

The AGAPE News

March 2008

Vol. 3, No. 3

The Sadness

I remember as a kid being sad when I realized that the church didn't always mean what it says about loving everyone. On Sundays, the preacher talked about justice for everyone but, for many people, that justice did not include civil rights for black people or equal rights for women. Realizing the gulf between the vision of the gospel and the practices of the church made me very sad.

I remembered that same sadness this week when I read a church court ruling that slams the door in the face of gay and lesbian Christians seeking ordination. A high church court for the Presbyterian denomination ruled that local Presbyterians no longer have the right to even consider a gay or lesbian person for ordination. The Church is the only group I know that can slam a door that is already closed.

I'm sure the people on the judicial committee did not intend to be cruel. They were just doing their job. There is a principle in secular courts that says to follow the narrower of two interpretations of a law. In secular law, that principle leads to clarity, but, in church courts, that practice is a bullet train to fundamentalism. Each ruling will be less and less charitable. Each ruling will be based less and less on the universal principles of Christ and more and more on some cold disembodied interpretation of the law. It is almost as if some people think the Scribes and Pharisees who fought against Jesus were presented as role models to be followed.

It is an ancient human error to believe that we are more righteous when we become more inflexible on ethical matters. In a perfect world we would not need divorce, or prison, or abortion, or the church for that matter. The world would spin on greased grooves and every yard would mow itself. It would be easy if we could just choose between good and evil. But most of our choices in the real world are ambiguous. We are making the best of imperfect scenarios. To become rigid and rule-centered is a far cry from becoming more authentic and principle-centered.

Jesus taught that religion is made for people, not people for religion. Rules are not ends in themselves, they are meant to enrich human life. If they do not help us become fully human then they are inadequate. The fulfillment of the law is not found in mere obedience, but in fullness of life.

I want to go on record as saying that I will never obey or cooperate with this mechanical cruelty. The Spirit of God dwells in the people not in the hierarchy of any church. As a Protestant, I have a responsibility before God not to turn over my conscience to any hierarchy or group. If the Holocaust taught us anything it should be that none of us has the right to surrender our conscience to a system. We are each responsible at every moment for how we treat others.

Love, Jim

Spirituality and Activism Conference - March 28-29
Sustainability: Food, Environment, Economics

Friday, March 28, ♦ 7 pm

"The Real Dirt on Farmer John" An entertaining grassroots story of how one farmer went organic. The film was screened in January at the Alamo Drafthouse. Discussion following. Free.

Saturday, March 29

♦ 11:30 am registration \$10 donation

♦ 12 noon

Opening Presentation: "*The Science and Politics of a Sustainable Future*" by Justin Podur, York University professor of environmental studies.

♦ 1 – 5:30 pm

SOS, Envision Central Texas, Livable Cities, Sustainable Food Center amongst others will lead workshops through the day.



Notes from Your Congregational Nurse

Donna Rutherford, RN

Dear Church Family and Friends,

More and more we are hearing about heart disease and the differences in how men and women experience a heart attack. This month, I would like to focus on a few of these differences.

Most people when asked what the classic symptom of a heart attack is would respond “a gripping, vise like chest pain radiating down the left side to the arm,” sort of like really bad indigestion. For men, this is often the response. They may also experience nausea, lightheadedness, shortness of breath and have a cold sweat.

For women, many report feeling no chest pain. If they do experience pain, they might describe it as heartburn in the middle of their back. They may also have jaw or shoulder pain, feel nauseous, short of breath and feel very fatigued.

Cardiologists are now looking at women differently. Many women are symptomatic of a heart attack several months before the actual incident. Extreme fatigue, sleep disturbances, shortness of breath, indigestion and feeling anxious are some of the signs that have been noted prior to the actual attack. These symptoms are often not recognized as a heart attack and medical care is delayed. Because of this delay, the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute states that only one-third of women who have a heart attack make a complete recovery. For those who don't recover, 50% will likely die in the first year after a heart attack.

What can you do if you think you or someone close to you is having a heart attack?

