MIAMI SHORES
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

THE LIGHT



Pastor's Page with Rev. Dr. Valdir Franca

The Elevator, a Good Morning, and the God Who Comes Near

An Advent Reflection on Emmanuel — God With Us

Advent is a season of waiting. We wait for Christmas, for the celebration of the birth of Jesus, for the coming of the One whom Matthew's Gospel calls Emmanuel, God with us.

But perhaps one of the challenges of Advent is that we spend so much time preparing for God's arrival that we sometimes overlook the ways God is already arriving among us.

We imagine God coming in extraordinary ways: in angels singing, in stars shining, in shepherds receiving good news, and in a child born in Bethlehem. And, of course, these are the beautiful images of Christmas. But what if God also comes in much smaller ways? What if Emmanuel meets us in the ordinary, unexpected encounters of our everyday lives?

I have been thinking about this because of something as ordinary as an elevator ride.
I live on the 25th floor. Every morning, whether I like it or not, I have to take the elevator. And, as some of you know, I am not particularly a morning person. I am also rather shy and introverted. So, for me, an elevator ride with strangers is not necessarily the most exciting part of the day!

Yet I have developed a small habit. When someone enters the elevator, I try to say, "Good morning"

It is such a simple gesture. Two words. Nothing extraordinary. No great theological statement. No profound act of generosity. Just an acknowledgment that another human being is sharing the same small space with me.

But I have noticed that sometimes those two words receive no response at all.

And that has made me wonder: Have we become so accustomed to living alongside one another that we have forgotten how to acknowledge one another?

We share buildings, neighborhoods, streets, churches, schools, and communities. We occupy the same spaces, but sometimes we seem to inhabit entirely different worlds. We are physically close but emotionally distant. We see one another, but we do not always recognize one another.

And here is where I think Advent has something important to teach us.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us that the child born in Bethlehem will be called Emmanuel, which means"God is with us" (Matthew 1:23).

Notice the significance of that name. God does not remain distant. God does not simply observe humanity from above. God comes among us. God enters our human experience. God shares our world.

The incarnation is God's ultimate greeting to humanity.

In Jesus Christ, God says to the world: "I am here. I see you. You are not alone"

And perhaps this is one of the invitations of Advent: to become people who offer that same kind of presence to one another.

We cannot always solve another person's problems. We cannot always change someone's circumstances. We may not even know what another person is carrying into the elevator, into the sanctuary, into the classroom, or into the workplace.

But we can acknowledge their presence.

We can offer a smile. We can listen. We can make room. We can say good morning.

And sometimes, that is where community begins.

Our church's mission reminds us that we are called to worship God, welcome all, and build community. These are not simply words for our letterhead or our website. They are practices we are invited to live every day.

Welcoming all does not begin when someone walks through the doors of our church. It begins much earlier—in the way we encounter people, in the way we recognize their dignity, and in the way we make room for those who may be different from us.

And building community does not always require a major program, a committee, or a special event. Sometimes it begins with two people sharing an elevator and one of them having the courage to say, "Good morning".

Perhaps this Advent we might recover the spiritual significance of these small gestures.

As we light the candles of hope, peace, joy, and love, may we remember that these are not simply beautiful symbols placed on a table. They are invitations to become bearers of hope, makers of peace, witnesses to joy, and instruments of love.

And perhaps we should add one more Advent practice: learning to recognize the people God places in our path.

Because Emmanuel is not only the God we celebrate at Christmas. Emmanuel is the God who meets us on ordinary Mondays, in crowded elevators, in unexpected conversations, in difficult relationships, and in the lives of people we might otherwise overlook.

So, as we enter this Advent season, I want to leave you with a simple question:
What if one of the ways we prepare room for Jesus is by making a little more room for one another?

Perhaps the world does not need another complicated formula for becoming a better society. Perhaps it needs more people willing to begin with small gestures of humanity.

A smile. A word of encouragement. A moment of attention. A little kindness.
And, yes, two simple words: Good morning!

May this Advent season teach us to recognize Emmanuel not only in the manger in Bethlehem, but also in the people standing beside us.

For the God who comes to dwell among us invites us to learn, once again, how to dwell with one another.

Good morning, and blessed Advent!

Rev. Dr. Valdir Franca

MISSION CORNER

by Luis Carranza & Marta Lavandier

GIVE MIAMI DAY 2026



We're excited to share that Miami Shores Presbyterian Church is once again participating in Give Miami Day, South Florida's biggest celebration of generosity and community! On ***November 19, 2026***, we will join hundreds of organizations across the region in giving back to the causes that make our community thrive.

