

e-news for Dec 26, 2024

Dear FPC family and friends,

We had quite an eventful session meeting the week before Christmas. You may not realize this, but I am not a policy guy. I would much rather build relationships with people than build policy around words and documents. But policy and documents are crucial to keeping things decent and in order. Without them you would simply descend into chaos, and, well, no one likes chaos, certainly not in a church. We are blessed here at FPC with elders who are what might be called policy wonks. In one meeting we were able to approve two substantial documents which comprised a grand total of nearly 20 pages of policy.

The first document which session approved to go to the congregation was our bylaws. We have not had a set of bylaws for the congregation in place since the 1960's. The way our church government works is that the session approves the bylaws, but you as a congregation need to give the final approval by a 2/3 vote. This will happen at our yearly congregational meeting on January 26. The bylaws are basically a users manual for the church in how we do things that involve decision making and living out our life as followers of Jesus in this specific church. Linda Younger took the lead on this committee and she had help. Thank you to Bill Potter, Peter Witmer, Carolyn Groff, and Linda for your work on this.

The second document which session approved, which does not need congregational approval, is the policy on child safety at First Presbyterian Church. The last time that we took a serious pass at this document was almost 25 years ago. Situations change, life in the church is not static, it evolves, and so do the supporting policies, especially those surrounding child safety. I hope you will find the robustness of this document encouraging, while at the same time not limiting for programmatic success. Once again Linda Younger headed this committee up. She had a lot of help from Seth Gregory who was our scribe, Joyce Potter, David Edwards, Amanda Allison, and Dan Colvin. This team worked hard and put in a lot of hours and came up with an incredibly thorough document. Thank you all for a job well done, and thank you session for being willing to tackle two pretty heavy documents in a very busy time of the year.

Session also made a decision about the state of the cleanliness of the church. Trustees had recommended that we go back to using Kepiro cleaning service. They had worked with us for a handful of years and did a wonderful job. After Covid we tried to transition and we had thought with hiring an individual custodian we could have someone around the building doing odd jobs while at the same time cleaning the church. We realized the work that Kepiro did for us was outstanding and we miss their ability to make our church look great. This will be a substantial increase to our budget, but it is a sacrifice which we felt was necessary.

It is the day after Christmas. It is a time in the life of the church and in the life of all of our families to celebrate with joy the newborn king. The pageant was heart warming and reminded us of why Jesus is Emmanuel, because in the children we see His face staring back at us. The next time I will be writing to you it will be a brand-new year. I pray that God will bless you and your families in a wonderfully meaningful way today and in the year to come.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR

e-news for Dec 18, 2024

What is Blue Christmas? We had a saying in my family, while I was growing up: *A place for everything and everything in its place.* I don't know if it ever really corralled all the sports equipment, books and lost socks. It taught me that all things belong, and that life will be more enjoyable if we give them a spot to belong.

Sometimes the Christmas season can be filled with so many extra, delightful and good things like shopping for (or making) the perfect gifts (that doesn't bust the budget!), family visits that have been put off and are finally here, late bedtimes with excited children, gatherings around the table for the treats we all love, oh, and the cooking and the cookie making! (And, there's that Elf who needs a different shelf every night...)

And just maybe you have some other things in your life that need a place to belong during this wonderful Advent season. That's where Blue Christmas comes in.

Blue Christmas is a worship service designed to bring all the things that don't fit in our joyful celebrations, but still long for the hope of Christmas. It will be an opportunity to rest from the pressures and remember that Emmanuel, *God-with-us* promises to see, heal and make a good and happy future for all the small, maybe even lost or broken but important pieces in our lives.

Blue Christmas will also be a time of prayer for other hurting people and places. The ancient people of Israel prayed laments to contain the chaos of their world, and so can we. War and injustice still make headlines in December. It weighs heavy in the season of excess 'stuff' and an emphasis on the bright and shiny. Yes, birth of Christ is the best news ever, and we still yearn for the day when His peace is established for all people everywhere.

Blue Christmas will be a time to remember that Jesus was sent from heaven and took on human form for exactly the reasons we need: He came to carry our losses and burdens into the presence of God. He came to offer a redemption of things that test our faith. He came into the world 2000 years ago, in order to come to Strasburg, to you and I, today.

Did you know the meaning of encourage originated with 'heart'. To give courage is to give strength to the heart. All our worship can and does encourage our hearts. Blue Christmas, especially, will be a worship service to where we will open ourselves to the ways the Spirit of Jesus will give our hearts the strength they need and long to have.

During the Blue Christmas service, we will have quieter, reflective music when we can listen, reflect and be still. We'll sing together. Jonathan will play the piano and Seth Gregory, the cello. (Thank you!!) We will also pray, hear readings and recall God's promises. If you need a place of hope, sanctuary and prayer to put your fatigue, grief and longing this Advent, Blue Christmas might be that place.

In Christ,

Jen Eisenberg, Seminary Intern at First Presbyterian Church of Strasburg

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

Blue Christmas – Sunday, December 22 at 3pm. Join us for a time of contemplation on what it means that Jesus is with us this season. We praise Emmanuel.

Bible Study – Tomorrow evening at 6pm. Join us here for Bible Study. It is hard to believe that we have been doing this study now for close to 5 years. Join us here for this virtual, interactive study: [Bible Study](#)

Christmas Eve Services: Join us for the pageant at 4:30, and candlelight services at 8 and 11.

e-news for Dec 4, 2024

Dear FPC family and friends,

So, let's talk about money, shall we? As a congregation you voted to receive the budget that session had passed at its last meeting in November. I have attached a copy of the budget below. One aspect of being a Presbyterian that I so appreciate is that we are an open book. We do not hide anything about who we are or what we are doing, not even that which some may consider the most sensitive information, such as our financial data.

What I hope we made clear at the congregational meeting on Sunday is that we have experienced a budget shortfall this year that is not insignificant. As a congregation you have been so incredibly faithful by responding to every appeal and by hearing that information and saying to yourself: This is my church. I'm going to make sure that I am going to do what I can to not allow that shortfall to impact the ministry that we are doing.

But that is the key, isn't it? Understanding the ministry in which the church is involved and the mission that is a part of our fabric can only motivate us to meet the financial needs that may arise. If you don't know what we are doing then why would you support the church? I have always consistently encouraged followers of Jesus Christ, who might be aligned with FPC, to follow the Scriptural mandate of giving 10% of the material income that we receive back to the church. But understanding what the church is currently involved in that might bring joy to your heart is crucial in providing motivation for giving.

So, what does the 2025 budget look like and what areas might be seen as encouraging for those who might want to give even more in December? Did you know that our new budget has \$76,000 in mission giving for 2025 as opposed to \$65,000 in 2024? That significant change reflects our commitment to our Community Impact Committee which helps Lancaster County folks who might be in financial need. Did you know that this past month your session approved a one-time donation of \$5,000 to Chestnut Housing, a locally run organization whose mission it is to provide permanent housing to those in need.

Our mission budget really reflects our commitment to being a Matthew 25 church where we take seriously our local, regional, national, and even international commitment to meeting people

in need right where they are. Our budget also reflects our commitment to our youth and their growth in coming to know Jesus. Not only do we have a full-time youth and young adult staff person, but we increased the budget of our mission trips and continue to have a robust budget for yearly expenses for that program. We care that our children and our youth grow into faith and we put our financial resources in a place that can make a real difference.

I have always said that it is from worship that all else emanates. That is also reflected in our budget through our staffing a part-time organist/choirmaster, and a part-time director of contemporary worship. What happens on Sunday morning is practice for the week to come and allows us to come to know Jesus in a more personal way. But also what happens on Sunday morning is an opportunity for you to invite friends and neighbors to come and worship and if they do not know Jesus, they can come to a personal relationship with him. That is what we are all about here at FPC, coming to know Jesus personally and loving him and our neighbor in all that we do and say.

