life. My prayer is that every soul at St. Philip might experience the life-changing, hope-giving ministry of our mission partners.

Go online to register: <http://saintphilip.net/MissionDay.html>

Charities that you can learn about and will benefit from St. Philip’s Mission Day.



Lord of the Streets
Episcopal Church



LOOKING TO LENT

- ✦ Ash Wednesday is **March 1**. We will have services at 12 noon and 6:30 p.m.
- ✦ Lenten Wednesday Services begin **March 8** at 12 noon with lunch at 12:30 p.m.
- ✦ A new Sunday morning adult class for Lent begins **March 5**: "Discovering and Delivering Your Spiritual Gifts" led by Susan Lange and John Wurster.

LOST AND FOUND

Have you left something behind after church? Or maybe you found a pair of glasses that were left behind. Here at St. Philip we have learned that this happens more than you may think. Therefore we have designated a drawer in the office mailroom for such articles. This includes: sunglasses, reading glasses, scarves, umbrellas, and various other items. You can access this drawer during business hours and on Sunday. This week we had a gold earring with a hoop and pearl on it.



PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Thursday, **March 9** at Nouveau Antique Bar (2913) Main St. will be the POP's Rodeo Event from 6-9 p.m. This is an event that engages Young Adults, held during the great and exciting Houston Livestock and Rodeo season; this fundraiser invites younger generations to join the POP community. POP's Rodeo incorporates good food, good music, silent auction (always with an item donated by the Houston Texans and tickets to the Houston Livestock Rodeo!), and prizes. Shaun Michael, a rising Houston country artist, will perform. POP's Rodeo also features the presentation of the Young Professionals Award. To purchase tickets got to:

<https://popministry.org/pops-rodeo/>

CANCER SURVIVORS AND CAREGIVERS

Share HOPE with others who are currently fighting cancer. Support an individual with the same diagnosis or make hospital visits. Become a trained CanCare Volunteer and make a difference. CanCare has been offering support to cancer patients and their families for over 25 years.

Our next training is scheduled for **February 10 – 12**. Please go to cancare.org/volunteer to submit an application. For more information contact us at 713-461-0028.



The January Communion offering collected \$1,248 which will be dedicated to the Ministers' Discretionary Fund. The Ministers' Discretionary Fund is a special account available for the pastors to help church members and others in our community with extraordinary financial needs. The people assisted with this fund generally fall outside the bounds of support available through local relief agencies. The uniqueness of this fund permits the pastors to respond to individual situations in a confidential manner, while extending the love and care of St. Philip. The fund is supported by directed gifts from interested individuals, occasional "pay backs" from people who have received assistance, and occasional grants from the mission committee.

THEOLOGY ON TAP

Join persons in their 20s and 30s who engage heart and mind in exploring the mystery of faith through worship, theological conversation, and mission within an inclusive, supportive community that is committed to serving our neighbors with compassion and humility. Next meeting is **February 7** at 6:30 p.m. Bernie's Burger Bus—5407 Bellaire Blvd. 77401.

ST. PHILIP VBS ~ LENT 2017



VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

FEBRUARY 25TH
 { SATURDAY ~ 9AM TO 2PM }

[FOR MORE INFO & TO REGISTER]
VISIT: SAINTPHILIP.NET

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

January 2017

Called Session Meeting – January 15

- Session received into membership:
 - ✦ Sally S. Alcorn by letter of transfer from Presbytery of New Covenant (previously at First Presbyterian Church, Houston)
 - ✦ Meredith Alcorn McCarthy by letter of transfer from Presbytery of New Covenant (previously at First Presbyterian Church, Houston)
- Session authorized celebrating Communion at the wedding of Clara Reed and Nathan Lee on January 21, 2017.
- Session appointed Roderick James as the Session representative to the Central Mission Endowment Council for 2017.
- Session approved Communion offerings for February (Souper Bowl of Caring) and March (One Great Hour of Sharing).

