

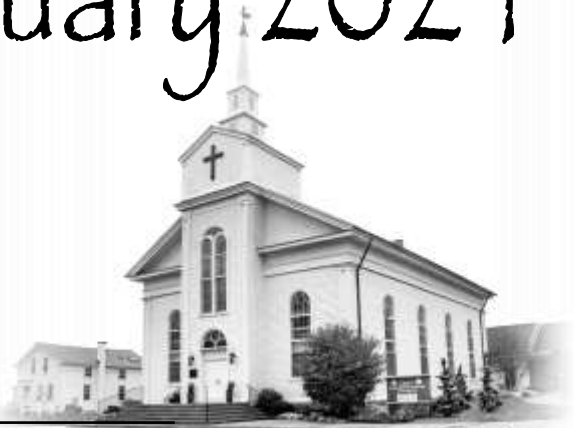
The Missive, January 2024

First Presbyterian Church

8047 Church Street
Richland, MI 49083
(269) 629-4944
fprich@firstpresrichland.org
www.fprich.org

Rev. Dr. Mark W. Jennings
revmarkwj@gmail.com
(269) 598-0966 cell

Volume 58, Number 1, Monthly



“For everything there is a season,” Ecclesiastes 3:1

Turn... Turn... Turn...

As I write, the tune by the Byrds runs in my mind. I was only 7 when this song was released in 1965. Yet it was woven into the fabric of my childhood. It's one we all knew, would sing to on the car radio or I would hear it on my transistor radio as I lay on my bed reading The Hardy Boys or Madd Magazine.

It's January 2024 and I am in disbelief that we are approaching the end of the first quarter of the 21st century. Y2K feels like it was only a few years ago and do you remember how we were warned that the computers would crash and we should stockpile soup cans in our basement? It's the end of the world as we know it!!! (Another great song, this one by R.E.M. that came out about 20 years later)

Does time speed up with age?

One theory puts forth the idea that a year in one's life goes faster the longer you live. Of course it's not really faster but your mind perceives it to be because, the longer you live, a single year becomes a smaller and smaller part of your life.

So it just feels faster.

This is why a year at the age of 5 takes for-e-v-e-r

But at 50, a year is gone in a blink. At age 5, it is one whole 5th of your total life: a huge slice of the pie that is your life. But at 50, it is a sliver,

1/50th of that pie. Too small to even constitute a slice and it's gone before you know it.

January is named for the Roman god, Janus. He was the oldest of the Gods, the first. He was the God of transitions or gateways. Janus was a reminder of where we've been and where we are going. How appropriate for the new year when we spend our time reflecting back on the year prior, looking ahead to the year to come. Janus is represented by an archway and this goes both ways. We go in and we go out. We look in one direction or we look in the other. This is why the God, Janus, has two faces because each looks in the opposite direction.

Ecclesiastes goes on to say, “moreover, he has put a sense of past and future into their minds,” 3:11

The past is important; its importance is to teach you. Your past is comprised of layers of foundation that support who you are today. But we have to be careful. When we dwell on the past and refuse to allow it to teach us about the future, we lay a faulty foundation that will not serve us well. The past is not meant to keep us captive, it is meant to free us as we mature emotionally, learn from it, take personal responsibility, and are better equipped to embrace our future.

Friends, may you be blessed in 2024.

*Grace and peace,
Mark*

JANUARY 2024

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 ~ New Year's Day ~ ~ Office Closed ~ 5:00: Boy & Cub Scouts	2 ~ Office Closed ~ 10:00: Food Pantry	3 10:00: Food Pantry Noon: Seasoned Seniors 7:00: Mission Cmte.	4 11:00: Bible Study 4:00: Choir Rehearsal	5	6
7 9:45: Worship, Communion & KidsFirst	8 1:00: Pastoral Care Team 5:00: Boy & Cub Scouts	9 10:00: Food Pantry 11:00: Church Staff Mtg. 6:15: Brownie & Daisy Scouts	10 10:00: Food Pantry 12:30: Worship & Music 4:30: Girl Scouts 6:15: Session Meeting	11 11:00: Bible Study 4:00: Choir Rehearsal 5:00: Girl Scouts 6:00: Deacons	12	13 4:00: Grad Bash Euchre Tournament
14 9:45: Worship, 2¢-a-Meal & KidsFirst 2:00: Boy Scouts	15 ~ Martin Luther ~ King Day 5:00: Boy & Cub Scouts 6:30: Boy Scouts	16 10:00: Food Pantry 10:00: Connected Threads at Beacon Pointe 11:00: Church Staff Mtg.	17 10:00: Food Pantry	18 11:00: Bible Study 4:00: Choir Rehearsal 5:00: Jack & Jill Registration	19 Noon: ARC Blood Drive	20
21 9:45: Worship & KidsFirst 11:15: Just Love	22 5:00: Boy & Cub Scouts 6:00: Boy Scouts	23 10:00: Food Pantry 10:00: Connected Threads 11:00: Church Staff Mtg. 6:15: Brownie & Daisy Scouts	24 10:00: Food Pantry 4:30: Girl Scouts	25 11:00: Bible Study 4:00: Choir Rehearsal 5:00: Girl Scouts	26	27
28 9:45: Worship 11:15: Annual Meeting & Church Potluck	29 5:00: Boy & Cub Scouts	30 8:00: Men's Breakfast 10:00: Food Pantry 10:00: Connected Threads 11:00: Church Staff Mtg.	31 10:00: Food Pantry			