The budget for 2025 is very, very optimistic. This is especially true as we recognize that without a concerted effort on your part in December we will fall far short of budgeted income for 2024. But my approach to church budgets has always been to let the elders of session know: put the figure down that you feel will be needed to carry out the ministry over which you have been assigned. In my 31 years of ministry I have never served a church where God has not provided for the ministries which the leadership has understood the Holy Spirit to have put on their hearts. As a congregation over these past 13 years you have been faithful enough that FPC has been able to meet its expenses year in and year out. Thank you for that and thank you for supporting FPC in December and in 2025.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

Bible Study every Thursday evening at 6pm. You can join us here: [Youtube](#)

Saying goodbye to a couple of staff people: We have been so blessed to have Tron Smith as part of our staff here at FPC. Tron has served faithfully as our custodian over the past two and a half years and is a familiar face around us. He has taken on more responsibilities at his full-time position as custodian of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Lancaster. Congratulations Tron and we will miss you!

Also serving out through the year will be Walter Kondratowski who agreed to serve as interim director of contemporary worship. We will be looking to hire a permanent person for that position, so if you know of any names let us know. Thank you, Walter for serving as a stop gap in this time when we really needed you!

Upcoming Advent and Christmas activities:

Sunday, December 8 at 7pm: Christmas at the organ with our very own Jonathan Jones

Sunday, December 15 at 7pm: Courtyard Carols with our very own Walter Kondratowski

Sunday, December 22 at 3pm: Blue Christmas organized by our very own Jen Eisenberg.

Christmas Eve Services:

4:30 Children's Pageant

8pm and 11pm Candlelight Service

Giving to FPC: Wondering what the best way to give to FPC might be? You can: 1. Place your contribution in the collection plate, 2. Click the DONATE button on the church web site3. Mail your check to FPCS, 101 St. Decatur Street, Strasburg, PA 17579

e-news for Nov 23, 2024

Dear FPC family and friends,

For over 192 years First Presbyterian Church of Strasburg has been faithfully following the call of Jesus Christ to be the body of Christ in this region. Every generation has faced its challenges and seen celebrations that would shape its future and affect its culture. This body of believers has seen and fought in the civil war and lived through it. This bride of Christ has survived the Spanish Flu and WWI and flourished while asking the difficult questions of where is God the suffering that we see around us. These saints of First Strasburg have fought in WWII and experienced first hand the turbulent 60's. Most recently we have lived through Covid and now we look to position ourselves in a place where every person who worships with us will experience the living Christ by loving God and loving neighbor.

If you are reading this enews then you are a vital part of the history of this church. You have contributed in some way to establishing the kingdom of God through our work together. This Sunday we will be celebrating the birthday of the church. We have 42 people who have been members of this church for over 50 years. That is not a typo, so let me repeat that. We have 42 people who have been members of this church since 1974 or earlier. Our longest standing member is Elinor Rudy who joined the church in 1940, this marks her 84th year as a member. I don't know about you but my eyes are getting a bit misty thinking about the commitment, the faithfulness, the love that is seen in this church through these faithful members.

This past week we welcomed 9 new members into the fellowship. These new members are beginning to make their mark and impact the life of the church in ways that we cannot know now, but look forward to seeing over time. We have 8 girls in our confirmation class this year, and they will begin the clock counting toward which of them will be the longest standing member 80 years from now. They will only be in their early 90's, so yeah, they got this. This week we have two baptisms which reflects the life of the church which is, well, alive!

There is a movement recently in churches that eschews membership. I'm a bit conflicted in this approach. I absolutely agree that membership should not have its privileges, but rather it should carry first and foremost its responsibilities. Becoming a member is not meant to provide you with services and perks. Being a member of First Presbyterian, I hope, provides a new way of life that insists that we are all for Christ, or not at all. Being a member of First Presbyterian in this

generation reminds us that we are first and foremost called to love God and to love our neighbor. Membership does not mean that we are to be served, but rather that we serve. That is what we sign up for when we join First Presbyterian.

My prayer for each of us for this birthday Sunday is that we remind ourselves that this journey is better when it is travelled with others. When was the last time that you invited others to come to church with you? This is going to be our emphasis in 2025, but it is not too early to start today. Begin this Sunday and invite them to the birthday brunch where they can see the longevity that is a part of our family. People stay when they see meaning and find significance. Invite people with whom you would love to find significance by living a life together for Christ here at First Presbyterian. We have a great church, let people know about it.

Your servant in Christ

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

Celebration of the ministry of Michael Wilson in Donegal Presbytery: On December 8 at 2pm there will be a luncheon celebrating the ministry of Michael Wilson in the Presbytery of Donegal. Please call the church office if you are interested in attending. All are welcome.

Memorial Poinsettias: Orders are now being taken for memorial poinsettias for the upcoming Advent season. Cost is \$10 per plant. **Deadline for orders & payments: December 15, 2024.**

Congregational Meeting on December 1 after the second service: At this meeting we will be voting on the Pastor's terms of call, voting on church officers, and receiving the budget.

Civil Rights Bus Trip: Join us on a bus trip through key southern sites of the Civil Rights Movement. The trip will take place March 8-15 and is sponsored by Messiah University. If you are interested contact Pastor Bob for more details.

Santa's Helpers: Once again we will participate in helping L-S School District families with gifts for Christmas. This year we will have 100 tags out on the tree starting on December 1. The gifts need to be purchased and placed under the tree by December 15th.

CHURCH DECORATING DAY ~ On Monday, November 25th at 6pm, we will be decking the halls and preparing the church for Advent and Christmas. Come join in the fun, have pizza, and help us to decorate!

Advent calendar:

December 1 – 5:30 Family Advent Night for anyone who would like to attend

December 8 – 7pm Christmas at the organ hosted by Jonathan Jones

December 15 – 7pm Courtyard Carols featuring cookies and hot cocoa sponsored by Walter Kondratowski

December 22 – 3pm Blue Christmas Worship Service sponsored by Jen Eisenberg.

December 24 – 4:30 children's Christmas pageant

8 and 11pm candlelight worship

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS:

- 1. Budget approved** – You will be able to pick up the budget starting this Sunday in order to prepare yourself for the congregational meeting on December 1.
- 2.** Approved the disbursing \$5,000 of mission funds to support One Hope for Africa – baby homes mission.
- 3.** Approved the disbursing of \$5,000 to support Chestnut Housing from mission funds.
- 4.** Approved the disbursing of \$2,500 to bring Vladimir Tatarnikov for a week as Missionary in residence.
- 5.** Approved the first read of new by-laws for the congregation that if approved in December will come before the congregation for final approval at a congregational meeting in January.
- 6.** Approved the first read of a child safety policy that would become the acting policy of First Presbyterian.

e-news for Nov 14, 2024

Dear FPC family and friends,

It is early Thursday morning and I'm sitting in another airport. One of the joys of being listed on the slate as the future moderator of the Donegal Presbytery is that you get to go to conferences in Louisville, KY which helps to prepare you for that role. Just a couple of days ago at the personnel meeting I mentioned how uncomfortable I have been feeling this year because I have actually taken all of my vacation and study leave time for the first time in my 13 years as your pastor. I don't like being away from you. It also makes me a bit anxious to be flying in on Saturday evening with the off chance of there being complications which might make me late for Sunday. We have a plan B in place, but let's plan on that not happening and I'll be glad to see all of you bright eyed and bushy tailed on Sunday morning (I have no idea what that means but my mom used to say that a lot).

I think of the roads that the 12 disciples took for the three years that they followed Jesus. While Capernaum was their home base (Matthew 4:13), they still traveled as far south as Jerusalem and as far north as Tyre and Sidon. That is over 100 miles away that they consistently walked over those three years, so you can imagine that they had a traveler's mentality. You hear that in Matthew 8:20 where Jesus tells those who might want to follow him that you cannot expect to have the creature comforts that maybe you would have in a more sedentary and "normal" lifestyle.