Stated Session Meeting – January 31

- Session approved the transfer of membership letters of Charles and Carol Lucas to Parkway Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX.
- Session approved the removal of Diana Herzog and William (Bill) Herzog from the St. Philip membership roll upon her request.
- Session approved the 2016 St. Philip Annual Statistical Report for submission to the Presbytery of New Covenant and to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of the General Assembly.
- Session approved the 2017 budget of \$1,505,100 that was proposed by the Budget Council.
- Session approved having Mission Committee allocate and spend up to 80% of its 2017 operating budget, with the remaining 20% subject to Session review and decision later in the year when it can be determined if the overall St. Philip operating budget balances for 2017.
- Session renewed the policy of putting a collection basket out at various fellowship events to help reimburse the cost of catering and pay for food, drinks, decorations, and supplies for the events for the 2017 year.
- Session approved supporting Mission Day on February 19 by covering the expenses (not to exceed \$500) of various mission partners.
- Session approved 2016 fourth quarter transfers to Reserve for Replacement totaling \$18,316.59.
- Session approved holding only one service of worship on Sunday, February 19, 2017, at 11:00 a.m.
- Session acted to invite the Rev. Margaret Aymer to preach at both the 8:30 a.m. and the 11:00 a.m. services of worship on February 26, 2017.

Committee Actions:

- Fellowship Committee has decided to combine the Mardi Gras Luncheon with the Annual Congregational Meeting Lunch as to avoid having two lunches back-to-back during February.
- Personnel Committee sponsored the recognition of Matthew Dirst's twenty years of service to St. Philip on Sunday, January 29.
- Property Committee has approved a building use requests to 1) German School for Mon., Wed. 10 to 11:30 a.m. for two rooms, for a term of ten weeks beginning January 15; and to 2) Spearheads AA group for Wednesdays, 6:30-7:30 p.m., Room 16.
- Property Committee has rescinded the previous bid approvals related to repairs due to surge damage and approved the bids by HiFiDoc for repairs to the sound system for an amount not to exceed \$3,000, and for surge protectors and installation for an amount not to exceed \$1,800.
- Property Committee has authorized trimming of two trees on the west side of the old education building, and approved grout repair on that building.

IN OUR PRAYERS

Cynthia Shoup—recovering at TIRR	Marian Murphree – moved to hospice care
Margaretta Bolding – moved to The Treemont for rehab	Bette Shumake – recovering well at Buckingham
Barbara Rathgeber – receiving dialysis	Jan Conner – recovering from a broken neck at Seven Acres
Barbara Cloninger – Hospice care at Home Sweet Home in Katy	
Rev. Doug Ensigner—former Central PC pastor—having back surgery Wednesday	
Tim Burgess' grandmother—Melvona Friichtenicht recovering from a broken hip	
Jack Wetmore – friend of Wayne and Sandra Truxillo, is receiving treatment	

Recuperating at Home: Joe Ann Berwick, Larry Dean, Susan Estill, Helen Harris, Malcolm Host, T.E. “Joe” Keever, Peg Palisin, Alice Pennington, Penny Vieau, Ruth Weber, Jean Stanley, Sondra Sullivan



AN INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW DIRST

by Deborah Burks

In February 2017, Matthew Dirst will have served St. Philip for 20 years as Organist, Choir Accompanist, and, for several significant periods, as Interim Choir Director. In anticipation of this milestone and our celebration of it on Sunday, January 29, I sat down with Matthew and asked him to share a bit about his background and education, his teaching and performance work, and his experiences here at St. Philip.

Matthew grew up in Aurora, Illinois in a musical home: his mother served as organist in a Lutheran church and later moved to an Episcopal congregation, where she continues to play. Matthew attended the University of Illinois as a music major with emphases in piano and organ. He then earned dual Masters degrees at SMU: an M.M. in organ and a Masters of Sacred Music. A Fulbright scholarship took him to study in Paris, where he won the *prix de virtuosité* in both organ and harpsichord. When he returned to the U.S., it was to complete a Ph.D. in Musicology at Stanford, after which he was snapped up by the University of Houston's Moores School of Music.