WINTER WEATHER POLICY FOR 2023-2024

Please note our weather policy for the 2023-2024 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 may also close. See WWMT for announcements. Closure decisions will be made by Paul.

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

January Celebrations

January Birthdays

1 stDeng Thon Alier	12 thLillie Steele	25 thKristi Ryan
3 rdJohn Lebiecki	13 thCam Nicholson	25 thDarcy Wank
3 rdSue Myland	13 thBrennan Wieber	26 thDanny Snyder
5 thErin Jennings	18 thLarry Irey	27 thNick Reece
5 thAdam Simon	18 thKate Miller	29 thPaul Cazars
6 thRebecca Gibson	18 thTeresa Young	29 thJoyce Dishon
6 thRobin Nott	20 thChuck Farho	29 thSandy Stupica
8 thPam Foster	20 thGreg Keusch	30 thFaith Fiordalis
8 thVivian Lovequist	20 thAmy Syverson	30 thMarie Larson
12 thDave Deater	21 stBrooke Heck	30 thSarah Striffler
12 thClara Kreinbring	24 thChristie Sutherland	31 stKim Knutsen

& Anniversaries

2 ndWendy & Nate Martens, 3 years	22 nd Diane & Don Meitz, 68 years
12 thMary & George Lindenberg, 43 years	26 th Shannon & Jeremiah Smith, 10 years
14 thLaurie & Scott Alexander, 19 years	

Carillon Hymns and Honoree

Date	Selection	Honoree
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 28, 11am. Please plan to join us to celebrate 2023 and plan for 2024! We will review the annual reports and elect new elders and deacons.

Chili, Salads, Sweets: After the Annual Meeting, we'll enjoy gathering for an old-fashioned "potluck" in the Gull Prairie Room. Pull out your favorite recipe(s) and bring them to church on Sunday the 28th!

We need five people to signup with Rachel to bring a crockpot of chili.

Women's Book Club: The next will be reading Dominique Lapierre's *The City of Joy*. The discussion will be hosted by Nancy Lynch on Wednesday, January 24th, at 1 pm.

Men's Breakfast: Food and Fellowship, Tues. the 30th, 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.

***NEW* Home Based Small Groups**

by AmberBeals

For much of 2023, the small group focus has been on creating opportunities for connection, whether it be through fun events like the door-sign painting workshop, Bunco nights, flower arranging, Dads' bowling and trivia, learning events like the SHALOM visit or the book discussion, and regular activities like the Walking group or Moms' group. From a community building perspective, it's been a great way to get people used to socializing again post-COVID. However, now that I am reflecting and making plans for 2024, I'd like to try something new and see what happens.

In 2024, I would like to encourage people in the congregation to consider joining a home-based small group with the hope of providing an opportunity for deeper connections. I am starting a sign-up this month and am hoping to roll out the groups in February. Here are a few details:

-Each group will be small: likely in the 5-9 adults per group range

-There will be three types of groups to choose from: Families, Individuals, or Couples

-Groups will meet monthly, with the option to take the summer off if desired.

-Each group will take turns meeting in people's homes. If someone doesn't have a usable home space, we may be able to make some arrangements in the Deacon Brown House when it's your turn to host.

-Each group will choose what they want to structure around. Some groups may want to study a book together while others may just want to share a meal together or just get together. The most important thing is regular fellowship.

-I would like groups to commit to meet through the end of 2024. Once we get through the year, we can reassess and/or shuffle and decide how we want to move forward in 2025.

-People can sign up as individuals OR couples OR families.