Let's be clear, and so you won't feel sorry for me, I am not sleeping outside in Louisville. I'll have my own room, they will feed me, so the creature comforts will be present. But a traveler's mentality is one that is necessary for disciples to have because then you are not attached to any one place as if your life depended on it. This is the longest that I have ever lived in one place. Just

this year we completed our 13th year which by far and away is the longest place that I have ever lived, and certainly the longest place my family has ever lived. If someone were to ask me now where I am from or what is my home town Strasburg would come out without hesitation. That has never been the case in my life before.

If someone were to ask a disciple of Jesus Christ where he was from, what would they answer in the 1st century? If someone were to ask Peter where he was from, we know that he had the accent and the mannerisms of a man from Galilee, but because of his traveler's mentality what would he say after year 2 with Jesus? Paul tells us very clearly in Philippians 3:20 "But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." It sounds stranger to answer the question directed to us: "So where are you from?" with the answer: "Heaven!" But that is what Paul is telling us.

When we have that approach then our ultimate loyalty is not toward any one place or nation, but rather our ultimate loyalty is unequivocally to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In fact, in II Corinthians 5:20 Paul tells us "So we are ambassadors for Christ." As ambassadors for Christ our nation is heaven and whom we represent is Jesus. I'll never forget when every time that I would walk into the US Embassy in Moscow, which was almost every day, I would see the American flag and it was that which the embassy represented. But then inside you would see the current president and vice president and the secretary of state as those whom the embassy also represented.

As ambassadors of Christ our embassy is wherever we may find ourselves because that land is a foreign land when our home is in heaven. Now, in this foreign land in which we find ourselves, earth in general and United States for those of us living in Strasburg, we are called to represent fully and completely Jesus and to put His desires and His wishes first in our lives. Sometimes the wishes of our Jesus correspond and dovetail with the wishes of the nation in which we find ourselves. But often there can be a contrast when the nation in which we find ourselves pushes against the righteousness which we find in Matthew 25. May God give us wisdom with a traveler's mentality that requires of us to be ambassadors for Christ first and foremost.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

No Bible Study this evening!

Advent programs coming up:

Monday – November 25: Decorating the Church – Come and join us at 6pm as we decorate the church and get it ready for Advent. Pizza will be provided as well as fun and fellowship. Join us!

Sunday – December 1: Wreath making for all – Join us as we gather in Fellowship Hall at 5:30 to make wreaths to have for our homes for Advent. All are welcome.

Sunday – December 8: Christmas at the organ – Join us for an organ concert and Christmas carols hosted by our very own Jonathan Jones. Program begins at 7pm

Sunday – December 15: Courtyard Carols featuring cookies and hot cocoa - We will be in our courtyard with a fire as we sing carols beginning at 7pm. This will be led by our very own Walter Kondratowski.

Sunday – December 22: Blue Christmas- Jen Eisenberg will lead us in a time of reflection and meditation in the sanctuary at 7pm as we contemplate the joy of Christmas while also recognizing that it is in this time that we also could find ourselves in grief and mourning. Join us!

OPERATION CHRISTMAS SHOEBOX PACKAGING: Join in the fun of stuffing the shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child in Fellowship Hall on Sunday, November 17th at 10am. We are also in need of help on Saturday, November 16th at 9am to set up tables and items

for packaging of the shoeboxes. Please see Beth Feiler for any questions.

CHURCH BIRTHDAY BRUNCH ~ Join us on Sunday, November 24th at 9:30am (after the 8:30am service) to celebrate 192 years together and to recognize, celebrate and honor the 50+ year members with a brunch in Fellowship Hall. This year's menu is baked French toast, sausage and fruit. As in the past, we will need volunteers to bake and bring to church on the 24th. You will be provided with all ingredients and materials necessary, including the recipe. We are also in need of help to set up Fellowship Hall on Saturday, November 23rd. There will be no Sunday School or nursery care during the brunch on Sunday, November 24th. Please contact Alice Eisenhooth at 717-725-2675. Thank you!

Congregational meeting on December 1 after the second service: At this meeting we will be voting on the pastor's salary, receiving the budget, and electing officers. Join us!

e-news for Nov 9, 2024

Dear FPC family and friends,

This is the 4th general election that I have been with you. In 2012 with Obama in my enews I marveled at how unique our country is in the peaceful and historic transfer of power that takes place every election. In 2016 with Trump in my enews I asked the question, which we will be seeing again on Sunday morning, now what? In 2020 with Biden in my enews I reminded us in the middle of Covid that all things shall pass including how we feel after an election. Here we are again in 2024 with Trump and my first enews after the election. If there is one thing that we ought to learn after these four elections with four polar opposite results each year is that the words from Isaiah 40:8 remain true and will always remain true: The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of the Lord will stand forever.

This past Thursday evening for Bible Study I spent quite a bit of time dissecting and unpacking what our response and our responsibilities are as disciples of Jesus Christ in this post-election time. I encourage you to spend some time to follow along in the Bible Study, here is the

link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DNjQ5RIFTM>. Tomorrow in church we will also be looking at this topic more extensively, so if you are curious as to what we understand is our role in civic society and what ought to be our response, come along to church this Sunday.

I am noticing on social media and in conversations with people a lot of parallels that are being drawn with this election and some type of movement of the Holy Spirit within the nation. Let me caution you, as someone who considers himself somewhat well versed in things of the Holy Spirit, that God does not wait on an election in a random nation in order to breathe out His Holy Spirit upon us. The presence of God and the power of the Holy Spirit are not at all related to who is elected.

There are churches that are teaching a heresy that is somehow conjuring images of King David and our present time. Any attempt to understand Messianic prophecy through an election in our country is not only heresy, but the epitome of hubris. Did we forget that the actual Messiah died on a cross and reminded us that if we are to be recognized in the kingdom of God we are to be servants of all? It is always dangerous when the political bleeds into the religious with the churches supporting and even encouraging this type of heresy.

I have often bemoaned the authority that churches have lost within civil society throughout the years I have been in ministry. The church being able to speak into the lives of the decision makers is crucial. Churches encouraging politicians to love God and to love their neighbor, all of their neighbors, is an important aspect to the role of the church in civil society. We are not called to love God and leave our politics at the door. We are called to love God and to pursue God's righteousness in our politics. The problem comes when God's righteousness is interpreted as putting our interests first above the interests of others. That is true both at a personal level and at a national level. Righteousness is defined as acting according to the will of God which can only be seen through the lens of loving God and loving neighbor.

We are all glad to have the election behind us. As the nations changed leadership, I hope you take great joy in knowing that our God remains the same and the election has not changed the nature of God. Now go out there and love somebody!

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

CHURCH DECORATING DAY ~ On Monday, November 25th at 6pm, we will be decking the halls and preparing the church for Advent and Christmas. Come join in the fun, have pizza and help us to decorate!

FAMILY ADVENT NIGHT ~ Join us on Sunday, December 1st from 5:30-7pm! All church family members are welcome (young and not so young, kids and no kids)! There will be a sign-up sheet on the information table in The Well. If anyone would like to donate Christmas cookies there will be a sign-up sheet there as well.

IGNITED STUDENTS ANNUAL FAMILY FOOTBALL LEAGUE will take place on Sunday,

November 17th from 4-6pm at the L-S Practice Field. Adults vs. Students (Grades 6-12) compete for the FFL trophy and bragging rights. Come on out to play or cheer from the sidelines! Bring a lawn chair and dress warm. We'll provide the hot cocoa, flags, and pigskin. Please RSVP to Kristin at kristin@straspres.org or 908-581-5050.

CHURCH BIRTHDAY BRUNCH ~ Join us on Sunday, November 24th at 9:30am (after the 8:30am service) to celebrate 192 years together and to recognize, celebrate and honor the 50+ year members with a brunch in Fellowship Hall. This year's menu is baked French toast, sausage and fruit. As in the past, we will need volunteers to bake and bring to church on the 24th. You will be provided with all ingredients and materials necessary, including the recipe. We are also in need of help to set up Fellowship Hall on Saturday, November 23rd. There will be no Sunday School or nursery care during the brunch on Sunday, November 24th. Please contact Alice Eisenhooth at 717-725-2675. Thank you!

