

## February 12 Adult Spiritual Growth Class Synopsis

### **Let There Be Light: A Study of FPC Stained-Glass Windows – Francis Makemie**

First Presbyterian Church has been blessed with parishioner memorial gifts of 15 beautiful stained-glass windows over the years, as summarized in the wonderful guide put together by Virginia Wiley in 1990, as part of the 175 year anniversary celebration of the church. The window of focus is Francis Makemie, leader of the first presbytery, located in the second window on the right side from the front, facing the Chancel and framed in the lower medallion.

The window shows the first presbytery meeting at Philadelphia in 1706 organized by Francis Makemie, a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian minister who preached in the middle colonies from 1691 to 1707. Pictured are the seven missionaries including Makemie, who worked in scattered churches of the middle colonies, forming the first presbytery in America with power to license its own preachers. Makemie was the first moderator of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, where they ordained a new minister, John Boyd. For the first time American Presbyterianism was independent of external control. In 1717, the first Synod was established in Philadelphia with four presbyteries with churches all in the middle colonies. Makemie became the leader of the Presbyterians, also known for his defense of the rights of Presbyterians like himself to minister without a license, even though Presbyterianism had no official standing in the colonies. Makemie's successful self-defense of charges of preaching without a license was an early and significant contribution to the American heritage of rights to free expression and free worship.

Francis Makemie was born in 1658 in Ramelton, County Donegal, Ireland. Not allowed to go to the University of Ireland in Dublin since he was a Presbyterian of Scottish descent, Makemie attended Glasgow University, where he was convicted by the Holy Spirit into a life-long love of and service to Christ and His Church. He was ordained into the clergy in 1681, and followed a missionary calling to North America in 1682 at the request of Anglican William Stevens, owner of Rehoboth plantation on the Pocomoke River. In 1684, with immigrants from England, Scotland and Ulster, Makemie established the first Presbyterian congregation on the Eastern Shore in Snow Hill, Maryland, and followed by one in Rehoboth. The church erected in Snow Hill became the current Makemie Memorial Presbyterian Church.

In 1687, Makemie settled in Accomack county, Virginia, where he purchased land, engaged in trade, and ministered at nearby Rehoboth. He married Naomi, the daughter of William Anderson, a successful businessman and landowner who helped him become established. Naomi and Francis had two daughters. Makemie expanded his trade to Barbados facilitated by his father-in-law, purchased a house there in early 1690, and obtained a license to preach as a dissenter. Contemporaneously, he spent two years pastoring in Barbados and sheltered Irish ministers persecuted for their Calvinist faith.

Makemie continued to travel across the mid-Atlantic colonies, starting several Presbyterian churches and communities along his way. In 1689, Makemie visited England and persuaded the Presbytery there to support missionary work in the colonies.

In 1706, Makemie led the formation of the first presbytery in America, joining seven missionaries working in scattered churches of the middle colonies. By 1717, the first Synod (Philadelphia), four presbyteries had been established: Philadelphia, New York, New Castle (Delaware), and Snow Hill (Maryland).

When the Presbytery of Philadelphia met, its members came from two different backgrounds. One was Presbyterianism founded among English Puritans, although only one Philadelphia minister, Jedediah Andrews, fit that profile. The most dominant was that of Scottish or Scotch-Irish Presbyterianism. Four of the original ministerial members of the presbytery hailed directly from Scotland, and the other three were from Northern Ireland. This explains in part why Philadelphia is considered the traditional capital of Presbyterianism in the United States. The colony established by William Penn granted religious liberty to a variety of persecuted believers, Presbyterians among them. In fact, Presbyterianism in Scotland would not rebound from English-Scottish rivalries to become the national kirk until 1690, thus making American Presbyterianism only seventeen years younger. For the Presbyterian church to gain a foothold in America, the goodwill and kind assistance of Pennsylvania Quakers was required. Scottish and Scotch-Irish immigration to the New World brought Presbyterians primarily to the middle colonies, especially southeastern Pennsylvania.

As Makemie continued his ministry, he faced continuous opposition by the Church of England, who had the full legal authority in the American colonies and who characterized him as “a loon propagating subversive doctrine.” In January 1707, Makemie was arrested by Lord Cornbury, the governor of New York, for preaching without a license. Anglicanism was the official religion, but Makemie had a license to preach as a dissenter in Virginia and Maryland. Makemie believed that if freedom of religion could not be obtained in one colony, it would endanger the flourishing of all of them. Throughout his trial, he reminded Cornbury that Parliament had granted authority and liberty to preach under King William and Queen Mary through the English Toleration Act in 1689. Furthermore, he argued, this act’s jurisdiction extended beyond Great Britain into all her territories. He showed certificates from Maryland and Virginia courts that gave credence to his work. After spending 6 weeks in jail, Makemie was acquitted in June 1707 in a groundbreaking victory of free speech and free expression of religion. The case resulted in the immediate recall of Lord Cornbury. Though found innocent, Makemie was ordered to pay both the cost of the defense and the cost of his prosecution. The case eventually caused the New York legislature to enact legislation to prevent such prosecution again in the future and also led a Maryland court to certify the establishment of a Protestant Dissenter Church justified by an act of Parliament.

Shortly after the trial, Makemie’s published the sermon entitled, “A Good Conversation” for which he was arrested. The publication’s foreword noted Matthew 5:11 and Acts 5:29: *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.... Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, ‘We ought to obey God rather than men’.* Makemie’s sermon was centered in Psalm 50:23: *Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that orderth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.* The sermon of more than two hours spoke of “a good conversation”, i.e., a sacrificial life of praise and thanks that truly honors God, leading to a full revelation of the salvation of God, Christ Jesus Himself in whom we find full joy, hope, and peace. Matthew Henry in his commentary shares that “it is not enough for us to offer praise, but we must yet order our conversation aright. Thanksgiving is good, but thanks-living is better.” Such a “conversation” requires diligence, perseverance and humility in faithful obedience to God. However, peace and grace is found in knowing, as Makemie writes, “that though the conversations of the Best are not altogether free from irregularities, God is pleased to accept and account them as blameless and perfect before Him, in and through our blessed Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ.” For this we can take true joy in our salvation that God continually reveals in His Son.

A song to reflect and pray on:

[\(54\) Amazing Grace / He is Lord - Steph Macleod with Celtic Worship & Friends - YouTube](#)

## **Looking ahead – Sunday February 19**

First window from altar on right side (Upper Medallion) – Ascension of Christ