In your college and graduate years, what shaped your trajectory towards professional musicianship? Good teachers and mentors, and the support of scholarships given by people who valued music and musical education.

Why the Baroque? And when did you begin focusing on it? It was a happy accident. I'd always been interested in that music. I had the opportunity, starting with my Masters degree, to study the harpsichord seriously, and especially in Paris during my Fulbright years there, and then I had a great teacher on the west coast, who was at UC Berkeley when I was at Stanford, so it kind of happened because I was at the right places at the right time. I took to the instrument and to that repertoire, and it was a good fit! With that music, I feel that I have something strong that I can say, in the way I might shape it or present it. I'm not sure I have anything strong to say about a Beethoven symphony. I enjoy hearing them, but I have no desire to conduct one.

You are not only a musician, but also a teacher and scholar of music history... How did you end up in university teaching? I got lucky and got a job! When I was living in Paris, I faced the choice: do I stay here and make a living as a freelance musician because I enjoyed that, but the thought of trying to actually make a career out of it long term... It's tough to stitch together a career from part-time and freelance work. I knew that I didn't necessarily want fulltime church work, because that didn't seem to be my calling. I love part-time church work. To be involved in the community, for me, is great, but my heart was in doing something else as well. So I decided to go back to graduate school and get a PhD and look for a music history job, and luckily I got one at UH. I sent off the materials the day after I turned in my dissertation. And miraculously it worked!

Tell us about your book, *Engaging Bach: The Keyboard Legacy from Marpurg to Mendelssohn* (Cambridge University Press, 2012). It's a story of Bach's legacy and how it is centered largely around the legacy of his keyboard music during the century after his death--that is how his memory was kept alive and how the traditions of his way of writing music and of teaching it survived several generations through his sons and students and on into more famous names like Mozart, Mendelssohn and others into the 19th century.

How did *Ars Lyrica* come into being and when? A couple of key people arrived in Houston around the same time I did: Barrett Sills, our cellist, who's the principal of the Houston Grand Opera and Ballet orchestras, a couple of violinists, and some singers. We started to play together under that name in 1998, and when I got tenure at UH we decided to go through the incorporation process. That happened in 2003-2004. Since then we've slowly grown and hired some staff, and now we have a series downtown. So it was one step at a time.

What is required when you put together a season for *Ars Lyrica*? Sometimes those programs are straightforward to pull together if the music is published and we can get hold of it. Sometimes it requires making editions, which is a lot more time consuming, or stitching together some kind of narrative out of a lot of short pieces, which is complicated. It's easier to just decide, 'Let's do Handel's Messiah. Boom!' Then we have this big, chunky piece, and we get the scores out and just do it. Sometimes we do something like that, but more often we do a series of shorter pieces that have to be artfully connected.

How do you find the little-performed, rarely-heard pieces that make *Ars Lyrica*'s programs so notable? I'm always curious. I go to a lot of festivals, both in the United States and Europe. I like unusual things. If someone's doing an 18th century opera by a composer I've never heard of, I'll go! See what it's like. I've always had great curiosity about that particular period--really all of music history, for that matter--I was blown over by a performance of Shostakovich's *The Nose* at the Met several seasons ago, which I thought was an amazing experience. It had art direction by William Kentridge and it was really gorgeous. But, you know, those kinds of unusual things have always been more interesting for me than going to see *Bohème* one more time. And then the fact that I am both a musician and a musicologist means I have the research skills to find things and a good library at my disposal, so I spend a lot of time looking at stuff.

Does that mean you also go and sit in archives, sifting through the remaining papers of various composers? Sometimes! I've made a few editions myself. I've also used editions by other people. Sometimes people are not willing to share, but many of us in the early music community, especially, *try* to share with each other as much as possible. In fact, I just shared a set of parts yesterday for

a little Charpentier chamber opera we did two seasons ago with somebody in Chicago.