- Call 911 immediately! Emergency workers are trained to care for you. Never attempt to reach the hospital on your own. Minutes count.
- Chew a regular aspirin immediately (325 mgm) or four 81 mgm aspirin (if not allergic) to reduce damage to your heart. Always keep aspirin in your home.
- Don't wait to see if your symptoms get worse or go away. Heart attacks need prompt attention. Immediate attention during the “Golden Hour” can help to reduce long term damage to the heart.

On the Health Ministry bulletin board this month you will find more info about heart attacks and strokes and what you can do to prevent them.

This season of Lent invites all of us to surrender old habits and behaviors that may not be healthy. This season of Lent can also remind us to look to our all-loving God for strength, courage and hope and to feel that we are never alone in our journey for good health.

Love and Blessings,
Donna



Thank you for your expressions of sympathy at the death of my mother, Louise Baumann, who died on January 25, She never recovered from the surgery after falling and breaking her hip two weeks prior. She was 18 days shy of her 92nd birthday.

Love, Diane Toussaint

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Published monthly by
**St. Andrew's
Presbyterian Church**

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AGAPE Ministry Team Meetings - 2nd Tuesday, March 11 at 7 p.m.

Join one of the **AGAPE** teams and see how the work of the church is done. All are welcome.

A - Artist Individually we each need to find the source of our own creativity whether it is singing, cooking or just appreciating the beauty in nature. When we come together, this need is met by worship, our music program, spiritual development, resting and playing.

G - Guardian Each of us must learn how to care for the roots of our community. At the community level we talk about leadership development, taking care of our building and grounds, sharing our resources and using them wisely.

A - Ambassador Each of us has a responsibility to take the message of love out into the world in our own way. Our Mission and Social Justice issues fall under this category.

P - Pastor We take God's love to the church community-by welcoming all; identifying and meeting personal concerns in times of need; and educating and fostering community. To empower our physical, emotional and mental well-being and prevent unnecessary suffering, we offer educational information programs, and groups

E - Educator We invite our members to establish a lifelong habit of learning and sharing that learning with others, particularly our youth.

Session Summary

Your session has had another meeting packed with a lot of items that impact the life of our community. Vacation Bible School is fast approaching and you will be hearing a lot more from the Educator Team about the jobs that need to be filled in order to have another successful and meaningful experience for our children and youth this summer. So be watching for more news from them and speak to any member of session or that team about how you would like to be involved. It's a great opportunity to get to know the younger members of our church family.

Our proposed budget was reviewed and will be finalized next meeting. We are still waiting for everyone who wishes to pledge to get their cards to the church office. So there is still time to do that if you haven't scratched that item off your "to do" list yet. We are also looking to have an audit completed this year of our financial record keeping.

Be sure to notice the new blinds in the foyer and the sanctuary. They look good and seem very functional for our needs in those spaces. Many thanks to Barry Becker and the whole Guardian Team for this addition to our physical plant. Your Guardian Team has been very busy for quite a while now making improvements we all can appreciate and enjoy.

Our staff and Parish Nurse remain very busy with all the jobs that help to make St. Andrew's the caring, loving community it is. There have been weddings and funerals and sick folks to visit in hospitals and nursing homes as well as hungry folks to feed just to name a few of the many things they do on our behalf every week.

Presbytery will be meeting in Austin on March 7 and 8 at Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church. Anyone can attend a presbytery meeting as a visitor. Our commissioners to the meeting will be Ryan Ruta and Wayne Rogers but they would welcome anyone else who might want to attend part or all of the meeting.

You will be hearing more about many other things in the days and weeks ahead. Among them is a seder celebration in April for Passover which will be led by our friends from Poemia. There will also be another CPR class in April. The Activism and Spirituality Conference is coming soon too. Hopefully we can offer something of interests for all our church family.

Submitted by Babs Miller, Clerk of Session

Ambassador Team



“The God Strategy: Faith as a Political Weapon” a talk by David Domke, Professor of Communication, University of Washington, will be presented

at St. Andrew's on March 2 at 12:30 pm.

Religion has long been a significant part of American politics. For much of this history, the confluence of faith and politics has been a largely symbolic practice, without distinctly partisan motivations. But something has changed in recent decades. On issue after issue, U.S. public debate today includes — and often is dominated by — faith-based perspectives espoused by politically adept individuals and organizations. This lecture will examine how and why this occurred and what it means for democracy.