Kidz JAM (Jesus and Me) choir rehearsals will continue this Thursday, November 14th, from 5:45pm to 6:30pm. We will meet in Fellowship Hall. We look forward to sharing this music ministry with children of all ages. Parents are welcome to stay for rehearsal. If you have any questions, please contact Jonathan Jones at jjones@straspres.org or 484.949.4514.

e-news for October 23, 2024

Dear FPC family and friends,

At the new member's class on Sunday I once again stated a truth that has almost become cliché now. The Presbyterian Church (USA) gathers more people from other denominations than any other denomination. What makes the PC(USA) a good place for anyone and everyone? I believe it is because it still allows people from both ends of the theological spectrum to maintain their political ideologies, be challenged in them, but still live out lives that are a testimony to their personal Savior Jesus Christ. I have always said that you cannot separate your politics from your spiritual life, but within the PC(USA) you can live out your spiritual life in an environment where your politics will be challenged by the Word of God.

Our government within the church is also one that is incredibly attractive to those who want to have a say in how the church is run. Every new member's class I repeat the truth that our US government is fashioned after the representative system that we have within the Presbyterian Church. As members of the church you choose representatives, elders, who will make decisions on your behalf but according to their conscience. Wait, what is all of this talk about politics? Isn't this supposed to be about my relationship with Jesus?

We see this form of government on how to run the church in the Bible. We read about elders who were to administer the government of the church in Acts 1:23, 11:30, 15:2-3, 16:4, 21:18, and Titus 1:5. We run the church the way that we understand Scripture tells us to run the church. You elect elders to make decisions on your behalf for the life of the church. This is directly from the Bible, which is the way that we like to do things.

Our church is a part of a geographical groupings of churches called the Donegal Presbytery. It covers York, Lancaster, and Chester counties and a straggler church in Maryland. This Presbytery has as staff a Presbytery Executive who is Erin Cox-Holmes, who has been to our church many times, and a Stated Clerk, Michael Wilson, who worships here with his wife Tricia and their family. Every two years a Moderator is elected for the Presbytery whose responsibilities include running the quarterly Presbytery meeting that gathers all of the 50 churches in the Presbytery, helping with installation and ordination services across the Presbytery, being a part of the leadership team for the Presbytery in making decisions for its operation and vision, and other tasks that the Presbytery Executive might ask him (me in this case) to do. It is a volunteer position.

I have been asked to serve as the Moderator of the Presbytery of Donegal for two years with the term beginning in January. Now, let's be clear, there is an election involved and another candidate can always come from the floor and that person can be elected. But just like we have a nominating committee, so also does Presbytery in its leader team and it is not inconceivable that another person could be nominated and then elected from the floor. After all I was honored to represent Donegal Presbytery as an alternate commissioner to the Generals Assembly in Salt Lake City this past July. This time I will be the only candidate brought before the body by the nominating committee.

It is kinda a big honor for not only me but also for the church. We have had two other moderators in the recent history of First Presbyterian Strasburg. Janet Shay was Moderator in 1996 and Karl Richards in 1972. On November 19 at Highland Presbyterian Church will be the election and the installation of the next Moderator. You are all welcome to attend that meeting of Presbytery, it is open to all. It starts at 9:30 and that should be one of the first things on the agenda. I'm grateful for this opportunity and humbled by this possibility.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

Bible Study every Thursday evening at 6: Join us tomorrow evening at 6 for Bible Study here: [Youtube](https://www.youtube.com)

NEW MEMBER CLASSES continue at 3pm on Sundays until November 3. Anyone interested in learning more about First Presbyterian Church or joining our church family is welcome to attend!

TRUNK OR TREAT Ÿ Join us from 5-6:30pm on Sunday, October 27th! Sign up at the table under the TV in the welcome area and have your car parked and decorated with a suitable theme by 4:30pm. Anyone who would like to donate candy and snack items should sign-up at the table in the welcome area, and drop their items outside of room 5. For more information, contact Beth Feiler at 717-572-9683 or bfeiler@straspres.org.

FPCS Hurricane Helene Relief ~ The Session of our Church has approved contributing \$10,000 divided between the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, and the Mennonite Disaster Service. If you, in the congregation, feel led to make an additional contribution to this Relief Fund, you can make a

notation on an Offering Envelope or Check stating "Hurricane Helene Relief," making your check out to First Presbyterian Church.

LOST AND FOUND ITEMS There are a number of items that have made a home in the lost and found. If you are missing a hat, gloves, water bottle, shirt, coat, baseball gloves, or other items, please check the lost and found, located on the coat rack in the foyer. All items not claimed by Sunday, November 3rd, will be donated.

Saturday, November 9th SCOUTING FOR FOOD DRIVE 9AM

Each year the local Boy Scout Troop 56 collects food from our area & brings the donations to Fellowship Hall where it is then sorted, dates checked & then stocked onto our shelves. We welcome anyone who would like to help with this annual food collection. We generally are done no later than 1 pm. If you could donate anytime during the day we would greatly appreciate the extra hands. It is an enjoyable experience as we help the community, get to know the Scouts and leaders, and the youth from FPC as we work side-by-side. Any questions please contact Donna Stettler.

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD SHOEBOX PACKAGING NOVEMBER 17 Join in the fun of stuffing the shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child in Fellowship Hall on Sunday, November 17th at 10am. We are also in need of help on Saturday, November 16th to set up tables and items for packaging of the shoeboxes. Please see Beth Feiler for time. Please see a list of items still needed in this newsletter or the weekly bulletin. Thank you for your donations throughout the year.

CHURCH BIRTHDAY BRUNCH NOVEMBER 24 Join us after the 8:30am service to recognize and celebrate and honor the 50+ year members with a brunch in Fellowship Hall. This year's menu is baked French toast, sausage and fruit. As in the past, we will need volunteers to bake and bring to church on the 24th. You will be provided with all ingredients, and materials necessary including the recipe. We are also in need of help to set up Fellowship Hall on Saturday, November 23rd. There will be no Sunday School or nursery care. Please contact Alice Eisenhooth at 717-725-2675. Thank you!

Sunday, November 24th MINISTERIUM THANKSGIVING SERVICE 4PM Join Christians from Strasburg at High View Church as we celebrate Thanksgiving together as a community and give thanks to God for God's provision. This is sponsored by the seven churches of Strasburg in the Ministerium.

Monday, November 25th CHURCH DECORATING DAY 6PM On Monday, November 25th, we will be decking the halls and preparing the church for Advent and Christmas. Come join in the fun and help us to decorate!

e-news for October 11, 2024

Dear FPC family and friends,

Quite a few of you have commented on how powerful this past Sunday's World Communion service was. Being led to communion by Vladimir Tatarnikov, a Lutheran pastor in Belarus, was moving for many of you. I am in North Carolina right now in a seaside town called Wilmington preparing for a wedding that I am going to be doing tomorrow. This family whose daughter I am

marrying was instrumental in our work in Russia while we were there. The mom of the family, who was on our session while we were in Russia, said how amazing it is to see Vladimir do the same kind of work that we were doing while we served in Russia. For more information on Vladimir and the work that he is doing you can find an article from a few years back here: <https://lutheranworld.org/news/belarus-pastor-grateful-solidarity-and-prayers>

Often, I take for granted the global aspect of our faith and of the impact of our work. It has always been a part of my life and I see it as normal. We can easily miss the effects of decisions that are made at a local level and yet have tremendous impact both nationally and internationally. This is especially true in relationship to the church. When we decide to help Vladimir and his work in Belarus we are able to impact not just a small Lutheran Church in a part of the world that most of us will never see. But rather, we are able to bring relief and restoration to people that maybe some day you will meet and they will have an impact on your life.