How did you come to St. Philip? That was due to Charles Hausmann's efforts. He was the long-time choir director here and my colleague at UH. He alerted me that St P's organist Joby Bell was leaving the position about halfway through my first year in Houston. I wasn't necessarily looking for a church job because I was still getting grounded in Houston and figuring out how to teach and how to balance all parts of that job. But because I knew and admired Charles, I came over one Sunday and liked it, and liked the people... and I've been here ever since! Twenty years. Hard to believe! But I could sense even then that this was a place, which, if I were to stay in Houston long-term, would be a great church home. And when it became apparent that a renovation was in the works and would entail an organ, it became that much more interesting to stick around and make something good happen.

What role did you play in bringing that organ to the church? I was part of the committee from the start. The case for a new instrument was helped along by an organ that was failing and whose failings were obvious to the congregation, so I didn't have to do much convincing! It was perfectly clear that the organ needed to go. So when the renovation plans became serious, we formed an organ committee and it became part of the project. It was a several-year process . . . six or seven years, start to finish.

We looked really closely at three different builders, and I would have been happy with any of the three of them, to be honest. It just happens that Paul Fritz gave us the most compelling proposal, which we thought made the most sense for our particular space.

So what are the key features of our Fritz organ? It's a wonderfully versatile instrument. Its primary voice is Northern European 17th/18th century, but it plays a huge range of literature, well outside those time frames. Paul put enough variety into the instrument, a swell mechanism, for example, so you have an expression box for 19th and 20th century music when you need it, and all sorts of 'bells and whistles'--pistons and combination actions--so that it's a fully modern instrument. It can play virtually everything you throw at it. So the key to this instrument is the sounds it can make--a lot of different sounds. For the size room this is, we needed an instrument that was capable of filling it because it is a big space in terms of cubic volume. The second feature of our Fritz organ is its visual aspect: he builds beautiful cases--in our case, one that harmonized beautifully with the church. It completes the room in a really nice way.

Is there a perfect piece of music for this organ? There are *dozens* of perfect pieces. It plays everything really well.

When was the harpsichord purchased for St P? It's been here since 2012. John Philips of Berkeley, CA made it. His instruments are extremely well made, and they sound beautiful. I also own an instrument of his, we have two at UH, and there's another in Houston, owned by a former member of the Ars Lyrica board.

Each of Philips' instruments has a different character: French harpsichords, German, Italian, Spanish, English--they were all different in the 17th and 18th centuries. There was no such thing as a 'standard issue, Steinway Black, Model D' for harpsichords; each country had their own different ideas and their own sounds, so harpsichords are 'disposed' differently, that is to say, they might have different numbers of keyboards, different numbers of notes, in terms of the actual range of an instrument from top to bottom. The strings might be made out of brass, or steel, or some combination thereof. The string lengths might be hugely various from one instrument to another. The basic shape of the box might be different--longer, shorter, deeper, fatter, heavier, lighter. All those things affect the sound of the instrument rather dramatically, so all these instruments have their own particular voice and sound quality.

The one at St. Philip is modeled after a Flemish instrument from the late 18th century, fairly late in the development of the harpsichord. It's a versatile instrument with two choirs of eight-foot unison strings. It's a practical instrument in that it is small enough that we can cart it around from the choir room to the sanctuary and it's not too big to carry. One of my requirements for this instrument was that it fit into both elevators. It is voiced very generously: it is full enough to be heard throughout the sanctuary and yet is intimate enough that it is perfectly fine in a room that only seats twenty people. That is the beauty of that mechanism and its means of producing sound--it's kind of magic!--and we also have a very good room, which helps the sound carry.