-Once I learn how many are interested, I will divide people up into groups and get things started. I will do my best to match your preferences, but with the smaller church size, please be understanding.

-If you would like to join a small group, but are out of town a few months a year, still email me with the details below and just let me know and I will see what options we have for you.

If you are interested in participating in one of these home-based small groups, please email Amber (amberbeals@gmail.com) and include the following:

Name/Names

Which group most interests you? Families, Individuals or Couples

What is your Age range? 20s-30s, 40s-50s, 60s-70s, 80s+

Other Small Groups Coming Up

by Amber Beals

Walking Group: Meet in the North church parking lot. We will decide whether to walk the preserve or the bike path, depending on weather.

January 9: 9am

January 23: 9am

Youth Small Group Gathering: Save the Date! Youth, 5th grade and up, are invited to a Super Bowl Party on the evening of February 11. We will be inviting youth from Gull Lake United Methodist Church as well and this event will be held in the Deacon Brown House. For those that don't enjoy football but still want to hang out, there will be some games available to play as well. Watch for more details as we get closer! If there is anyone in the church willing and able to help plan this activity, please reach out to Amber at amberbeals@gmail.com

Book Discussion: February 25 (Sunday) at 11:15am. Small Groups is partnering with the social witness group, Shared Blessings, for the next Book Discussion. The book chosen is Small Great Things by Jodi Picoult. I encourage you to look it up to see if you are interested in reading this with a group of other church goers! This will be available to purchase at church soon so watch those Thursday emails!

From the Library Cart: I know you haven't see the cart out as much as I had planned. Hopefully this can start happening again! If you would like to help me by rolling this out on Sundays, please email me at amberbeals@gmail.com

A few new cart additions to watch out for:

Book by Amanda Held Opelt. Amanda's sister, Rachel Held Evans (a well-known Christian writer) died of an unexpected, sudden complication at the age of 37. This beautiful book has come out of Amanda's own grief and experience in a world and culture that doesn't always know how to handle death and grief.

Lust for Life: A classical biographical novel about Vincent Van Gogh by Irving Stone. An older book, but a very fascinating look on Vincent's struggles and how his great art came to be.

Where'd You Park Your Spaceship? An Interplanetary Tale of Love, Loss, and Bread By Rob Bell. This is a new genre for Rob, sort of sci-fi or fantasy, but has a lot of deep truths woven in.

If you would like to help me by rolling this cart out on Sundays, please email me at amberbeals@gmail.com

Also, do you have a book you think others should read? If you are interested in donating a book you found especially meaningful to the library cart, please email amberbeals@gmail.com

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



**American
Red Cross**



First Presbyterian Church

8047 Church St. | Richland, MI 49083

January 19

Noon – 6pm

Use the contact information below
to make your appointment.

redcrossblood.org | 1-800-RED CROSS



by Sandy Carahaly

Happy New Year! I hope you were all able to find time to relax amid the hustle and bustle of the holidays and reflect on the joy and the promise of the newborn King.

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!

A Minute to Learn:

International Holocaust Remembrance Day

International Holocaust Remembrance Day is January 27. We are all well-aware of the Jewish genocide perpetrated by the Nazis, but what many don't know is the persecution experienced by gay and lesbian people between 1933-1945. The Nazis closed gay bars, banned their organizations, raided their meetings, and shuttered their presses. Books with gay content, even scientific literature, were included in Nazi book burnings. Over 100,000 homosexual men were arrested under "Paragraph 175" of the German criminal code which banned sexual relations between men as a "crime against morality." This included transgender women, who were not accepted as women during the Nazi regime. Most of the "guilty" were imprisoned, but as many as 15,000 were sent to concentration camps and assigned a pink triangle to wear on their uniforms to identify them as homosexual. Punishment included hard labor, torture, castration, medical experimentation, and for as many as 65% of them, death. Notably, lesbians were excluded from persecution under Paragraph 175, because "racially pure" German women were seen as necessary for expanding the Aryan race. For more information,

see: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/series/gay-men-and-lesbians-under-the-nazi-regime>

While The Holocaust is firmly planted in the past, it's important to be aware that persecution and systemic genocide of LGBTQ+ people still exists in many countries, today. There are currently 70 countries that criminalize same-sex intimacy. I have a friend who had to leave his homeland to ensure his safety; his story is horrifying. If you would like to help provide safe passage for LGBTQ+ people or simply learn more about how LGBTQ+ people are persecuted, a wonderful humanitarian organization is Rainbow Rail-



Gay Men, Lesbians Under Nazi



Rainbow Railroad

road. <https://www.rainbowrailroad.org>

While the US is often a provider of refuge and advocacy, in 2022, the increase in anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and legislation contributed to the US becoming #8 on the list of countries from where requests for aid originated.