This week as I spend time with a family that was so close to us in a time in our life when our kids were still growing up and we were doing things that literally were able to save the lives of individuals with whom we came into contact and who were members of our church in Russia, it is easier to see how decisions at the church level have an impact internationally. I would so love for each one of us to see ourselves as connected to each other not just within the church family but also within the community. What we do in the church has an impact upon Strasburg.

But what we do in Strasburg has an impact on our nation. You may not see the link there. Did you know that within our State Department there are Christians who were impacted and affected by the work of the church that was done? Currently serving as Ambassadors, and head of the CIA, and other individuals who make policy and carry out the roles put upon them by our government are people who are influenced by the work that a local church does. It is true, I know this first hand because these people were members of our church in Russia.

As you look around the sanctuary on Sunday morning you don't know what is to become of that gaggle of children who gather on the steps of the pulpit area to hear the children's message. They will all be impacted by what they learn and the experiences that they have at our church. When they grow up who knows if they will not become people who have an impact upon decisions that move nations and individuals in one direction or another.

So, when we do church, I would love it if we were to approach it as if what we are doing makes a difference in not only our lives, but in the lives of those growing up in the church, in the life of the community, in how our country is influenced by the decision makers who cross our doors, and by the world by those who happen to stumble into our presence. We are linked together not by our political parties, or our common way of thinking, or our vocation, but by the blood of Jesus. There is nothing more binding than that.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

e-news for October 4, 2024

Dear FPC family and friends,

World Communion Sunday may not be on your radar this week. While it happens every year, it doesn't really move the needle much at all for most people, especially in a time when we are almost overwhelmed by the deaths and the destruction left by Helene. These two things may seem very distant from each other, but there is a correlation that needs to be fleshed out. I can't remember a storm that has produced so much death and tragedy, other than Katrina, here in the United States. So many of you have relatives or some connection to that region of this country that what is happening there feels personal. Hundreds of lives have been lost and it is hard to imagine that towns such as Ashville, which many of us have been to many times, are unrecognizable.

When tragedies such as this happen close to home and in locations that we know and love, it becomes personal and we remember and we are driven to do something. Who remembers what happened 20 years ago on December 26? A Tsunami hit Thailand and close to 250,000 people were killed. I remember it well and I remember hearing the number of deaths and thinking that someone had added an extra zero to that number. It can't be possible that half a million people were killed by a single catastrophic event. But it did happen and it is true, but it happened a world away and so the magnitude of it and our emotional attachment to it is diminished.

There is something about familiarity and personal connection that elevates the emotion for us in regards to tragic events that take place. While the death toll in North Caroline is about .1%, that is one tenth of a percent, of what it was in Thailand, we emotionally probably feel it more because it is closer, we may have family members who live there and it is in our country. So many emotions go into living through these types of experiences.

One of the results of celebrating World Communion Sunday is to make the world our neighborhood so that we are able to feel and experience the joys and sorrows of the world personally. We will have Vladimir Tatarnikov, a Lutheran pastor whom we support who works in Belarus, lead us to communion this Sunday in his language and using his traditions. Belarus is really far away and you probably haven't spent any time thinking about the people and the reality of life there. But when you get to know Vladimir and he leads you to the table of life I hope and pray that the people of Belarus become a little less distant to us.

We live in a day and age where there really is no excuse to pretend that God somehow has a preference for our country or our people. God not only loves us, but he equally loves the people of Thailand and Belarus, and Palestine, and Israel...You get the point, we are almost programmed to think that our faith in Jesus somehow originated here in this country and is defined by what is happening in this country.

World Communion Sunday reminds us that we are new to this whole faith in Jesus. Christian Palestinians have been loving Jesus for over 2,000 years, while American Christians have been loving Jesus for just over 200 years. We can often fall into the trap of thinking that God loves us more than he loves other people from other countries, as if God has chosen us over and against other people from other countries. That can't be further from the truth, trust me, I know, I've lived in a number of other countries and seen the faith of other people and it is strong.

So here is my challenge for you this Sunday, come and celebrate World Communion Sunday and be generous to the relief efforts that we will be involved in for the storm decimated areas in our country. As you take communion blessed by Vladimir be reminded of the love of God that finds its home inside and outside of our country and our church. God's love, the same love that we feel, stretches further than the eye can see.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

BREAD FOR WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY: If you like to bake then you can help us by baking a loaf of bread and bringing it in by tomorrow morning so that we can have them for World Communion Sunday.

NO BIBLE STUDY THIS THURSDAY!

HARVEST HOME: On Sunday, October 20 we will be celebrating Harvest Home and you will have an opportunity to bring in canned goods to help our foodbank.

NEW MEMBER CLASSES: will begin on Sunday October 20 at 3pm. Anyone interested in learning more about First Presbyterian Church or joining our church family is welcome to attend!

TRUNK OR TREAT: Trunk or Treat at FPCS will be held this year from 5-6:30pm on

Sunday, October 27. Sign up at the table under the TV in the welcome area and have your car parked and decorated with a suitable theme by 4:30pm. Children should arrive in a costume between 5-6:30pm. Anyone who would like to donate candy and snack items should sign-up at the table in the welcome area. For more information, contact Beth Feiler at 717-572-9683 or bfeiler@straspres.org.

e-news for September 18, 2024

Dear FPC family and friends,

The life of the church family is marked by life events that take place within the life of individual families. The birth of a new baby (welcome to our family Josiah!) changes the dynamics of not only the individual family, but also the church family. We have had a rash of new babies being born over these past two years, it has been fun and it has added some great energy. The death of a loved one has a tragic life changing impact upon a family and impacts the church family as a whole as well. When we gather around Robin and Ali and their families in their grief, even while we celebrate the resurrection of Paul, we know how a sudden loss can impact all of us.

There is so much in between these life events that take place within families of the church. There are those who are so wanting to start a family but things just aren't working out right. There are those whose lives have been turn upside down because of an accident or a medical event that has left them incapacitated at worst, or at best wondering when they are going to have a normal day when they feel okay. There are those who have received shocking financial news and

are in need and don't really want to publicize or let the world know about it. There are those who are caring for their aging parents or spouses and don't see the light at the end of the tunnel, things are so up in the air right now. Life events are a part of, well..., life. All of those events make a difference in the life of the church as a whole as well.

As a church family we are called, as Paul says, in Romans 12:15 – “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” It is not always easy to keep the balance. As we rejoice sometimes those who are in seasons of life that are opposite of where we find ourselves suffer more injury and are scarred. That shouldn't dampen our joy, but it should make us more aware that as a family we are connected to each other and our seasons of life are varied and impact each other. In the same manner when we mourn and grieve while we do so with the hope of the resurrection, we also know that our grief lasts for a season and then joy does come in the morning (Psalm 30:5).

I have been thinking a lot about last week's sermon and the difference between the theology of abundance versus the theology of need. We all go through life at times feeling as if we are in need. This is true financially, emotionally, spiritually, and socially. The needs we experience in life are real and are not meant to be ignored by a Pollyannaish approach to life as if all we have to do is think nice thoughts and our needs will go away. No, our needs are real, but how we approach our needs is the key to our relationship with Jesus and to each other.

If we approach our needs from the perspective that God is working behind the scenes as we are working front and center to meet our needs, then that is vastly different from thinking that we never have enough and we will never have enough. I challenged you on Sunday to wake up this week and every morning say to yourself: I have everything I need. I know that saying it doesn't make it true, but it does, I hope, put all things in the perspective that all that we have in our possession is actually a gift from God in the first place.

The ability to live life from a perspective defined by Paul in Philippians 4:11-12 where he said that he has learned to live life not from a theology of need, but from a perspective of plenty, this theology of abundance that we have referred to lately. I pray that this week, and in the weeks to come, that as you rejoice and as you mourn and as you find yourself somewhere in between that the Holy Spirit will fill you with the desire and the ability to view life from the perspective of abundance. God has given you all that you need.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

NO SUNDAY WORSHIP AT FPC THIS SUNDAY. WORSHIP IS AT 10AM AT STRASBURG COMMUNITY PARK. BRING A CHAIR OR A BLANKET.

