

# The Missive, December 2023

## First Presbyterian Church

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Volume 57, Number 12, Monthly



***“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.”***

***John 1:5***

*About 25 years ago, our church children put on a Christmas pageant called “Bearers of the Light.” The message was clear and moving. Be a light: live in love and forgiveness. Forsake evil. The children held battery-operated candles. It was so well-received that people asked that we repeat it and so, a few years later, we did it again.*

*The message, to be bearers of light, is a strong and memorable one.*

*With Advent, we are entering the season of light. Of course, we embrace the light all year long but perhaps we value it more now because daylight is lessened. Soon we will have a winter solstice where we joyfully acknowledge the return of the light as our days slowly begin their journey back to their former length.*

*But there is—undoubtedly—an emphasis on the need for light this year. I admit I am feeling it more than other years.*

*For me, it began with a dark act, an act of violence by way of antisemitic graffiti that was spray painted upon a local synagogue a few weeks ago. Thankfully, there were many in the community who responded immediately, both to help clean up and to support this Jewish congregation.*

*But it was the words of the Rabbi that struck me, he said “A little bit of light pushes away a lot of darkness. This was an act of darkness. There's a lot of darkness in the world. The way that we fight is we start with light.”*

*Yes. Light.*

*This vulgar graffiti was not an act done in the light of day. Why? Because the exposure would hold the miscreants responsible.*

*So why do it? Why does anybody give in to hate or choose to dwell in anger where no good can grow? No*

*matter their self-deluding beliefs, on some level, those who act under cover of darkness know they are wrong, so they hide in darkness while performing their evil acts.*

*The scripture from John reminds us that light overcomes darkness. Jesus said “For all who do evil hate light and do not come to the light so that their deeds may not be exposed.” John 3:20. We were reminded of this at the service for Ken Hetzel, where Nate Martens read this passage specifically picked out by Ken.*

*Yes. Light exposes those things that thrive in darkness. The sun's antiseptic properties cleanse. Evil shrinks and dies in the presence of the light.*

*Only truth survives the light.*

*So friends, remember that peace begins with you; it begins with me. It begins in the personal choices we make in how we conduct our lives. We are none of us perfect and we are all guilty of cruelty and unkindness. This is all the more reason to remember that those things that thrive in darkness: gossip, rumor, character smearing, self-serving anger that fails to recognize a more balanced truth, and any other violence that is committed upon another under cover of darkness, these things are not of God.*

*As we journey into December, we have two occasions to use as reminders to live in the light. As the winter solstice arrives on December 21, followed by Christmas, may we use these opportunities to embrace the light and forsake the darkness.*

*Let's all be bearers of light.  
Mark*

# DECEMBER 2023

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1 6:00: 4H Meeting	2
3 9:45: Worship & Communion	4 1:00: Pastoral Care Team 5:00: Boy & Cub Scouts	5 9:00: FPC Walking Grp. 10:00: Food Pantry 10:00: Connected Threads 11:00: Church Staff Mtg.	6 10:00: Food Pantry Noon: Seasoned Seniors 7:00: Mission Cmte.	7 4:00: Choir Rehearsal 5:30: Wassailing	8	9 6:00: Kids Night In
10 9:45: Worship, 2¢-a-Meal & KidsFirst 2:00: Boy Scouts	11 5:00: Boy & Cub Scouts	12 10:00: Food Pantry 10:00: Connected Threads 11:00: Church Staff Mtg. 6:15: Brownie & Daisy Scouts	13 10:00: Food Pantry 4:30: Worship & Music 6:15: Session Meeting	14 11:00: Bible Study 4:00: Choir Rehearsal 5:00: Girl Scouts 6:00: Deacons	15	16
17 9:45: Worship 11:00: Pageant Rehearsal	18 5:00: Boy & Cub Scouts 6:30: Boy Scouts	19 10:00: Food Pantry 10:00: Connected Threads at Beacon Pointe 11:00: Church Staff Mtg.	20 10:00: Food Pantry 6:30: Trivia Night at Richland Library	21 4:00: Choir Rehearsal	22	23
24 9:45: Worship 10:00: Christmas Pageant 5:00: Christmas Eve Service	25 ~ <b>Christmas</b> ~	26 8:00: Men's Breakfast 10:00: Food Pantry 6:15: Brownie & Daisy Scouts	27 10:00: Food Pantry	28 4:00: Choir Rehearsal 5:00: Girl Scouts	29	30
31 ~ New Year's Eve ~	<div data-bbox="284 1386 695 1444" data-label="Text"> <p><b>OFFICE CLOSED</b></p> </div>					