David Domke is a professor in the Department of Communication and head of journalism at the University of Washington. His research and teaching focus on how political leaders strategically craft their public communications and also how news media cover these messages. Domke, a former journalist, is the author of God Willing? Political Fundamentalism in the White House, the War on Terror and the Echoing Press (London: Pluto Press, 2004). His new book, The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon in America, was coauthored with Kevin Coe of the University of Illinois and was published in Jan. 2008 by Oxford University Press.



The Spiritual Activist Study Group meets on the second and fourth Mondays at 7:15.

Currently we are focusing on study materials that can be accessed online at www.TransformationTeam.net. Visitors welcome



The League of Women Voters guide is available online at

http://www.lwvaustin.org/votersguide/votersguide_mar2008.pdf.



Green Ideas for 2008

Reduce use of petroleum products, including plastics and Styrofoam. Reducing the amount of plastic and Styrofoam used is something that every consumer can do. Plastic and Styrofoam are derived from petroleum. They do not decompose, create a staggering amount of litter, and are a hazard to fish, birds and other wildlife. While cheap at the retail level, their environmental costs are extremely high.

St. Andrew's is now using paper cups rather than Styrofoam, and most of our coffee drinkers choose a ceramic mug from the kitchen. When we need to use disposable plates, we choose paper over Styrofoam.

Making bottles to meet Americans' demand for bottled water required more than 17 million barrels of oil last year – enough to fuel more than 1 million U.S. cars for a year - and generated more than 2.5 million tons of carbon dioxide.

We can start paying attention to the packaging of the products we buy. Convenience foods are frequently packaged in plastic trays that are not accepted for recycling. Carry out containers are often Styrofoam. Each of us can make choices that are reasonable for our circumstances that reduce our use of plastic and Styrofoam.



Would you like to brew Equal Exchange Fair Trade Coffee in your own home? St. Andrew's is serving the Café Salvador. Several varieties are available in whole bean or drip grind, with or without caffeine, many organic; all are gourmet coffees. Shop online at <http://eeretail.stores.yahoo.net/coffee.html>.

Equal Exchange is a fair trade organization that helps farmers in Latin America, Africa and Asia earn a fairer share of income, obtain access to credit and technical support, and gain a trading partner they can trust. 100% of Equal Exchange products are fairly traded, benefiting 39 small farmer cooperatives in 19 countries around the world.



Artist Team Glimpses

I recently watched a television documentary about scientists studying the deepest trenches of the oceans. As expected, they found incredible geological and geothermal conditions unlike any we see on the surface of the Earth. To their amazement, they also found these places teeming with life. They found a lake of heavy brine lying on the bottom of the ocean, with multiple species living in the brine and around the edges. Nearby, they found huge vents where water and lava were forced up from under the crust. The water was highly acidic and its temperature was far above what we surface dwellers consider the boiling point. Despite the absence of sunlight, oxygen, or clean water, a multitude of simple but beautiful living creatures thrived there.

It struck me that this could be a glimpse far back in time to the origins of life on this planet. It also occurred to me that this could be a glimpse into the distant future, when our atmosphere neither protects us from the sun nor provides a steady source of oxygen, and when water of the purity that we need is no longer abundant. When these conditions dominate the surface of the Earth, humans will no doubt be long gone, but life will continue. This illustrated to me that the force that creates life is the most dynamic, changing, and adapting thing in the universe, and is simultaneously the most permanent thing. This is the thing we call YHWH, the thing we try to tap into through meditation and prayer, the thing of which poets write, the thing painters paint, the thing about which the caged bird sings.

We can never fully understand this thing, but we can occasionally get little glimpses of it. The Artist team encourages all of you to share your glimpses, in whatever form they might be. Please contact Kathy Galloway (katgal@austin.rr.com) or Matt Hiland (matt_hiland@hotmail.com) with your ideas and we will do our best to help them come to fruition.

Matt Hiland, Artist Team

Pastoral Care Team



We celebrate with Tres and Maia Churchill at the birth of their second child, Noah, on Dec. 30, 2007. He is the baby brother of Elijah.