Bible Study this Thursday and every Thursday evening: Join us on Thursday, September 19 at 6pm for Bible Study with Pastor Bob. You can join us here: [Youtube](#)

Women's Bible Study: Every Tuesday join us for a women's Bible Study. Classes will be held at 9am and 7pm. All are welcome! We will be using a study called "Now That Faith Has Come" by Beth

Moore & Melissa Moore – A study of Galatians. For any questions please contact Stacy Bronkema, Linda Bredin, or Sandy Wenger.

NEW MEMBER CLASSES will begin on **Sunday October 20th at 3pm**. Anyone interested in learning more about First Presbyterian Church or joining our church family is welcome to attend!

e-news for August 31, 2024

Dear FPC family and friends,

The summer has come to a screeching halt and we still, technically, have three weeks left. Kids are back in school, our own preschool is ramping up to start in a little over a week, programs are starting up with Clubhouse on September 7 (make sure you get involved and send your children/grandchildren to it). While we didn't take a break over the summer, there absolutely is a different rhythm once it is over. Things just seem a little more intense, a little more frenetic, a little more, well, full of life.

There is one place in the Bible where we hear Jesus talk about the seasons of the year and it is, surprise surprise, in Matthew. Look at chapter 24:32-33 and you will hear him talk about the fig tree and how it gives us clues as to when summer is coming. One of my pride and joys in our property is a grape vine that we planted about three years ago. This year it produced a real bumper crop of beautiful and sweet grapes.

Every year I have to train it and prune it and cut it down to size knowing that it is for its own good. This happens right before it starts to bud and it is, like the fig tree in Matthew, a sign that the summer is on its way. That is the way it is with the life of the church. There are certain events and celebrations that we have that we know once they happen, well, summer is coming to its end. The church picnic is a sign that summer is just about over and soon we will find ourselves where we are now with programs starting back up and school back in session.

We are challenged to have in our own lives seasons where we are able to be even more in touch with our relationship with Jesus. Lent has served traditionally as a time when we might be more introspective and seek out ways in which to strengthen our following with our Savior. Advent encourages us to focus on the second coming of Jesus as something that will happen and something for which we need to be prepared. Our own preparation for the coming of Jesus is not to be overlooked and the church seasons are opportunities to become more intense and deliberate and intentional in our discipleship.

As this new earthly season begins, maybe this is an opportunity for each of us to begin a new season in our lives with our Savior. Take this time as an opportunity to establish spiritual disciplines. Choose a five minute block each day to spend in prayer. Choose ten minutes to read through the Gospels. Determine with your family to spend an hour this weekend or next helping out at the church together or at Water Street, or just by going around picking up trash in Strasburg that might be on people's lawns. When you do that pray for that family.

There are so many ways in which to strengthen our walk with Christ if we would just take the time to do it. The change of seasons is a great excuse to find ways to strengthen our relationship. I

pray that as the summer comes to a close, that we would all determine to walk closer with Christ in this year to come.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

Community Wide worship – Gather with all the churches of Strasburg for worship at the Strasburg Park on **Sunday, September 22nd at 10am**. There will be no worship here at FPC, so come and join our brothers and sisters in Christ from Strasburg to worship on this day. In the event of rain, service will be held at Strasburg Mennonite Church.

FOOD BANK: We are looking for a few volunteers to help us with our weekly shopping of perishables items. Volunteers would check the stock of milk, eggs, margarine, and bread before we open on Tuesday afternoon and then once again before we open again on Friday afternoon.

REVERBERATE Ÿ Join us and other churches from Lancaster County on **Sunday, September 15th at Longs Park** for an evening of praise, unity and worship. The event is free but there will be **food trucks open from 4-6pm and worship from 6-8pm**. Bring a chair or a blanket to sit on. Everyone is invited! Meet us in the parking lot at FPC at 5pm to carpool or meet us there!

Women's Bible Study Ÿ Mark your calendars that we will be starting a new Bible Study on **Tuesday, September 17th**. Classes will be held in the **morning @ 9:00** or in the **evening @ 7:00**. All are welcome! We will be using a study called "Now That Faith Has Come" by Beth Moore & Melissa Moore – A study of Galatians. For any questions please contact Stacy Bronkema, Linda Bredin, or Sandy Wenger.

Nominations for Elders, Deacons and Trustees: The Church Officer Nominating Committee requests names from the congregation for consideration for the next class of Elders, Deacons and Trustees. When submitting names for consideration, you may include the names of congregation members as well as your own. Please submit names to be considered for nomination to Carolyn Groff and Linda Younger or to the church office by September 3.

e-news for August 22, 2024

Dear family and friends,

It has been over a year since we did our emphasis on Prayer, Scripture and Action. The purpose of this initiative was to increase our desire and our practice in prayer, Scripture and action. We received a grant from the Lilly Foundation called Rekindle which helped us with the finances that were needed to programmatically emphasize these three crucial aspects of the life of the church. We took a survey at the beginning of this focus, over a year ago, and now recently a few months ago we took the same survey again to see if our efforts to increase the congregational desire to pray and read Scripture and be involved in action actually produced positive results.

Well, the results are in, and they are across the board positive. Now when I say positive, I mean that in just about every single category there was an increase in practice of prayer, reading of Scripture, and involvement in action. As a church we met the goals to increase our desire to serve God and to walk closer with him in every single category that we had hoped. How did we do that? Well, I believe we spoke about and did prayer more as a congregation than we had in the past. We followed along a Scripture schedule and read through the Bible in 72 hours. We were involved in action that was concerted and was meant to remind us that God has called us to action.

We would really want you to look at the results yourself. You can find them here: [August 2024 PSA results](#). It will pull up an excel spreadsheet with four separate tabs. You can find charts, numbers, and also comments. Take the time to read the comments. This is what you as a congregation told us in regards to what was most meaningful to you during this process and what suggestions do you have a result of this process. I need to say that I was blown away by the across the board positive increase in people desiring to pray more, read Scripture more, and be involved in godly action more. Make sure you look at all of the tabs. This is what we want as a church and apparently all it took was a little concerted effort to make it happen.

But there was something else that I found appealing and intriguing to me. I read into the survey that as a congregation you want to be challenged in your spiritual life. You are not satisfied in being complacent and just letting church come to you as if in that way by osmosis you would strengthen your relationship with your Savior. No, you seem to want to have someone who leads you in ways of prayer that remind us that Jesus is not a name but he is a person with whom we have a relationship. You want to be held accountable that you are reading your Bible with a reading challenge. You want to be given opportunities to serve that create a direct link between you and God's creatures and creation.

We heard your responses and we are going to be more deliberate in those actions and in those requests. We continue to offer programmatic ways to be involved in prayer and Bible Study and action. We will continue our men's prayer breakfast, our Bible Studies and Sunday School classes for youth and adults, as well as opportunities to serve at Water Street and our own Food bank which we have been providing for years now. Maybe some of the realities that we find is that we were made more aware of what is out there that we can actually do that will contribute to the kingdom of God through the feeble hands that we have.

Our time focusing on PSA was evidently worthwhile. Now we need to capitalize on this success and ensure that what we have done is not a one and done, but continues to serve as fodder for a walk with Christ that is meaningful and deep. Without that, we cease to carry out our calling as a church.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

Bible Study this evening at 6pm: Have you ever joined Pastor Bob's Thursday evening's Bible Study. The good news is that it is easy to join. Just click on this link. [Youtube](#)

You can stay completely anonymous, or you can chat with us and be as interactive as you like. If you have never joined in on a Thursday evening Bible Study, now in its 4th year, come and join us, try it, you'll like it.

Worship in the park on September 22: We will not have worship in our building on that Sunday but rather we will be worshipping at the Strasburg Park along with all of the churches of Strasburg at 10am.

Reverberate 2024: Come join us for an evening of worship with the churches of Lancaster on September 15 at Long's Park. We will leave from the church at 5pm and carpool together. The time of worship is from 6-8pm. Come and join us!

Blessing of the Backpacks: This Sunday at both services we will be blessing the backpacks of students, teachers, and administrators serving in schools and colleges and universities. Join us and help us to start the year off well with God's blessing upon our time in our educational institutions.

Clubhouse starting back upon September 7: We would love for you to come and help us out as we provide great fun and Bible learning for our children at our Clubhouse program. Bring a bunch of your neighborhood kids along on September 7 at 6pm and watch as they are transformed to followers of Jesus.

e-news for August 11, 2024

Dear FPC family and friends,

On March 14, 2021, almost exactly one year after Covid shut down the church, Jon Knauss came and stepped into a void that the church had and desperately needed filled. Tess Feiler had just resigned and Jon jumped in willing to lead us. He has led us for nearly 3 and a half years as director of contemporary worship. This Sunday FPC and Jon mutually agreed that things simply were not working out the way that either of us planned or hoped as he serves as our director. As a result, this past Sunday, today, was Jon's last Sunday with us. Please pray for him as he transitions that the Holy Spirit would guide him to what is next for him.

So what is next for FPC and the 11am service? We are grateful that an elder of our church, Walter Kondratowski, has agreed to step into the gap in an interim capacity. Walter will be leading the second service worship as we put together a search team and find our next leader of contemporary worship. I know that this will come as a surprise and a shock to many of you and you may have a lot of questions. Please feel free to reach out to me to share any of your thoughts or feelings as you process this news.

God has been faithful to this congregation and He has seen us through a lot of different and difficult times. This is one of them as we grieve the loss of a staff person who helped us through Covid, and led us in worship for over three years, that's a long time! But we trust that God will continue to be faithful to provide leadership in this church as we look to staff to support us and bring us alongside as we do the most important thing that we can do as a church: worship.

Your servant in Christ,
Pastor Bob

e-news for August 1, 2024

Dear FPC family and friends,

So, what is your favorite thing about the Olympics? I don't just mean the events like gymnastics, or basketball, or the fan favorite break dancing making its debut this year. There is also the fact that countries from all over the world unite and compete against each other, even those countries that are sworn enemies are able to somehow find the resolution to meet and compete without bloodshed. There is something unique and almost surreal as we go through this exercise every four years. As someone who loves sports and has been accused of being somewhat competitive, it is definitely something toward which I look forward.

You have quite a few references in Scripture to competition and sport. I'll just list a few of them and you can look them up on your own: I Corinthians 9:24-27, II Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 12:1-2, Philippians 3:14. The one that I use the most is found in II Timothy 4:6-8 which reminds us of the centrality of faith in our life. But that faith is often the result of much work and perseverance that could involve training and sticktoitiveness. Yes, that is a word, you can look it up.

We know that the original Olympic Games took place hundreds of years before Jesus walked on the earth, around 776 BC. That would have been around the time of Jonah and Isaiah as they were proclaiming the Word of God to the people of God. During Jesus' day even though Greece was under Roman rule, they still were carrying on with the Olympics. The actual term Olympics comes from the word Olympiad which literally means every 4 years and was a unit of time like week and decade. The Olympics always took place in Greece on Mount Olympus.

In history we read about the Olympics that were present when Jesus walked upon the face of the earth. The Emperor August revived the Olympics and he restored the Greek original site and asked King Herod to subsidize the games with funding. Nero, who was so vicious to the Christians and killed so many of them, was also apparently a poor sport. He entered himself into the chariot races of the 211th Olympiad in 65 AD and was thrown from his horse but still claimed victory. He also established musical contests so that he could enter them and he won all of them as well. Nero won every contest in which he entered, no judge would or could refuse his victory at the fear of death.

I have always said that the more things change the more they stay the same. As humans we are not more civil or ethical now than we were 50 years ago, or 500 years ago. The presence of sin in our lives remains and we are in constant need of a Savior. We often get caught up in such silly controversy thinking that the world is going to end if we don't somehow defend God from the forces that God isn't able to deal with Himself. God is in charge, God has been in charge, and we don't need to think that any cultural wars that are present are going to change the outcome of God's victory over all things. The more we get caught up in the silliness of trying to defend God or our Christian values, the more silly we look as a community.

Here is my encouragement to all of us. Enjoy the Olympics. Paul may have been an athlete who competed in the Olympics, even though he wasn't Greek so that probably isn't true. But he certainly did love to use sports imagery to interpret our faith journey as one that is a marathon, and not a sprint. Our journey together as a church is a marathon, hang in there through every leg of the event.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

ANNUAL CHURCH PICNIC Ÿ Come enjoy fun, food and fellowship on **Sunday, August 18th at 12:30pm at Tinney Pavilion**. There will be a corn hole tournament, bingo and kids games! Pulled pork, hotdogs, beverages and paper products provided. Please bring a side or dessert to share!

Community Wide worship – Gather with all the churches of Strasburg for worship at the Strasburg Park on **Sunday, September 22nd at 10am**. There will be no worship here at FPC, so come and join our brothers and sisters in Christ from Strasburg to worship on this day.

Bluegrass Festival on August 31st at 6pm at the Strasburg Community Park.

Bible Study this evening at 6pm. You can join us here: [Bible Study](#)

e-news for July 25, 2024

Dear FPC family and friends,

Do you know Jen Eisenberg? Well, if you don't, you will soon get to know her. She and her husband Jon have been worshipping at FPC now for well over a year. She helped us with the PSA retreat at Black Rock when she led our time together looking at the Scripture portion of PSA. She is currently enrolled as a student at Fuller Theological Seminary. She is in the process of finishing up her course work. She is a Candidate in our Donegal Presbytery under care of the First Presbyterian Church of Lancaster. She has taken and passed all of her ordination exams so now all that remains are a few more classes, a stint with Clinical Pastoral Education at a local hospital, and some time in Field Education.

What is Field Education? Field Education is where a seminary student spends time at a local church learning the ropes and contributing in the life of the church. Sometimes, like Brett Foote and Holly Miller, field education is done as you are a student pastor and given responsibility over a church and its work without any other pastoral presence at that church. The traditional way to do field education, the way Stacy and I did it, is to get connected to a local church and serve there under a pastor and its session and contribute to the life of the church without being the primary pastor. When that happens, you are a seminary intern serving on staff at a local church fulfilling your field education requirements.

Last evening your session enthusiastically supported and approved bringing onto the team of First Presbyterian Jen Eisenberg as a seminary intern where she will be serving and living life with us

from September through May. Over this nine-month period she will be in worship with us, she will be involved in the day to day running of the church, and she will be learning about what we do here and why we do it. Having someone with the caliber and the devotion that Jen has dive into the life of the church for 9 months is going to make a difference, a huge difference in how we are able to reach out to the community with the love of Jesus. I am so looking forward to seeing how God will move among us over this time period. Keep your eyes and your ears open for the movement of the Holy Spirit.

It has always been a joy for me to mentor seminary interns while pastoring at a church. While we were in Florida we hired for the first time in the life of the church an Associate Pastor. While he was not an intern, it was his first call out of seminary and it was a thrill to see how God worked in his life under our care to the point where he is now a senior pastor in a PC(USA) church. Shout out to Rev. Dr. Phil Hagen here: <https://www.fpcidahofalls.org/about-us/staff/>

While in Russia we brought on board Vladimir Tatarnikov, a young 19 year old seminary student who served with us for a year before he went on to become a pastor with the Lutheran Church in Belarus. Again, the work that he is doing in Belarus is in many ways a mirror image of the work that we did together in Russia. You can see a story about him a few years ago here: [https://lutheranworld.org/news/belarus-pastor-grateful-solidarity-and-prayers#:~:text=\(LWI\)%20%2D%20Vladimir%20Tatarnikov%20is,in%20the%20whole%20of%20Belarus.](https://lutheranworld.org/news/belarus-pastor-grateful-solidarity-and-prayers#:~:text=(LWI)%20%2D%20Vladimir%20Tatarnikov%20is,in%20the%20whole%20of%20Belarus.)