# December Celebrations

## December Birthdays

1 <sup>st</sup> ..... Andrew Fiordalis	11 <sup>th</sup> ..... Connie Slater	22 <sup>nd</sup> ..... Laura Monk
1 <sup>st</sup> ..... Joseph Juodawlkis	14 <sup>th</sup> ..... David Alexander	24 <sup>th</sup> ..... Jake Larson
4 <sup>th</sup> ..... George Lovequist	14 <sup>th</sup> ..... Mara Cazars	24 <sup>th</sup> ..... Jeni Steele
4 <sup>th</sup> ..... Grant Slezak	14 <sup>th</sup> ..... Evan Odar	25 <sup>th</sup> ..... Jan Petersen
6 <sup>th</sup> ..... Georgie Lovequist	14 <sup>th</sup> ..... David Snyder	26 <sup>th</sup> ..... Jennifer Stupica
6 <sup>th</sup> ..... Nathan Martens	15 <sup>th</sup> ..... Sarah Myland-Waseem	27 <sup>th</sup> ..... Amy Juodawlkis
8 <sup>th</sup> ..... Jean Sowers	15 <sup>th</sup> ..... Lars Ruser	27 <sup>th</sup> ..... Margaret Tantilla
8 <sup>th</sup> ..... Carson Miller	16 <sup>th</sup> ..... Harry Stolt	29 <sup>th</sup> ..... Laurie Alexander
9 <sup>th</sup> ..... Nancy Hess	20 <sup>th</sup> ..... Michael Wright	29 <sup>th</sup> ..... Karen Urban
9 <sup>th</sup> ..... Alanna Wyckoff	20 <sup>th</sup> ..... Cathy Layson	29 <sup>th</sup> ..... Carol Leeson
10 <sup>th</sup> ..... Kendall Jennings	21 <sup>st</sup> ..... Ashleigh Webb	31 <sup>st</sup> ..... Jan Fisher
10 <sup>th</sup> ..... Kathleen Rothenberg	22 <sup>nd</sup> ..... Mike Juodawlkis	31 <sup>st</sup> ..... Kay Polzin

## Anniversaries

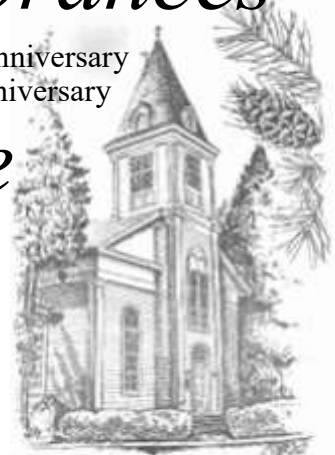
16 <sup>th</sup> ..... Kay & Larry Irey, 56 years	21 <sup>st</sup> ..... Liz & Allen Matthews 21, years
18 <sup>th</sup> ..... Lib & Jerry Wittwer, 58 years	29 <sup>th</sup> ..... Joyce & Chuck Farho 19, years
18 <sup>th</sup> ..... Marsha & Robert Zick, 47 years	

## & Remembrances

1<sup>st</sup> ..... Marilyn & Ed Davis's anniversary  
 29<sup>th</sup> ..... Kay & John Polzin's anniversary

## Carillon Hymns and Honoree

Date	Selection	Honoree
13 <sup>th</sup> .....	<i>Jesus Loves Me</i>	Zackery James Anderson
14 <sup>th</sup> .....	<i>Amazing Grace</i>	Olga E. Boyer
15 <sup>th</sup> .....	<i>The Old Rugged Cross</i>	Emma Hubbard
16 <sup>th</sup> .....	<i>Joyful, Joyful</i>	Ellie Lynch



### FPC ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### CONNECTED THREADS

Connected Threads will be meeting every third Tuesday, 10 am, at Beacon Pointe. All other Tuesday meetings will meet in the Resource Center.

#### MEN'S BREAKFAST

Food and Fellowship. The last Tuesday of each Month, October 31st, 8am at Liz's Parkview Café.

#### SEASONED SENIORS

Noon on the first Wednesday of the month at New Hope Covenant Church, Richland. Please come for lunch & fellowship with our seasoned seniors. Lunch is a free-will offering.



by Sandy Carahaly

It has been **just over a** year since the Just Love group organized with a goal of identifying ways to “walk the talk” of LGBTQIA welcome and affirmation in our church community and the community at large. We’ve had many wonderful discussions, developed and strengthened friendships, and grown in our inspiration and commitment to being strong advocates.