You have not only served St P as organist, but at various times, you've stepped in as interim choir director. (We have enjoyed that!) Do you enjoy that role? What is the tradeoff of challenge vs reward when conducting rather than playing/accompanying? I *have* enjoyed it. It's a different role. You're able to shape the music in both cases, but in different ways. I enjoy conducting. If I could be awake 24 hours a day, I might do more of it! You have to make choices in life and these are the choices that I've made, but I've enjoyed the times that I've spent in front of the choir. It's a very gratifying job to have such a lively, interesting group of people singing for you, and this choir really takes its mission seriously. They sing beautifully when they are well taught and inspired to do so. It's been a great pleasure for me to be able to step in, but it's also been great when the new director of music has arrived and I could step back to my more accustomed role and get on with life in other spheres, because it does require dedicating more hours to what is going on at St. Philip. Luckily, during the times when I've needed to step in, I've had the schedule flexibility to do that.

When I was in the choir and you were directing, it seemed to me that you approached our rehearsal time and our music from a worship perspective (not every director or church musician does). Could you speak to the spiritual aspect of church music? That is the central component, really, of any church choir, certainly. It needs to be a central focus for anyone who is serious about



being a church music professional, whether they are full- or part-time. That is the whole purpose: it is to lead people in spiritual growth and spiritual nourishment. That's what it's for. It is not just to hear pretty things sailing down from the choir loft. It is to lead you on a journey. I regard it as analogous to what goes on in the concert hall: we're not just up there to impress people, we're up there to somehow get inside their lives, to hopefully make them better people, to invite them to listen in a new way, to think about the world in a new way. That strikes me as a spiritual journey--as church is.

You are also very good with words! I always enjoy your music notes. What is your aim when you construct those? Whether it be a choral piece or an organ piece or something else, I try to put it into context--maybe historical, maybe geographical. To, in other words, give the audience a hook so the experience can be a little more meaningful. I don't tend to load up those notes either for Ars Lyrica or St. Philip with too many technical descriptions; they need to be of a general nature, but I find the task of writing for a general audience to be quite interesting. It's analogous to the musician's task--and this is a point I try to make to my students at UH--we spend hours and hours in a practice room, trying to find how we will shape a musical phrase, and we need to take the same care with the words we use, to find exactly the right words to describe something, words that are completely telling and communicate to people what they need. As opposed to any old random words will do! We may talk like that, but we shouldn't write like that. If you can't serve as an effective advocate for your art, you aren't going to draw very many people into it.

Has there always been good support for music at St P? Yes! It's always been very healthy. This is also a congregation that is blessedly free of serious disagreement about the function of music in church, and I've always appreciated that because there are so many congregations where that is a constant bone of contention.

What composer or piece elicits the most congregation response when played in worship? Anything loud and fast! Get people's blood moving, and they respond. It's harder to get response with a quiet, contemplative piece unless it manages to strike a familiar chord somehow either with a melody to latch onto or with a sonority that is unusual or telling.

Is there a piece that you particularly thrill to play on our organ? Oh, there are hundreds of pieces that I just thrill to play. My usual answer to 'what's your favorite piece of music?' is 'whichever piece I have in front of me at the moment.'



What composers do we not hear often at St. Philip and why? The ones we haven't explored with a whole lot of regularity tend to fall at the extreme chronological ends of the scale or maybe the extreme national tradition ends of the scale. So, for instance, we haven't done a whole lot of Monteverdi here or Palestrina or Tallis or Byrd. The occasional piece, but that's it. Chorally, we haven't done much Messiaen or Stravinsky or thorny contemporary compositions, just because those are difficult, and the stuff that's really old requires a great deal of technical expertise in those kinds of old performance practices. That said, this program has covered an enormous amount of ground over the twenty years that I've been here. One of the things that I like about the music program at St. Philip is that we are really pretty catholic in our musical tastes: it might be spirituals one week and Gregorian chant the next. Gregorian chant sounds wonderful in our space--we sing a number of Gregorian chant hymn tunes that are Anglicised, but have Gregorian melodies.

When you aren't listening to or playing early music, what do you listen to or go to hear? I depend on good friends and often my partner Sixto to take me to things that wouldn't occur to me otherwise, but we have a blast! Sixto's field is not music, as such. His specialty as a curator was contemporary performance art and dance, but now he's working in public policy and the arts. He is a good source of knowing what is going on, where. His tastes are much more attuned to the pop aesthetic than mine are;

I tend not to pay much attention to it, but occasionally, he'll kind of poke my nose in the right direction and I'll realize that 'Oh, yeah, that's kind of cool!' More and more in the car, I enjoy the randomness of turning on different stations and just seeing what I get. For me, that's a lot of fun--to learn new things.