Your generosity helps us continue our mission of welcoming, nurturing, and growing together in Christ's love through fellowship, worship, and service. This year, your gifts will directly support three key initiatives:

- **Kitchen Restoration & Appliance Renewal**: Repairing and updating our kitchen area so we can serve delicious fellowship hours, host community events, and support our school programs.
- **Special Holiday Music**: Bringing uplifting, extraordinary music to our sanctuary during the holiday season to inspire our worship and celebrate God's grace.
- **Continuing Campus Beautification**: Maintaining and enhancing our church grounds so that everyone who steps onto our campus feels at home and welcomed.







Early giving begins on ***November 14th ,*** please consider giving early or sharing MSPC's story with your family and friends. Every gift, big or small, helps us serve our congregation, school, and neighbors.

CARE PACKAGES

The Missions Committee sent care packages to 15 youth members attending colleges and universities across the United States. The students included nine in Florida, two in Georgia, and one each in Massachusetts, Oregon, Illinois, and Colorado.
Each care package included healthy snacks, a gift card, a devotional, and a personal letter from Pastor Franca.







Pictured are Olivia Compo and Emily Reich, both students at Florida International University (FIU), with their care packages.

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD - MAKE A CHILD HAPPY THIS CHRISTMAS!

You can get your Operation Christmas Child boxes from Bekky Leonard in the Narthex each Sunday for a $1.00 a box (instructions included). Once you have filled your box you can bring it to Bekky on Sunday or drop them off in the church Office by November 15th . We will deliver them to the drop off location, so please be sure to get them to us by the 15th.

GROWING TOGETHER: GARDEN MINISTRY PLANT SALE

The Garden Ministry will host a plant sale following the November 22 and December 6 services. Families and community members can shop a variety of ornamental plants, vegetables, and herbs while supporting a wonderful cause. Proceeds will benefit the community garden and ongoing campus beautification projects. Be sure to bring cash and small bills.

BUILDING BRIDGES FOR CHRIST

By Joshua Harford





There is a mystical place on the edge of South America, bound by two ancient rivers, where the sugar cane fields of Urugay converge with Brazil and Argentina. Some whisper that the remote "Beautiful Union" – as this convergence of nations is sometimes called - is actually a nation unto itself. It is definitely unique from the rest of Uruguay. I had a vague recollection of visiting as a child, but the memories came flooding back once I was there.

Here, television is broadcast in Portuguese. Spanish remains the common language, but many are trying desperately to learn English and to build bridges with the outside world. It's quite a change from when I argued with my playmates over whether we should speak in Spanish, Portuguese, German, Ukrainian, Russian or English. I was the only one who argued for English. I don't know which language we were speaking at the time, maybe it was our own.
Formally, this region is known as Litoral Norte or Northern Coast in reference to the Uruguay River. It is unique from the rest of Uruguay not just in geography, but also in composition. Compared to the south, residents are more likely to have settled after WWII and are more likely to be central and eastern European. Soviet Russia and East Germany both invested heavily in the region. However, the area has recovered more slowly from the cold-war than most, so residents are also less likely to attend church or to have even heard of Christ when compared to the rest of the country – which is already the most secular state in South America.

The nearest Protestant minister I could find was over an hour away. I felt God tugging on my heart. "I could have easily grown up here," I thought how different my life would have been. I cannot say for certain why I was raised in the United States instead of Germany or the Soviet Union or the "Beautiful Union."

But what I do know is that it afforded me the opportunity embrace the light of Christ in my life, and I would be remiss if I did not share this with my brothers and sisters (perhaps not literal ones) who have never experienced this perspective.

With this in mind, I met with an organization called Teach Beyond, and we devised a plan to use soccer to reach these isolated "border colonies." After returning to Uruguay two additional times and spending over three months total on the ground, plans for a soccer outreach and retreat finally came together. The event, called Copa Cristo Rey, enabled active Christian ministries in Uruguay to come and see the remote northwest region.





We coordinated to have a Christian soccer team travel out to the region from Montevideo, and they fell in love with the place: the clean, crisp air; the determined people. A pastor prayed a post-game blessing on the local communities, and the fellowship of a joint meal was enjoyed by all. The missions team held a soccer clinic for area youth, an experience that stretched their faith but proved rewarding.

I had the opportunity to speak to an English class about the light of Christ – a concept they seemed unfamiliar with but found intriguing – and I also had three opportunities to teach the missions team about King Saul, King David and King Christ – material that was inspired from the Sunday School class here at MSPC. What a blessing to share the knowledge that has been so helpful to me, with those living a world away.

Bridges were built and missions organizations are renewing their interest in the region. They are already asking about next year. One young soccer player visiting from Argentina even expressed interest in becoming a missionary himself. Please pray that God makes funds available and calls a full-time missionary or church-planter to Northwest Uruguay.