The mentoring and guiding of pastors as they step into ministry is such an important task and this church has historically not shied away from that responsibility. We have seen as part of our responsibility for the kingdom to prepare pastors so that when they go out and take on a church that church will be better served by that pastor as a result of their time with us. It is our hope that the same will apply to Jen Eisenberg as she journeys with us and lives life with us that once her time with us is over that where she serves after that will be blessed by the time that she spent with us.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

Saying goodbye to Bruce Gerlach: This Sunday during coffee hour we will be saying goodbye to Bruce Gerlach after his years of service here at FPC. He began his ministry after college here at this church and now he is retiring from his work here as well. God has brought him full circle and we are the benefactors of this blessing as a result.

A number of opportunities to gather together as a congregation:

Church picnic: Join us on August 18 after the 11am worship at the Tinney Pavilion as we celebrate life together with the good food that you bring and the games that we play together. There will be activities for the whole family there on that day, join us!

Bluegrass Festival: Every year First Presbyterian sponsors a bluegrass festival at the Strasburg Park. This year we will be celebrating together on August 31st at 6pm. Join us and bring a lawn chair or a blanket or both.

Community Worship: On September 22 at 10am all the churches of Strasburg will gather for worship together at the Strasburg Park. There will be no worship here at FPC, and only worship with our brothers and sisters in Christ from Strasburg on that day.

e-news for July 19, 2024

Dear FPC family and friends,

“Count your many blessings count them one by one...” When you read this it may take you back to the old hymn and memories of your childhood singing in a full church with a smile on your face. For me now this song is forever wedded with VBS and a room full of kids singing at the top of their lungs while their bodies are in overdrive acting out the motions that they were taught. We had the most kids that we have had in a long time, maybe the most in my entire time here and the feeling was electric. What we offer here at FPC in our VBS program is unique, it is sought after, it impacts our community and the life of many, many different families.

Yes, the impact on the children and their families is significant, but do you know what it takes to run VBS effectively? We had scores of volunteers from adults to youth and they were all outstanding. It was a rush to pull into the church and see it full of cars and knowing that these cars represented the volunteers who had agreed to sacrifice their time and their energies for the work of the kingdom. I remain amazed at how galvanizing VBS is for our church family in so many different ways. Jesus tells us in Matthew 12:50 that he defines his family as: “whoever does the will of my Father.” Our church was filled with Jesus’ family over this past week. What a rush and what a joy to be a small part of it.

Okay, now that this is almost behind us, what is next? There are some changes that are happening in the life of the church. With Bruce leaving us after his last Sunday on July 28 we look forward to welcoming Jonathan on the bench. We know that God is at work even in this transition. I hope to give you some news next week about someone else who might be coming on board, but I’ll hold off until session meets on Wednesday, but watch this space and stay tuned. The church can never stay static, it has to keep moving and keep reforming and keep looking for ways in which it can minister to the community.

It would be so easy to keep doing the things we have always done without anything new or anything unique. But the more we look to understand what is happening around us the more we can see ways in which to reach out to those around us with creativity and love. Jesus didn’t have to go through Samaria and meet with the woman whose life was changed and so she was able to change the entire population of the village. Jesus didn’t have to get involved with the woman who was caught in adultery, but he did and changed her life and probably gave the men who were accusing her something to think about in their own life as well. Jesus didn’t have to go into the temple and drive the money changers out, he could have just walked on by with his disciples and carry on with his day.

Jesus chose to live his life by not avoiding people or life situations that could have the most impact on those around him. He was always looking for an opportunity to give people a glimpse into the character of God which is always welcoming and loving and never dismissive or caustic. As

a church we must follow the example that Jesus gave to us which provides life for those who may not know it. Through our work we hope to give those on the periphery and those who feel unloved a glimpse into what it means to be a part of a loving family.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

Saying goodbye to Bruce Gerlach: Bruce Gerlach's last day with us as Organist and Choirmaster is Sunday, July 28th. Please join us at coffee hour on July 28th to thank him for his service here at the church which began in the 70's. If you would like to send him a card, please put it in Bette Davis' mailbox, or bring it with you on Sunday, July 28th and there will be a basket for cards.

ANNUAL CHURCH PICNIC: Come enjoy fun, food and fellowship on **Sunday, August 18th at 12:30pm at Tinney Pavilion.** There will be a corn hole tournament, bingo and kids games! Pulled pork, hotdogs, beverages and paper products provided. Please bring a side or dessert to share!

Water Street Rescue Mission Volunteer Opportunities

There are opportunities for our congregation to serve meals at the Water Street Rescue Mission in Lancaster this summer. These events will require around 2.5 hours of your time serving meals to the Mission's residents. Our church has 2 slots reserved for each of the following meals and there will be someone from our volunteer team serving with you:

Tuesday, August 13 Dinner 4:00 pm to 6:30 pm

Wednesday, August 14 Breakfast 6:00 am to 8:30 am

Friday, August 23 Lunch 11:00 pm to 1:30 pm

If you are interested in serving or if you would like to learn more about these serving opportunities reach out to Terry Sweigart at 717-606-6907 or by email at tlswieg@gmail.com. Thanks for your consideration.

e-news for July 12, 2024

Dear FPC family and friends,

It feels like a really long time since we've seen each other face to face. This summer has really been a lot of ins and outs, a lot of travel and events, a lot of church related work that doesn't take place at the church. As a result I will be away from the church more this year than any other year since I have been here. It makes me very uneasy and not totally grounded when I come back because I feel like I've missed so much. It is almost when you haven't seen a grandchild for so long that when you do see them they are already walking and you wonder: How did I miss that? So how have you grown over these past couple of weeks since I have been gone?

Our youth groups have come and gone on their mission trips. The middle schoolers are still working hard in New Jersey and from the reports that are coming out of base camp things are going very well. The summer has never been slow here at FPC, things are always in pretty high gear, and year is no different. We are on the cusp of VBS, are you ready? If you haven't seen the church yet, you need to go in and see the transformation that has taken place. We are definitely under the sea. I am so excited to see how God is going to work through our children to reveal himself powerfully.

I'm not sure that we have ever had close to 70 children pre-register in the past, but that is where we are now, which is hugely encouraging. Won't you take some time out of your busy work and family schedule this week and come around and help out at VBS? We might be having a record number of children so it would be great to have a record number of volunteers as well. I have always said that VBS week is one of the happiest weeks of the year here at the church. It is a joy that lasts for us for months. Don't you want to be a part of that? No matter your age or your abilities, we will find a place for you to work, guaranteed.

But the life of the church is more than the programmatic output. We have been involved in the life of the church as members have passed away, Ed Allen a few weeks back. Members have had surgeries and unexpected life events. There is not much more important that we do together than be together. The more we spend time together the more we are able to experience the presence of Christ together as a family which builds a bond that is unbreakable. We have lived life together and seen God at work in so many different settings. This short time away doesn't remove the experience of life that we have had together.

I have said in the past that because of the way that I grew up, a missionary kid who had to make quick, intense friendships because the boat was going to sail at any time, I feel very comfortable with people and also being away from people. Absence does not tend to decrease our ability to love each other. Hopefully, that old adage, absence makes the heart grow fonder, will find itself to be true. I know that when I return I find myself even more grateful for the family that God has grown here at FPC.

Take this summer to invest in your time here at FPC, in whatever capacity that may be. If you aren't currently plugged in and wondering how to do it, text me, give me a call, stop in the office, and let's talk. There are so many ways to be a part of the life of the church, but for the most part it is about relationships, spending time with each other. Let's look to do that more this summer.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

Water Street Rescue Mission Volunteer Opportunities: There are opportunities for our congregation to serve meals at the Water Street Rescue Mission in Lancaster this summer. These events will require around 2.5 hours of your time serving meals to the Mission's residents. Our church has 2 slots reserved for each of the following meals and there will be someone from our volunteer team serving with you:

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