The Shawl Ministry meets on the 2nd Thursday of the month at 7:00 pm. You don't have to attend the meetings to knit, crochet or sew the shawls or baby blankets but you'll miss out on the fun we all have getting together. Don't forget, you can donate yarn (or money to purchase more) and be a part of the ministry even if you don't know how to knit or crochet.



Insight Meditation

Weekly meditation sessions are held every Thursday, 7 - 8 pm at the church. Insight Meditation, which is practiced at these sessions, is a centering technique to quiet the mind and emotions by focusing on the breath and the body sensations. Special instruction for beginners will be provided prior to the session at 6:30 pm (For more information, please pick up an "Insight Meditation" brochure in the foyer.)



Walking the Mourner's Path:
Transforming Grief into Joyful Living is an eight-week bereavement support program for any person who has experienced the death of a loved one. Since 2001 Covenant Presbyterian Church has been offering a Christ-centered grief support/recovery class for those who have experienced a loss. It is recommended that at least 3 months have passed since the loss. Classes begin Monday, March 31 For more info go to www.mournerspath.com or email Carole Johnson at carolejohnson374@sbcglobal.net. See the Pastoral Care bulletin board for more info.

Educator Team



"Common Threads" Adult Sunday School Class
Beginning Sunday March 2, the Adult Education Class "Common Threads" will study the story of the passion of Jesus in The Last Week by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan. These two scholars discuss what they believe the "passion" of Jesus was really about. Using the Gospel of Mark as the basis for this study, they repeatedly attempt to answer the question, "What does then have to do with this now, our now?" The book looks at each day of the final week of the life of Jesus both historically and theologically. Join us as we look at this old story with new eyes. The Last Week is available through the St. Andrew's bookstore. This class is facilitated by Molly Hornbuckle.



Theology in
Everyday Life

The Theology in Everyday Life discussion group meets on the 1st and 3rd Monday evenings of the month (March 3 and 17). The meetings start at 7:15 pm and end promptly at 8:30 pm and are held in the adult classroom in the children's wing. Facilitators open and close the meetings but there are no teachers or lecturers. Benefits come from participants' willingness to offer their own views and to share their personal experiences. Topics of discussion are chosen by individual members of the group and include thoughtful articles, current events, poetry, scripture, art, music, films, book excerpts and sermons among other possibilities. The aim is to explore and understand how our Christian teachings are lived out in everyday life. This is an opportunity to examine our beliefs and grow in happiness living the abundant life. The group is small (averages 9 persons) and allows ample time for every one to contribute. Prior to the meetings, topic handouts are available in a basket in the church foyer. Pick one up and come join the discussion. All are welcome.

Children's News

If you have questions or would like to be involved in any of the programs listed, please contact our Children's Christian Education Coordinator, Tammy Iyer, at 251-0698 or email Tamara.Iyer@gmail.com.



Playground Safety at St. Andrew's To keep the playground safe it is very important that we maintain the equipment. Please help us on Sunday, March 9, after church for a brief (approx. 30 minutes) playground work time. If you cannot make it but would like to help another time or have comments, please contact Tammy

March 11, Tuesday Night, Vacation Bible School Peace Camp Planning Meeting – 6:30 pm.

Peace Camp is one of the best attended and most enjoyable events of the year. You are cordially invited to be in on the planning. RSVP to Tammy for childcare.



We are looking for volunteers to help plan and carry out an **Easter Egg Hunt** after church on March 23. Contact Tammy if you are willing to help with this.



Children's Church is where every child is valued and encouraged to safely explore their own experiences of God. children ages 4 to 10 are invited to participate. They have rituals, songs, activities and small groups. Children's Church curriculum is based on the same scripture references used in Jim's sermon



Saturday, Mar. 1, 9 – 11 am there will be a parent orientation and training for Godly Play.



The Godly Play approach uses an open classroom with selected, developmentally appropriate story materials. The ultimate goal of Godly Play is to teach children the art of using the language of our Christian tradition so that they may encounter God in a personal way and begin to find direction for their own lives. Rather than giving pat answers or teaching doctrine, Godly Play seeks to support the child's own spiritual quest and enable the child to develop a faith that is continually growing. Central to this way of teaching is the assumption that children do have encounters with the mystery of the presence of God. What they do not have is the language to communicate about their experiences. There are two Godly Play classrooms, one for elementary age and one for preschool. We want to welcome all children to join us.