Joshua Harford von Hannover
MSPC Deacon

MIAMI SHORES PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH SCHOOL

MSPCS NEWS

FALL AT MSPCS

What a fall it has been at MSPCS! The past month has been filled with exciting celebrations, community spirit, creativity, and plenty of fun. We would like to extend a heartfelt thank-you to everyone who supported our annual Pumpkin Patch. Thanks to our wonderful community, we celebrated another successful year!





Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month

We kicked off the festivities with our Hispanic Heritage Month celebration, honoring the richness, diversity, and contributions of Hispanic culture. Our students proudly represented the Hispanic community through wonderful performances, traditional dances, a festive parade, and delicious food. It was a meaningful opportunity to celebrate our cultural roots, learn from one another, and recognize the traditions that make our community so special.

Fall Fest: A Day Full of Community Spirit

Our Parent Association went above and beyond to make this year's Fall Fest a wonderful celebration! The MSPC campus came alive with excitement, featuring local vendors, festive activities, and plenty of opportunities for families and friends to come together. From exploring the vendor booths to enjoying the day's activities, everyone had a chance to experience the magic of fall. A big thank-you to our Parent Association, volunteers, and everyone who helped make this event such a success!







Spooktacular Spirit Week

Spooky season brought out everyone's creativity during our Spooktacular Spirit Week! From festive Halloween shirts and fun costumes to twin day, our students and teachers embraced the spirit of the season. We wrapped up the week with one of our favorite traditions: the Spooktacular Trunk or Treat! It was wonderful to see our families, teachers, and school staff come together to celebrate our students, share in the Halloween fun, and create special memories. Filled with decorated trunks, costumes, treats, and lots of smiles, it was the perfect way to celebrate the season as one big school community! Thank you to everyone who helped make this year's Halloween festivities so much fun!

GIVE MIAMI DAY

We are excited to participate in Give Miami Day! Early giving starts **November 14**, leading up to the big day on **November 19**. This is a wonderful opportunity for our community to come together and support the growth and learning of our students. Your contributions will help us upgrade our library and create cozy reading nooks, bring a colorful mural to our preschool, and provide new learning software for our teachers and students. Every gift makes a difference, and we are grateful for your support in helping make our school an even better place to learn, grow, and thrive!



HAPPY THANKSGIVING 2026

By Sharon Wallen



Happy Thanksgiving 2026 to you, your family, and your friends. God encourages us to "…be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with ***thanksgiving*** let our requests be made known to God." Philippians 4:6 In addition, God's children are invited, "in everything ***give thanks:*** for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." 1 Thessalonians 5:18

As I reflected on THANKSGIVING this season some of my thoughts are shared in AN Acrostic Poem below.

T *rust, Truth, Transparency, Tranquility, Trustworthiness*
H *umor, Health, Hymns, Honesty, Heart-warming Meals*
A *SK, Answers, Agility*
N *ewness-of-life, Nostalgia, Neighbors*
K *indness, Knowledge, Kingdom*
S *ongs of Praise, Sweet Desserts, Sleep*
G *od, Great Faith, Goodness*
I *nvitations, Innocence, Illumination*
V *ictorious-Living, Victories, Vacations*
I *gnite, Immersion, Innovate, Innovations*
N *o, Noah, Nehemiah, News*
G *od-like, Godliness, Greatness, Generosity, Gifts*

As you reflect on this Thanksgiving Season 2026, what additional thoughts come to mind for you? Enjoy your holidays. Stay well. Stay safe. Stay blessed.

Sharon Wallen
Deacon 2027

Upcoming Dates & Events

First Sunday of the Month: Pass It On Collection, Chapman Partnership & Safespace Donation
Sundays: 10 AM Adult Bible Study - Library
Sundays: 10:30 AM Nursery (Up to 4 Years)
Sundays: 11 AM Worship Service
Sundays: 11:15 AM Children's Church - Library
Sundays: 12:15 PM Fellowship Hour
Saturdays: 9:00 AM Anti-Racism Book Club
Wednesdays: 9:00 AM Soft Dolls
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19: GIVE MIAMI DAY (EARLY GIVING NOVEMBER 14)
Sunday, November 22: Plant Sale
Thursday, November 26: THANKSGIVING DAY

✨ ***Share Your Light!*** ✨

Have a story, reflection, or idea you'd love to share? Interested in being featured in The Light? We'd love to hear from you!

Send your questions or article submissions to mrodriguez@mspc.net for a chance to be published in an upcoming edition.

The Light Staff - November 2026

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MIAMI SHORES PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH