

The Missive, January 2023

First Presbyterian Church

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“How’s it going?”

It’s surprising how often I get this question these days. And it is usually asked with a look of concern—not for me, I think. Erin and I are doing fine. But there seems to be concern for the church. That’s understandable, it is tough times for many churches. As we are coming out of these years of the pandemic, many churches are struggling to deal with the aftermath. Some churches have lost members due to the passing of people from Covid (remember we have lost over a million people in our country) or folks who decided that they really didn’t need church and so have stopped coming. Some churches are struggling financially because people who stopped coming also stopped giving and many churches are finding it hard to make ends meet. Other churches are struggling with leadership because there are many pastors who found their jobs had substantially changed during the pandemic, that they had shifted from being one who preached and taught the gospel to one who coordinated online offerings and virtual content. Pastors who felt that they “didn’t sign up for this” are retiring if they are able or even resigning at a rate much faster than during the pre-pandemic years. And so, some churches are struggling.

So, when someone asks, “How’s it going,” they most often mean, “How are we doing?” And I’m a little surprised by the question, because from my vantage point, we’re doing very well. I consider us to be very blessed. Let’s look at our “condition.”

Financially, we’re in a pretty healthy place. We should finish 2022 with more receipts in the General Fund than expenditures, and that certainly didn’t always happen in the years before the pandemic, so I’m constantly grateful for the generosity of this congregation. And remember in the midst of all of this, over the last four years we have undertaken two capital campaigns, one to buy and fix up the Deacon Brown House, and a second to replace the steeple, fix the sanctuary floor and recarpet the Gull Prairie Room—all longstanding needs. And we have been able to raise enough money that both those projects were completed, and we were

able to pay cash and not take out any loans. So financially we’re doing well.

Attendance is a hard one to judge. We have been having 70 or so in person worshiping with us during the Sundays in Advent and we were thrilled to have 15 kids involved in the Christmas program on December 18th. We are continuing to broadcast our worship service each Sunday on Facebook Live—thanks to our production crew of Jeremiah and Jack and Zoe! How many does this bring in? That’s difficult to say. During “live” worship we may have 25 or 30 watching (that’s devices: computers, phones, ipads, adding up to about 40-45 people, we think) but then we send out via email a link to the service and post a recording on our Facebook page. For the last two Sundays in December, we had 249 “views” on December 18 and 267 on December 25th. And we had 305 views for our virtual Christmas Eve Meditation. So far. The count for these services continues to go up. Therefore, I’m encouraged that our worship is reaching people in one way or another.

Leadership in our church is one of the most exciting parts of our church this year. We have added staff member to our payroll: Paul Gobble as communications director, Rachel Little in the office, Brooke Held directing the children’s ministries, and Amber Beals with small groups. Added to them are our volunteer staff: Jeremiah Smith with video production assisted by Jack Sizer and Zoe Gobble, Erin O’Sullivan as pastoral assistant, Karen Urban assisting in the office; and with our ongoing staff members of Connie Slater, our sexton, Gretchen Ferris our treasurer, Chris Gobble the financial secretary, Larry Myland our director of music and Owen Rushford choir director, along with the elders, deacons and all the other volunteers, this is a team that is positive, excited and hard-working. In all my time in ministry this is one of the most exciting and fulfilling time to be pastor of this church. How’s it going? It’s going great!

And we are most grateful for all of you, who make this church a joyful place, making a difference in our community, serving God in so many ways. Thank you!

*Grace and Peace,
Mark*

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Erin and I would like to thank you all for the generous Christmas gift. The warmth and love that you have shown to us and our family through the years is a never ending joy for us. Thank you.