Over the past year we have:

- Held an open meeting in the GPR where Just Love members shared their personal journeys as members of and advocates for the LGBTQIA community
- Celebrated Pride Month with a special worship service focused on allyship and advocacy
- Sponsored a Church Fest table with design-your-own-button station
- Designed a logo (thank you to Marz Carahaly!)
- Began design and painting of the fence outside the DBH
- Surveyed the church membership & friends on areas of interest
- Provided education and reading recommendations through monthly Missive articles
- Held monthly meetings of the Just Love group

We are looking forward to the coming year, which will start off on January 21 at 11 AM in the Gull Prairie Room. Rev. Pat Weatherwax will lead an open meeting & discussion group on the Bible and LGBTQ+. All are welcome (and encouraged) to attend!

As you are shopping for the holidays, consider supporting LGBTQ+-owned businesses and LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations. Here is a short list from Michigan... search “LGBTQ owned” on Yelp for more...

- OutFront Kalamazoo
- Battle Creek Pride
- Dormouse Theatre
- Uncommon Coffee Roasters
- Left Field Cafe
- Guardian Brewing Company
- Browndog Creamery
- Twisted Willow Soap Company

**Days of Significance, December, 2023**

- Dec 1 – World AIDS Day
- Dec 8 – Pansexual Pride Day
- Dec 10 – Human Rights Day

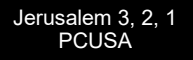
# Why is the Situation in Israel and Palestine (plus Hamas) so Complicated?

by Rev. Pat Weatherwax

I glibly offered to write a newsletter article about the conflict surrounding Israel and Palestine. I wish it was easier to explain how the area we call **The Holy Land**, got to be such a troubled place. As I tried to write this succinctly, I realized the whole Missive would be consumed by such an article, even if I submitted just the facts.

If you are interested, there are informative and easy-to-understand articles available. I especially recommend the PCUSA position statement:

“Jerusalem 3, 2, 1: Three Faiths, Two Peoples, One Human Family”.



<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/0019-CPJ-ACSWP-Jerusalem-3-2-1.pdf>

If you need a history lesson, the Wikipedia article on the

“1948 Palestine War” is helpful. It links to many other explanations, too.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1948\\_Arab%E2%80%9393Israeli\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1948_Arab%E2%80%9393Israeli_War)



1948 Palestine War Wikipedia

Other topics that matter are the work of the Palestinian group Hamas, and the concern of Christian Zionism. It is important to understand that the current State of Israel and the biblical land of Israel have very little in common.

If anyone in the congregation is extra-knowledgeable, I would love to chat, to help me understand more. The struggle of the region will not be solved in the foreseeable future. May the God of all the faiths involved move the leaders in the way of righteousness and peace.

# What the Animals Saw

by Larry Myland

December. In my mind, I call it the blessed month. Because of Christmas, of course.

I don't know about you, but during the course of the year my faith is not always as buoyant as it is when old Christmas comes rolling around. That's partly why I bask in the splendor of the blessed month with such unabashed abandon. It burnishes a sheen in my spirit that time has yet to tarnish. My faith always burns brightest in the glow of Christmas candles, when the promise of Christmas, the sheer wonder of it, kindles hope anew.

That's a small miracle perhaps, but a miracle nevertheless. The greater miracle is the ineffable mystery of God among us-that the Lord of Hosts came to us as the baby Jesus in those humble surroundings in Bethlehem.

Miracle and mystery, hand in hand. One of the surest ways to tackle such matters is through metaphor-through art or poetry or literature or music.

*O magnum mysterium,  
Et admirabile sacramentum  
Ut animalia viderent Dominum natum  
Jacentem in praesepe.  
Beata virgo, beata cujus viscera  
Meruerunt potare.  
Dominum Jesum Christum. Alleluia!*

*O great mystery  
And wonderful secret  
That the animals saw the Lord born  
Lying in a manger.  
O blessed Virgin, whose body was  
Deemed worthy to bear the  
Lord Jesus Christ. Alleluia!*

Another similar work, though one more akin to legend, is also a personal favorite. Like the O Magnum, it likewise features animals. Animals? Why would the sovereign of the universe reveal himself first to animals? There's a matter ready-made for your own Christmas meditations this year.

This second work by the Englishman, Thomas Hardy, relates the thrilling old narrative of how the animals always kneel at midnight on Christmas Eve.

When first I came across it years ago, I had to read it several times to get the real gist of it. I guarantee it will touch your heart. So, here it is, my little Christmas gift for you.

“The Oxen”

by Thomas Hardy

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.  
"Now they are all on their knees," an elder  
Said as we sat in a flock  
By the embers in hearthside ease.  
We pictured the meek, mild creatures where  
They dwelt in their strawy pen,  
Nor did it occur to one of us there  
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave  
In these years!  
Yet, I feel, if someone said on Christmas Eve,  
"Come, see the oxen kneel  
In the lonely barton by yonder comb  
Our childhood used to know,"  
I should go with him in the gloom,  
Hoping it might be so.

## FOOD PANTRY SHOPPING LIST

Over the Thanksgiving holiday, our food pantry partnered with the local Rotary Club and Loaves & Fishes to provide over twenty Thanksgiving dinners - complete with the turkey, stuffing, fresh potatoes, and a pumpkin pie with whipped cream - to local families with food insecurities.

After the busy time, the pantry shelves are now a little bare. If you feel called to shop for the pantry, cans of hearty soups, chili, and stews are still needed. Boxes of breakfast cereal are also low again.



## Fall Back Flapjacks Fundraiser

by Amber Beals

The Shared Blessings social witness team would like to extend a huge thank you to everyone who attended the Fall Back Flapjack Fundraiser and/or generously donated to the cause. It was a GREAT success, bringing in more than \$1,000 for Jonatan and his two boys, Angel and Joel. For those who missed it, we had live music provided by Nick Steele, plus we had Guatemalan-themed decorations and photos! The Steele family showed up and helped make and serve the pancakes, eggs, sausage, and orange juice. What a great breakfast!

It is still unclear when Jonatan and his sons will be coming as there have been several delays with their paperwork, but when they arrive these funds will be a helpful start for them so they can purchase school supplies and weather-appropriate clothing.

Jean and Jean put in many hours of their time to do ALL the shopping and a lot of the cooking, Sandra cracked upwards of 80 eggs, the Fosters helped with the setting up/clean up, Steve H made the coffee, and Mark and Erin greeted people as they came in. It took a team to make this happen, but it was only a success because so many generous people showed up!

## Word of The Month: Nephesh!

by Nate Martens

Every Tuesday, Mark begins our staff meetings with Micah 6:8 --

"what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?"

It is a powerful question for individuals and congregations. It has been a catalyst for some great dialogue.

This semester I have been taking Beginning Hebrew at Western Theological Seminary. Travis West is the instructor. This particular class has been very challenging, but also fun.

One day I was having a casual conversation with Travis and he made a reference to Micah 6:8.

I learned that the word for humbly is a hapax legomenon -- a term of which only one instance of use is recorded. Micah 6:8 is the only place that it appears. I also learned that what has been translated "humbly" actually means "to be in awe."

When I shared this new information at the next staff meeting, we considered the nuances of the words humbly and awe. Mark pointed out that to be in awe of God shifts the focus to the Creator. Being humble is usually a healthy thing, but it keeps us focused on ourselves.

This familiar passage took on a different meaning when Dr. West brought it to my attention. When you hear Micah 6:8 in the future I hope it evokes the awesome God we serve.



  
**NEED FOOD?**  
Our food programs are **FREE** and serve all of Kalamazoo County\*.

**GROCERY PANTRY PROGRAM**

- ✓ No eligibility requirements. No ID required.
- ✓ Pick-up groceries 2 times per month.
- ✓ Someone else can pick up on your behalf.
- ✓ Home deliveries available county-wide.
- ✓ Non-perishable food as well as fresh produce, meat, dairy, bread, and eggs.
- ✓ At least four days' worth of food for everyone in your household.
- ✓ Special dietary needs? Let us know!

**To Schedule A Same-Day Pantry Pick-Up:**  
Call 269.343.3663 Monday-Friday from 9AM-4PM  
If you are unable to call or reach us during these times,  
email [info@kzoolf.org](mailto:info@kzoolf.org) or message us on Facebook.

**NEED FOOD LINE: 269.343.3663**  
901 PORTAGE STREET, KALAMAZOO KZOLF.ORG INFO@KZOLF.ORG  
\*If you live outside the County and need assistance, give us a call. We may be able to help.