That plus, several years ago when Ars Lyrica was nominated for a Grammy award, we went to the Grammy ceremony, and so we got to be very close to the front row for the tv show. We were close enough to almost reach out and touch the performers, which included all sorts of people from Mick Jagger to Barbra Streisand, and that was a thrill. It was wonderful to watch up close.

What else do you do for fun? Cook, eat, watch movies, relax with a good book, sit in front of the tv, travel.

What's on your bucket list, travel-wise? Well, we just went to Spain. That had been on my bucket list for a while. Neither of us had been, so we went to Madrid and Barcelona before Christmas, which was great. It was cold and rainy in Madrid, so kind of grim, but it didn't matter! There were bright Christmas lights everywhere; it was beautifully decorated in the center of the city, and the museums were astonishing, so was the food. Portugal is on the list, and maybe Seville. I've spent a lot of time in Mexico, but have never been to South America: I'd love to go sometime. Never been to Alaska and would love to go sometime. I went to Hawaii for the first time several years ago, which was great fun and I'm eager to go back. Australia we've done, but have never been anywhere in Asia.

The musical equivalent of the desert island book question: if you could only ever hear one more piece of music in your life... what would that piece be? I don't think I would *want* to hear one more piece. I don't want to be left with just one piece in my ears because it would be an earworm I could never get rid of! That would drive me crazy.

Can you recommend any Houston 'gems'? I don't know that I can limit it to just one or two... there are so many great museums, for instance. The Menil is one of my favorite places. And there is always something new in this town; that's one of the exciting things about living here.

What have been the high points of your years in Houston? Oh, gosh. The arrival of the organ here would rate right up there. Other important things: tenure and promotion at UH (the guarantee of job security is a nice thing); buying a house for the first time; making a home with Sixto. All of those things would rate highly.

Editor's note: If you wish to make a contribution in Matthew's honor to mark this occasion, you might consider directing your gifts to one of the following: 1) St. Philip's Music Endowment; 2) Ars Lyrica (Ars Lyrica has a box in the church office) <http://www.arslyricahouston.org> ; 3) the Bach Organ Scholars program at the Moores School of Music (contact: Julie Anderson gdander4@central.uh.edu)

MUSIC AT ST. PHILIP
CONCERT SERIES



2016
2017
SEASON

Music of Telemann

Houston Baroque

Patrick Parker with sopranos Julia Fox & Megan Stapleton

All are welcome (kids too!).

FREE DONATIONS ACCEPTED

7:00 pm | Saturday
February 11

Artistic Director Patrick Parker leads Houston Baroque in the fourth program of its third season – *Landmarks* – presented through the Music at St. Philip Concert Series. The program features music of the late Baroque Hamburg-based composer **Georg Philipp Telemann** (1681-1767) in two sacred cantatas, works for solo violin and solo flute, and chorale preludes featuring the world-reknowned St. Philip organ by Paul Fritts. Telemann's music is cosmopolitan, blending German, French, and Italian styles. This foreign influence is showcased in two duets by Carissimi (the motet *Vanitas Vanitatum*) and Couperin (the third of his *Trois Leçons de Ténèbres*) for two sopranos and continuo. Formed in 2014, Houston Baroque features professional period instrumentalists and singers. The group has performed chamber vocal and instrumental music of the major Baroque composers in over thirty concerts throughout Texas. In January 2017, Houston Baroque released its debut album – *My Soul Sees and Hears!* (RAVEN OAR-988) – featuring arias, cantatas, and solo organ works by Buxtehude and Handel. For more information, visit www.houstonbaroque.org.

St. Philip Presbyterian Church ♦ 4807 San Felipe Street ♦ Houston, Texas