Mark

JANUARY 2023

| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|---|--|---|--|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1 9:45: Worship & Communion 2:00: Girl Scouts | 2 ~ office closed ~ 5:00: Boy & Cub Scouts | 3 9:00: GPP Walk 10:00: Food Pantry 6:15: Brownies & Daisy Scouts | 4 10:00: Food Pantry 12:00: Seasoned Seniors 5:30: Girl Scouts 6:00: Girl Scouts | 5 4:00: Choir Practice | 6 | 7 1:00: BSA 294 Court of Honor |
| 8 9:45: Worship, 2¢-a-Meal & Sunday School | 9 5:00: Boy & Cub Scouts | 10 10:00: Food Pantry | 11 10:00: Food Pantry 6:00: Girl Scouts | 12 11:00: Bible Study 12:00: January Series 4:00: Choir Practice 5:00: Girl Scouts 6:00: Deacons Meeting | 13 | 14 |
| 15 9:45: Worship & Sunday School 11:00: Just Love | 16 1:00: Pastoral Care Team 5:00: Boy & Cub Scouts 6:30: Boy Scouts | 17 10:00: Food Pantry 10:30: Christian Ed Leadership Team 6:15: Brownies & Daisy Scouts | 18 10:00: Food Pantry 1:00: GPP Walk 5:30: Girl Scouts 6:00: Girl Scouts 6:15: Session | 19 11:00: Bible Study 4:00: Choir Practice 6:00: Jack & Jill Registration Night | 20 12:00: ARC Blood Drive | 21 |
| 22 9:45: Worship & Sunday School 11:15: ASL Class  | 23 11:30: Membership & Fellowship 12:00: January Series 5:00: Boy & Cub Scouts 6:30: Boy Scouts 7:00: Earth Care | 24 10:00: Food Pantry 12:00: January Series | 25 10:00: Food Pantry 6:00: Girl Scouts | 26 11:00: Bible Study 4:00: Choir Practice 5:00: Girl Scouts 7:00: Moms' Group | 27 12:00: January Series | 28 |
| 29 9:45: Worship & Sunday School 11:00: Annal Meeting 12:00: Potluck | 30 5:00: Boy & Cub Scouts | 31 8:00: Men's Breakfast 10:00: Food Pantry 6:15: Brownies & Daisy Scouts | | | | |

WINTER WEATHER POLICY FOR 2022-2023

Please note our weather policy for the 2022-2023 winter: When Gull Lake Schools are closed, the church office is also closed. This means:

1. All scheduled daytime activities are canceled.
2. Scheduled evening activities will be decided based on weather conditions and cancellations will be posted in a timely manner.
3. Office staff: you are welcome to come in as needed. We ask that you keep the lobby lights off and the doors locked.

Food Pantry Policy is as follows:

Loaves and Fishes closes on a case by case basis. When they close, the Richland pantry will also close. See WWMT for announcements. All other closure decisions will be made by Paul.

Any closures will ALWAYS be posted in a timely manner on our FB page.

Adopted November 15, 2022

January Birthdays

| | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1..... Deng Thon Alier | 13..... Cam Nicholson | 26..... Danny Snyder |
| 3..... John Lebiecki | 13..... Brennan Wieber | 27..... Nick Reece |
| 3..... Sue Myland | 18..... Larry Irej | 29..... Harold Dishon |
| 5..... Erin Jennings | 18..... Kate Miller | 29..... Paul Cazers |
| 5..... Adam Simon | 18..... Teresa Young | 29..... Joyce Dishon |
| 6..... Rebecca Gibson | 20..... Chuck Farho | 29..... Sandy Stupica |
| 6..... Robin Nott | 20..... Greg Keusch | 30..... Faith Fiordalis |
| 8..... Pam Foster | 20..... Amy Syverson | 30..... Marie Larson |
| 8..... Vivian Lovequist | 21..... Brooke Heck | 30..... Sarah Striffler |
| 12..... Dave Deater | 24..... Christie Sutherland | 31..... Kim Knutsen |
| 12..... Clara Kreinbring | 25..... Kristi Ryan | |
| 12..... Lillie Steele | 25..... Darcy Wank | |

Anniversaries & Remembrances

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------|
| 2..... Wendy & Nate Martens | 2 years |
| 12..... Mary & George Lindenberg | 42 years |
| 14..... Laurie & Scott Alexander | 18 years |
| 22..... Diane & Don Meitz | 67 years |
| 26..... Shannon & Jeremiah Smith | 9 years |

This January we remember
 Dick Saddler's passing one year ago on the 11th,
 Tunis Willemstyn's Birthday on the 12th,
 Dick Saddler's Birthday on the 19th, and
 Pete Knibloe's passing one year ago on the 23rd.

Carillon Hymns and Honoree



| <i>Date</i> | <i>Selection</i> | <i>Honoree</i> |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 st | <i>Holy, Holy, Holy</i> | <i>Leonard J. Ryan</i> |
| 20 th | <i>Love to Tell the Story</i> | <i>Louise Hoorn</i> |
| 24 th | <i>This is My Father's World</i> | <i>Wava Murphy</i> |
| 25 th | <i>Come, Labor On</i> | <i>Kristi Ryan</i> |
| 29 th | <i>Old Rugged Cross</i> | <i>Marian & Earl Jones</i> |



FPC ANNOUNCEMENTS

Annual Meeting: Sunday, Jan 29, 11am. Please plan to join us to celebrate 2022! We will review the annual reports and elect new elders and deacons.

Soup, Salads, Sweets: Pull out your favorite recipe (s) and bring them to church on Sunday the 29th! After the Annual Meeting, we'll enjoy gathering for an old-fashioned "potluck" in the Gull Prairie Room. Drinks and table service will be provided.

Women's Book Club: The next Women's Book Club will be gathering on February 8 in the

home of Sandra Gobble. The book is Remarkably Bright Creatures, a novel. The author, Shelby Van Pelt. Everyone welcome.

Men's Breakfast: Food and Fellowship, Tues. the 28th, 8am at Liz's Parkview Café.

Richland Food Pantry: Call 269.343.3663 to make an appointment, Walk-ins Welcome. Tues. & Wed. 10am to Noon.



Small Group Ministries Happy New Year!

by Amber Beals

A New Year brings new activities and I am excited for 2023!

Monthly Small Groups: One possible idea I am looking at is establishing some small groups centered around a single book chosen by the church over the course of one year as a way to get to know others better and challenge each other spiritually. The groups would be 6-9 people that meet roughly once per month either in homes or somewhere at church. If this is something we decide on, it will probably roll out sometime in February. In the meantime, please let me know what your thoughts are about this.

January Series: Calvin University has an amazing group of lecture speakers they host every January about all kinds of current topics from a Christian perspective, and they can be live-streamed. I am still working to finalize these plans, so watch your Thursday emails for more details and to make sure they are a go. My hope is gather as a group and watch these at the DBH with others from the church who are interested. They are live at 12:30pm and a large tv will be brought in for easy viewing. There are a total of 15 lectures to choose from, but Pastor Mark helped me narrow down to four. Come to one or all. Everyone welcome!

January 12 (Thurs): Rev. Kyle Meyaard-Schaap will give practical advice and offer hope to Christians paralyzed by the scale of the climate crisis.

January 23 (Mon): Ken Jennings will discuss the importance of being a generalist in an age of hyper-specialization while sharing stories from his time on Jeopardy!

January 24 (Tues): Peter Wehner will remind Christians of their call to care for all, regardless of their political or religious affiliations.

January 27 (Fri): Kate Bowler will speak about understanding that we need one another because life is beautiful yet terrible and full of hope, despair, and everything in between.

Mini Library Group: Pam and I are in the early stages of plans to have a rolling book cart placed in the lobby or Fireplace room on Sunday mornings before and after worship. It would be a place to showcase and check out books that are currently housed in the resource room, and if successful, maybe eventually adding newer reads as well. Most of the books displayed would be on Christian or social justice topics as these genres are less likely to be found at our local library. I would love to get a group of book lovers together to help brainstorm how to roll out this project! Please contact me if you are interested in joining this! amberbeals@gmail.com

Game Night Group: I've had a few people ask when we are playing Bunco again. My plan is to have another game night in February. In the meantime, I would like feedback on 1) Time of day and days of week people prefer—daytime or evening 2) Do people like Bunco, or would you like to try a board game or card game night? There's a dice game called 10,000 which is really easy and fun to play in groups, but has a tiny bit more challenge/risk-taking than Bunco. I'm open to suggestions and feedback! If you enjoy playing games, please reach out to me as I would love to have some help planning and coordinating this. amberbeals@gmail.com

Continued groups:

GPP Walking Group: Meets the first Tuesday and the third Wednesday in the North church parking lot. January dates/times are: January 3 at 9am and January 18 at 1pm. Watch Facebook for cancellations. All are welcome!

**I would love to hear feedback from church members on other fitness ideas they interested in—such as biking together once it warms up or if there is interest in changing walk location for some variation. So far we have enjoyed the preserve, but we can definitely change things up!

Moms Group: To make it easier to plan, we are setting our date as the 4th Thursday of each month at 7pm at DBH. We will just keep it simple and gather/catch up. Hope to see you there! Next date: January 26 .

Shared Blessings: A Matthew 25 Service Group

by Erin O'Sullivan

In the fall of 2021, when the first group gathered to discuss the question of becoming a Matthew 25 church, we noticed that whatever the idea or concern that was raised, there was a consistent through line with all of them: how can we be a more welcoming church?

One of the topics discussed was how we respond to those with disabilities. Within this larger concern was the specific concern about sign language. Juanito Carisalez, a beautiful boy in our church family has Down Syndrome. One of the ways he communicates is through American Sign Language. Shared Blessings would like to facilitate better communication with Juanito by bringing an ASL teacher to our church. This one-time experience is meant to be quite limited. We hope to learn some key words and phrases supplied by Juan and Laura that will improve our ability to communicate with Juanito. We will end by learning to sign Jesus Loves Me.

Join us after worship on January 22 for this very special gathering.

The need is constant.
The gratification is instant.
Give blood.



**American
Red Cross**



First Presbyterian Church

8047 Church St. | Richland, MI 49083

January 20

Noon – 6pm

Use the contact information below
to make your appointment.

redcrossblood.org | 1-800-RED CROSS

Wait, What? Questions & Answers

by Rev. Mark Jennings

Do you have questions about something you heard in church? Have you always wondered why we do or say the things we do? Wondered what something means? This regular column is the place to bring up those questions and try to find an answer.

“Still Christmas?”

It’s January now, but I understand that in the church’s way of looking at it, it’s still Christmas! How long does Christmas last? Is that why we leave the tree up in the sanctuary so long?

You’re right, this can be confusing. Christmas is a day—December 25 th . But it is also a season, the 12 days between December 25 and January 6, when we celebrate Epiphany. Traditionally, December 25 th is the day that Jesus was born and January 6 th is the day that the wise arrived in Bethlehem to give their gifts to Jesus, Mary and Joseph. But it wasn’t always seen this way. Some churches, predominantly Orthodox, in places where they still use the Julian calendar (England and Scotland adopted the more common Gregorian calendar in 1752—there is usually a difference of about 11 days), they celebrate Christmas on January 7 th . This happens in Russia, Ukraine, Egypt, Ethiopia, Georgia, Macedonia, Serbia, and some others.

And this wasn’t always the case. In the very early church, Christians did not celebrate the birth of Jesus at all. In the first centuries of the Christian faith, people celebrated Epiphany—the revelation of Christ to the world symbolically through the arrival of the foreign magi, Easter—the resurrection of Jesus, and Pentecost—the coming of the Holy Spirit and the “birthday” of the church. The first Christ Mass was celebrated on December 25 th in the year 336. The first Roman Emperor to embrace the Christian faith was Constantine and he is the first to name this a holiday. As to why December 25 th was chosen is a question of much debate. The Annunciation—the angel Gabriel’s announcement to Mary that she had been chosen as the mother of Jesus—was traditionally celebrated at the spring equinox, then thought to be around March 25 th . So, add nine months and we get December 25 th.

For the first few centuries of the Christian faith, there was great resistance to celebrating the birth of Jesus, or of any saint at all. Early Christians believed that birthdays should be mourned, not celebrated, because this is the day that people are born into their lives of suffering. Instead, Christians celebrated the day that a saint was martyred, because that was the day of their true birth into the heavenly, spiritual realm. So people celebrated Easter instead.*

But the date of December 25 th stuck and since there are 12 days between Christmas Day and the celebration of Epiphany on January 6 th , thus came to be the “12 Days of Christmas,” and we can celebrate the birth of Jesus for a season of 12 days, not just one!

*Some information comes from “The Writer’s Almanac, December 25, 2016”



KidsFirst A look back at 2022

by Brooke Heck

That’s a wrap on 2022! 2022 was a big year for the children’s ministry (and myself!) at FPC. Vacation Bible School was such a fun filled couple of days and my introduction to the welcoming spirit of this church. The Sunday School program was given a new name - KidsFirst - to honor the name of our church but to also show our dedication to the smallest members of our congregation! We consistently fill the Sunday school room with ten or more children each week and have had so many fun events in the last few months of the year!

Looking ahead, we already have some exciting things to look forward to in 2023! Beginning this month, we will be starting a new curriculum, Simply Loved. I am excited to dive deeper into the Bible and all the wonderful lessons God has in store for our class.

I am so grateful for the opportunity to lead this ministry and to continue building relationships with all of the children, caregivers, and supporters of KidsFirst throughout 2023 and beyond!

Feature of the Month

by Pam Foster

Bell Tower Restoration, Sanctuary, and Gull Prairie Room Improvement Capital Campaign

Income and Expense Summary
December 2022

The Bell Tower Restoration, Sanctuary, and Gull Prairie Room Improvement Capital Campaign began officially in November 2021 and continues to the present time. A total of \$267,691 has been raised or pledged, and a total of \$231,931 has been spent and/or committed thus far.

Income:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| Beginning Balance | \$60,000 |
| Transfer from Building Fund | 25,000 |
| Transfer from Endowment | 6,000 |
| Member Contributions | 148,416 |
| Public Contributions | 11,950 |
| Go Fund Me Contributions | 2,430 |
| Memorial Contributions | 665 |
| Pencil Box Income | 1,230 |
| <u>Future Pledges (January 2023)</u> | <u>12,000</u> |
| Total: | \$267,691 |

Expenditures:

Bell Tower Restoration:

| | |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Tower-Pinkster | \$15,453 |
| Piedmont Steeple | 16,200 |
| <u>Hazelhoff Builders</u> | <u>153,944</u> |
| Subtotal: | \$185,597 |

Sanctuary Restoration and Remodel:

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Migala - carpet, tile, installation | \$26,189 |
| Hasselhoff Builders - pew movers | 3,527 |
| <u>John Bradford - choir floor refinished</u> | <u>1,650</u> |
| Subtotal: | \$31,366 |

Gull Prairie Room Carpet:

| | |
|--|------------------|
| <u>Migala – carpet, installation (1/16/23)</u> | <u>\$14,968*</u> |
|--|------------------|

Total Spent/Committed \$231,931

Unspent/Uncommitted (12/15/22) 23,760

Pledges for 2023 (January) 12,000

Remaining Balance \$35,760**

*Total cost of GPR carpet \$15,480. \$512 was taken from a designated GPR carpet fund.

**Bell display still to be completed; any remaining money in the Bell Tower Fund will be transferred to the Building Fund.

Rick Foster or Steve Sutherland, Elders, Buildings and Grounds, are available to answer any questions.

Just Love January Outreach

by Sandy Carahaly

Please join us for our next meeting: Sunday January 15th at 11:15 AM in the Deacon Brown House. We hope to have a Zoom connection available as well; watch the Thursday emails for more information! Agenda items include (but are not limited to):

- Spring education/discussion opportunities
- Pride Month worship plans
- Intersectionality
- Community visibility

Recommended Reading:

Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics, by Margaret A. Farley

A Minute to Learn: Intersectionality of Human Trafficking and the LGBTQ+ Community

January is National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month. LGBTQ+ people can be particularly vulnerable to human trafficking due in part to legal discrimination in employment and housing, as well as to families who are unsupportive, or worse, who kick their children out when they come out. Runaway and homeless youth are at a higher risk of being trafficked, but even youth living at home can be victims. Traffickers will often present themselves as the “hero” to a vulnerable person. They offer love, safety, shelter, and economic stability... at first. Traffickers are typically thought of as strangers, but can also be intimate partners, family members, and friends.

For more information, see The Polaris Project at www.polarisproject.org.

To donate time or talent to the Kalamazoo Area Anti-Human Trafficking Coalition, a local organization that supports the victims of human trafficking, or have a member speak to your business, school, or organization, see www.KAAHTC.org.

If you see something, say something: 1-(888)-3737-888 for the 24/7 National Human Trafficking Hotline.

Days of Significance, January 2023

Jan 11 – National Human Trafficking Awareness Day

Third week in January – No Name-Calling Week

January 27 – International Holocaust Remembrance Day – over 100,000 homosexual men were arrested during the Holocaust. Most were imprisoned, but as many as 15,000 were sent to concentration camps. Punishment included hard labor, torture, castration, medical experimentation, and for as many as 65% of them, death. For more information, see:

<https://time.com/5953047/lgbtq-holocaust-stories/>

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8047 Church Street
Richland, MI 49083

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH STAFF

Dr. Mark W. Jennings, Pastor
Larry Myland, Director of Music
Owen Rushford, Director of Choirs
Brooke Heck, Sunday School Director
Amber Beals, Coordinator of Small Group Ministry
Rachel Little, Office Manager
Connie Slater, Sexton
Gretchen Ferris, Treasurer
Chris Gobble, Financial Secretary
Paul Gobble, Director of Communications

JANUARY