Days of Significance, January, 2024

- January – National Slavery & Human Trafficking Prevention Month
- January 11 – National Human Trafficking Awareness Day
- Third week in January – No Name-Calling Week
- January 27 – International Holocaust Remembrance Day



Shared Blessings

by Erin Jennings

Shared Blessings had a year bookended by two significant happenings in 2023. Our foray into American Sign Language (ASL), in February, which was intended to be a simple, post-worship gathering with a local teacher, flowered into an actual class held over eight weeks. The sudden loss of leadership with Pastor Mark's stroke was quickly remedied by Laura Carisalez who took up the reigns to see this ASL ministry through. The other event took place this fall when we hosted a "Fall Back Flapjacks Fundraiser" for Jonathan and his boys, Angel and Joel, who are moving to the US from Guatemala. We made well over \$1,000 that is now in a "welcome fund" for their arrival. Shared Blessings plans to help with clothing and school needs. We are very grateful to Amber Beals who picked up the reigns when the ASL class was completed. We are a tiny but mighty social witness team in our church, always looking to lead the church in the principles of Matthew 25. We began strong and ended strong with a natural hiatus in the middle as the church recalibrated and adjusted to the leadership shifts.

In 2024, we are looking to pick up the call to deepen our understanding and commitment to peacemaking in a world challenged by racial injustice. We are excited to begin this new effort with a book discussion on Small Great Things by Jodi Picoult in February. This is in collaboration with Amber and Small Group Ministries. More info. on this can be found in Amber's piece in The Missive.

Word of The Month: El Chanoun

by Nate Martens

My Hebrew course at Western Theological Seminary has been a rich experience. I have shared some of the nuggets with all of you because it seemed to say something relevant.



When the semester started in August, Travis West bestowed upon each student a Hebrew name. (Dr. West's classroom name is always Moshe -- meaning Moses) As we have worked our way through the book of Jonah, we have encountered each name. My name was (and continues to be) El Chanoun which means "God is gracious."

My classroom moniker has been a reminder that whatever happens to us, God is with us and God is gracious.

A year ago at this time I was preparing to fill the pulpit for Mark on January 8, 2023 while he and Erin were in California. I was about to start a new semester and I was struggling with Greek! I had no idea that 2023 would unfold the way it did. The challenges of 2023 were unique, but so were the blessings. God is gracious.

I had no idea that I would have an opportunity to serve as a pastoral intern in this place! It was a privilege to share the journey of 2023 with you. God's graciousness was so evident in so many ways. The internship concluded in December, but rest assured Wendy and I will continue our friendship with this congregation.

To quote Winn Collier, "Love big and be well!"

Shalom,
Nate

What's a Parish Associate?

by Rev. Pat Weatherwax

You probably have heard of an associate pastor. That person generally is a "called and installed" second minister for a specific congregation. In my case, I am an honorably retired Minister of Word and Sacrament in the PC(USA). I served as the installed Associate Pastor at the Battle Creek First Presbyterian Church from 2012 thru 2021. When retiring from a church, clergy are asked not to participate and especially not be involved in leadership of the congregation they are retiring from. We are required to move along.

A parish associate is different from an associate pastor! There's no mention of the role of a Parish Associate in the PC(USA) Book of Order, but it is a common occurrence in our presbytery. For the most part (and in our situation) the Parish Associate is a voluntary assistant to the pastor and the church. Often it's a minister who has some other occupational responsibilities or, like me, is retired and just hanging around, looking for a church home. When providing the sermon the Parish Associate is paid like a pulpit supply substitute but otherwise not paid for involvement or activities.

With Mark Jennings' return to full time status I won't be preaching as much, but will continue to assist in worship and enjoy being a part of the choir and congregation. I appreciate the opportunity to continue serving as your Parish Associate.



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 or message us on Facebook.

NEED FOOD LINE: 269.343.3663
901 PORTAGE STREET, KALAMAZOO KZOOLF.ORG INFO@KZOOLF.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.

KidsFirst

Taking a look back at 2023

by Brooke Heck

We kicked off January 2023 with a brand new curriculum, Simply Loved, which focuses on learning a new Bible story each week that relates to the monthly Bible verse. All children congregated in the same class, led by myself and assisted by one of our amazing KidsFirst volunteers!

The first Valentines Kids Night In was hosted in February! We had 14 kids join us for 4 hours of fun while caregivers enjoyed a few quiet hours!