**Richland Food Pantry Please call 269.343.3663 to make an appointment.  
Tues. & Wed. 10 am to Noon. Walk-ins welcome.**

## What's the Best Designation

*from the Finance Committee*

As you are filling out your Stewardship Pledge form for 2024, you may be asking yourself, "What's the best designation for my gift to the church?". We ask that you give serious consideration to designating a larger portion to the General Fund for the operation of the church. Some of the expenses the General Fund is used for include, but are not limited to, Sunday school, fellowship, ground care, utilities, salaries, repair and maintenance, etc. We have so many wonderful committees that appreciate any and all gifts, but we also need to keep the doors open, the lights on, and things running smoothly. We can't thank you enough for your continued generosity year after year and we couldn't do it without your support!

## Reading Together is a Powerful Thing

*by Amber Beals*

Last month we read *The House United: How the Church Can Save The World* by Allen Hilton, then met for a book discussion.

Reading together is a powerful thing. I love that our church is willing to ask and discuss difficult and uncomfortable topics, even though we often have to admit we don't have the answers. But we keep asking and challenging and trying and nudging, and we do it TOGETHER. Thank you to Nate for leading a discussion on a difficult topic.

The next group read will be chosen by Shared Blessings and announced in January!

**2024 Stewardship  
First Presbyterian Church of Richland  
For the Glory of God  
Giving Period - January 1<sup>st</sup> - December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024**

**General Fund** **Total Annual Pledge**  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ / week or \$ \_\_\_\_\_ / month or \$ \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Building Fund** **Total Annual Pledge**  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ / week or \$ \_\_\_\_\_ / month or \$ \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like pledge envelopes in 2024 (please circle one):    Weekly            Monthly            No

Name(s):

Address:

City, St., Zip:

Email:

Options for returning your completed form:

• Email to the Financial Secretary: [firstpresbyterianchurch49083@gmail.com](mailto:firstpresbyterianchurch49083@gmail.com)

• Email to: Financial Secretary  
First Presbyterian Church  
8047 Church St.  
Richland, MI 49083

## KidsFirst December

by Brooke Heck

We hear it all the time “Jesus is the reason for the season” but it is so easy to get sucked into the commercialized aspect of the season when we are surrounded with “can’t miss sales”, unlimited Santa ops, and once a year TV specials. We celebrate Advent throughout the season and calendars marketed as “advent calendars” have become a household staple for a lot of young families. Walking through the store, you will see countdowns of chocolate, cheese, wine/beer, toys, and more... but what about it is an advent calendar that measures your giving/servitude? We can find countless verses in the Bible that point us to acts of service, kindness, and love for our neighbors.

It is more blessed to give than to receive.

- Act 20:35

But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.

- Galatians 5:13

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

- 1 John 3:18

And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

- Hebrews 13:16

I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’

- Deuteronomy 15:11b

As we begin this advent season, take the time each day to focus on kindness and record your act of servitude/love. By Christmas, you will be able to look back at all the ways you served others/our Lord this Advent season!

## 2024 Volunteers Wanted!

by Brooke Heck

KidsFirst is looking to expand our volunteer team for 2024! We have 2 classes (preschool-2nd grade and 3rd grade and up) and are continually looking to the future and the growth that will be needed as our current youth age out of the classes we are providing at this time. Joining the KidsFirst Crew is an extremely flexible, rewarding role within the church and as our ministry grows our team needs to grow as well!

As a KidsFirst volunteer, you are able to:

Choose the Sundays you volunteer (whether that’s one Sunday every few months or every couple of weeks!)

Get to know the youngest members of our church family

Spend time teaching the stories/lessons of the Bible using an interactive, simple curriculum that is provided to you

Be a part of an awesome team!

If you are interested in joining, Brooke would love to chat with you!







# KIDSFIRST KINDNESS ADVENT CALENDAR

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

**Take a few minutes each day to think about how you can spread kindness and love to those around you! Jot down what you did on the calendar to see all your little acts of kindness add up!**

3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30



First Presbyterian Church  
8047 Church Street  
Richland, MI 49083

*ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED*

# **DECEMBER**

## **FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH STAFF**

Dr. Mark W. Jennings, Pastor	Rachel Little, Office Manager
Reverend Pat Weatherwax, Parish Associate	Karen Urban, Office Volunteer
Nate Martens, Pastoral Intern	
Erin Jennings, Volunteer Assistant to the Pastor	Gretchen Ferris, Treasurer
	Chris Gobble, Financial Secretary
Larry Myland, Director of Music	
Andrea Large, Chancel Choir Director	Paul Gobble, Director of Communications
	Jeremiah Smith and Zoe Gobble, Production
Amber Beals, Coordinator of Small Group Ministries	
Brooke Heck, Sunday School Director	Connie Slater, Sexton