Since we organized our shower ministry in March, 2007, this service has been offered approximately 26 times during the food pantry hours, and 184 showers have been taken during those times. For the most part, these showers have been utilized by homeless men from our area, but approximately 20% of the time homeless women used this service.

Thank you to our volunteers who provide this opportunity to our homeless neighbors and friends. If you can imagine how you would feel if you could shower only once every two weeks, you can understand how grateful our friends are. Many volunteers make this possible: the people who staff the monitor's position, making sure that no one person uses

up all the hot water and everyone who has signed up gets their turn; the people who donate the toiletry items, clean underwear and socks; and the people who wash up the towels afterwards.

Another area of growth is in the hospitality we offer individuals waiting to shower or receive food. The fellowship that occurs while people are sharing warm coffee and something to eat on some of the cold mornings that the pantry has been open has been a rewarding time for many of us working at the pantry. On these occasions we get to confront our ignorance of our neighbors who live on the other side of the divide between our comfortable, middle class world and the world of living needy in the midst of plenty. The gratitude that is expressed by many of the people who come for help is both heart-warming and heart-breaking. The tasks involved in serving as a hospitality host are simple and no different than serving at our fellowship time each Sunday morning. If you would like to experience this challenge and this blessing, we encourage you to sign up to work at the Pantry some Saturday morning. Look for the sign-up board in the lobby on Sunday mornings.



St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Loving ♦ Progressive ♦ Presbyterian

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OPEN MINDS BOOKSTORE

(Open the 1st & 3rd Sundays of each month.)

The newest features in the bookstore are:

The Last Week by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan. (\$18 hardcover; \$12 paperback) These two scholars discuss what they believe the "passion" of Jesus was really about. Using the Gospel of Mark as the basis for this study, they repeatedly attempt to answer the question, "What does then have to do with this now, our now?" The book looks at each day of the final week of the life of Jesus both historically and theologically. This book is the basis for study by the Common Threads Class, facilitated by Molly Hornbuckle.

How Then, Shall We Live?: Four Simple Questions That Reveal the Beauty and Meaning of Our Lives by Wayne Muller (\$14) We all long to experience a sense of inner wholeness and guidance, but today's notions of healing and recovery too often keep us focused on our brokenness and our deficiencies rather than our strengths. Wayne Muller's luminous new book gently guides us to the place where we are already perfect, already blessed with the wisdom we need to live a life of meaning, purpose and grace.

A Wind Swept Over the Waters by John Nichols (\$13) As our lives change, even the most familiar words of the Bible can strike us in new and unexpected ways. Many of us were brought up to believe that a scriptural passage can have only one meaning. This idea limits our appreciation. Reading the Bible is like looking into a spiritual mirror. When we really absorb its language and images and give ourselves time to let them work their way into our souls, the ancient words can touch our life experience in unexpected ways.

Jesus and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings, ed. by Marcus Borg, (\$12.50) This remarkable collection of parallel sayings reveals how Jesus and Buddha were guiding us along the same path, highlighting a remarkable synchronicity in early teachings from East and West. This book also delves into the mystery surrounding their strikingly similar teachings, and presents over one hundred examples on facing pages.

Walk in a Relaxed Manner: Life Lessons from Walking the Camino by Joyce Rupp, (\$12) In this inspirational book, this well-known author presents her adventures on a 47 day pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago in Spain, which she took at the age of 60, with Tom, a retired pastor and close friend. As an imaginative practitioner of spiritual literacy, Rupp has gathered together the many meanings of her experience so that fellow pilgrims can share in the bounty. One of the main points of a pilgrimage is not knowing what will happen on the journey. Another part of it is living in the Now. This inspirational book is the basis for upcoming discussion in a recently formed Adult Sunday School class, *Common Threads*.

Taking Our Places: The Buddhist Path to Truly Growing Up by Norman Fischer, (\$12) Most of us take maturity for granted, as if it comes naturally with age and experience. In fact, however, few of us are truly mature individuals, occupying our unique places in life. In this profound and engaging work, Norman Fischer explores the true mark of maturity and the attributes which can enrich and broaden our lives. This hands-on guide provides a surprising new perspective that can turn old ideas on their heads and reinvigorate our understanding of what it means to be mature.

Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer by Richard Rohr. (\$14.50) Fr. Rohr offers that God is found in all things, even the most painful or sinful things. And it is through contemplative prayer that we are able to "see" and to hold the paradox of the good and bad within each of us and throughout human history. Prayer is "a way of living in the Presence and living in awareness of the Presence" allowing for transformation. A profound message that is to be read and reread.



The Poima book study group will meet Sunday, March 16. The study begins with a meal hosted by Poima about 5:30 pm in the McCarty home. The book study will begin at 7 pm. We are studying **Living Buddha, Living Christ** by Thich Nhat Hanh. March's session will focus on Chapter 8. Ann Callahan will lead the discussion. You are also invited for worship at 4 pm.

April's session will be on the 2nd Sunday, April 13. All are welcome. For more info go to www.poiemacommunity.org or contact Barbara at 468-4012 or bm272-54@earthlink.net.

Part-time Youth Leader Intern Opening

Includes option to continue past internship

PURPOSE: To direct and lead youth programming for Middle School and High School age youth. The Leader shall seek to foster Christian community by building relationships with young people that strengthen their spiritual growth, values, and faith journey and their commitment to the church family.*

ACCOUNTABILITY: Reports directly to the Pastor and is accountable to the Session. Works very closely with all church staff and the Educator Team so there will be coordination between the Christian Education programs, ensuring continuity as children transition to the Youth programs.

TIME REQUIREMENT: 10 – 15 hours weekly, negotiable

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Develop exciting and innovative youth programs and classes that will draw in St. Andrew's youth in order to promote community through fellowship, fun and faith development. This may include joint youth group events that include other area churches.
- Plan, provide and coordinate leadership for all youth activities, to include Middle School and High School Sunday Youth Fellowship Group(s). Examples of other possible activities to explore might be Small Groups, various outings, trips, weekend retreats, Presbyterian Youth Events (such as Youth
- Mid-winter trip to Mo-Ranch,) musical and dramatic presentations, or age-appropriate service projects and mission trips.
- Coordinate programs and activities with other St. Andrew's church programs
- Attend Sunday worship services and special events at St. Andrew's, and encourage youth, by example, to participate in all facets of the life of the church community.
- Ensure that all youth activities are adequately supervised by approved, responsible adults according to policy guidelines adopted by the Session.
- Develop positive relationships with parents of participating youths, and partner with them to enhance the impact of the Youth Program.
- Attend St. Andrew's staff meetings and meetings of the Educator Team Ministry.
- Ensure that all communications (newsletter, postcard, email, etc.) are delivered in a timely manner.
- Plan Graduation recognition and gifts, with the assistance of the Educator Team.
- Submit youth program budget needs, and adhere to purchasing policies of the church. Coordinate fund-raising activities that support special youth activities and trips.

QUALIFICATIONS:

Profile:

- Be an energetic, committed person of faith who can nurture and challenge our youth to progress on their individual spiritual journeys, and who embraces an inclusive, progressive approach to the practice of Christianity.
- Be an inspirational role model for youth to help develop leadership qualities and personal development.
- Have creative ability to generate new ideas and programs.
- Have organizational abilities to plan and facilitate the programs.
- Have the ability to build personal relationships with the youth of the church as well as provide order and structure.
- Be able to manage behavioral issues in an appropriate way.
- Have good communications skills, both personally and publicly.
- Have the ability to work with the youth's parents, and other adult leaders.

Education and Experience:

- Experience building a Youth Program is preferable, but not required.
- Bachelor's degree or equivalent experience.
- Have an understanding of the inclusive, progressive approach to the practice of Christianity as expressed and adopted by the St. Andrew's congregation.
- Be able to meet the St. Andrew's Child Protection Policy requirements.

TO BE CONSIDERED, please send your resume or request to Tamara.Iyer@gmail.com or mail work history to 14311 Wells Port Drive, Austin, Texas 78728

*St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church is an inclusive, progressive church community and an Equal Opportunity Employer. See website at www.staopen.com, click on Mission link for Mission statement.