April kicked off with Palm Sunday! Kids enjoyed participating in the service by laying the palms in the sanctuary to make way for Jesus (portrayed by Andrew Heck) on his donkey (portrayed by Rick Foster). Once downstairs, the kids traveled through Holy Week, learning about the many events that led up to the Crucifixion and Resurrection! Each kid went home with a "Holy Week kit" with activities for each family to participate in throughout the week! Easter Sunday was all about celebrating the empty tomb! We had a party full of Easter themed carnival games and prizes before heading outside for the Easter egg hunt!

The start of summer meant the completion of our curriculum! Instead of starting a new session of curriculum, we opted on focusing the summer months to serving our community! We kicked off the Summer of Service with a fundraiser at the Rummage Sale... raising a total of \$224! That money was used throughout the summer to help organizations the kids chose each week we met! We donated to the Richland food pantry, Bronson Children's Hospital, the staff at Friendship Village, and the Cheff Center, as well as completing a service project at the Richland Area Community Center! It was amazing to see the kids work together to choose who to donate to and what they wanted to do for them as well!

Lots of fun happened in August! The church was filled with "Happy Campers" August 13-16 during Vacation Bible School! 19 kids registered for the fun and we had a wonderful team of volunteers that made the week a memorable experience for all involved! A few weeks later, we had all incoming and outgoing 3rd graders (Esperanza Carisalez, George Lovequist, Tyson Putt, and Abraham Smith) complete the first "Scripture Study" to earn their church provided Bibles. The Scripture Study encouraged the students to dive into the Bible to find scripture that is important to them. They shared a short presentation to myself and Pastor Mark prior to receiving their Bibles during the church service on August 27th. The Blessing of the Backpacks also took place on August 27th just in time for the new school year at Gull Lake to begin the next day!

New school year, new classroom! September was a big month for KidsFirst! We expanded into two classrooms - early elementary (preschool-2nd grade) and upper elemen-

tary (3rd grade and up)! The early elementary class continued with the Simply Loved curriculum while the upper elementary class began a new curriculum, Be Bold! The new curriculum tackles a question that many kids often face but adults can often have a difficult time answering.

Before we knew it, December was here and it was time for the next Kids Night In and pageant rehearsals! Kids Night In was held December 9th and we had 10 kids join in for all the holiday fun! The 2023 pageant was filled with familiar hymns, 15 kids filling the roles, 7 kids filling roles with speaking parts, 3 songs sung by kids as duets or solos, and lots of fun and memories made!

It was my first full year as the director of Sunday School and it was an absolute pleasure continuing to build the KidsFirst program and creating a safe, inclusive, and fun space for all children to learn the glories of God and joys of Jesus! Thank you to all the church members who have played a part in the success of KidsFirst in 2023... I can't wait to see what is in store for 2024!

Support for Children Services

by Cindi Lebiecki

The Mission Committee would like to thank our congregation for the generous support of the Year-Round Pantry at Family and Children Services this Christmas season. Thanks to all of you, FCS received donations of diapers of various sizes, diaper wipes, Pull-ups, toilet paper, paper towels, laundry detergent, twin bed comforters, complete towel sets, complete set of cookware and dishes, laundry detergent and miscellaneous health and beauty items. You also provided \$120 worth of gift cards to be used for discretionary spending.



Many thanks to Jean Sowers, Jean Yoder, Jennifer Spengler and Donna and Ashleigh Webb for shopping and delivering these items to FCS.

The Family and Children Services Pantry is in need of items year-round and their greatest needs were identified to be disposable items such as diapers, wipes, toilet paper, paper towels and laundry detergent. You can drop these items off at any time at 1608 Lake St. Kalamazoo, MI 49001.



I AM MOST LOOKING
FORWARD TO



IN 2024!



First Presbyterian Church
8047 Church Street
Richland, MI 49083

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

JANUARY

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH STAFF

Dr. Mark W. Jennings, Pastor
Reverend Pat Weatherwax, Parish Associate
Erin Jennings, Volunteer Assistant to the Pastor

Larry Myland, Director of Music
Andrea Large, Chancel Choir Director

Amber Beals, Coordinator of Small Group Ministries
Brooke Heck, Sunday School Director

Rachel Little, Office Manager
Karen Urban, Office Volunteer

Gretchen Ferris, Treasurer
Chris Gobble, Financial Secretary

Connie Slater, Sexton

Paul Gobble, Director of Communications
Jeremiah Smith and Zoe Gobble, Production