

## **e-news for June 29, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

I've never been to Salt Lake City before. I'm at the airport waiting for the plane to take off to take me to Salt Lake where I will be gathered with over 500 people at the 226<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA). It is a huge honor to be your commissioner representing the Presbytery of Donegal. While it is very heady stuff, at the end of the day very little of what is decided at the General Assembly impacts what we do here in Strasburg. Now, I say this not to minimize the role that commissioners play or the role that General Assembly plays, but it is true. We don't change what we do or how we do it as a result of what happens at General Assembly.

Sometimes what happens at General Assembly makes national headlines. Unfortunately, the reason why it often makes headlines is because a decision is made that is controversial and a decision that more often than not goes against what I understand is God's desire and wish for His bride, the church. That might happen again at this General Assembly, but were it to happen, I rest in the confidence that our work as a church will not be affected and we will be able to continue to be a Matthew 25 church whose primary goal is to make disciples of Jesus Christ by loving God and loving neighbor. These goals can never be taken from us except by ourselves. We will always work together to ensure that love of God and love of neighbor is our primary goal.

Last week we were in committee meetings all day long on zoom. I know, that sounds terrible. Actually, it wasn't that bad. I would rather be in my home at a meeting than in a cold sterile meeting room where you can't get up and do what you need to do, or express your frustration and elation while you are muted. I actually liked being in committee meetings on zoom better than in person. Now starting this evening the whole body will gather in person in what is called a plenary to vote upon the decisions that the committees agreed to take to the whole body. This will go through July 4.

This year I was thrilled to be able to bring to a committee what was called a Commissioner Resolution which was approved unanimously by the committee to which it was brought. If you have any interest in church policy and decision making you can find that resolution here along with comment from three different PC(USA) entities who weighed in on the resolution. <https://www.pc-biz.org/search/3001379>

It lifts up the presence and historic importance of mission within the PC(USA), and especially the importance of mission as mutual mission, where we are not going into a country or a territory telling people how to do things as if God were not already present or as if only we have the full truth of who God is. While I served as a missionary for nearly 10 years it was never with the thought that I had the full truth which I had to give to the people with whom I was working. Rather, it was obvious that the presence of God was already strong and active and my role was simply to ride the wave that God has already started.

But isn't that true in the church in Strasburg as well? Aren't we called to discern how the Holy Spirit is moving and either ride the wave that it takes us on or simply get out of the way so that we would not quench the Spirit? While I am in Salt Lake I can be encouraged that when I get back no matter what is decided you will continue to work for the kingdom looking to ride the wave that the Holy

Spirit has already created. We must be willing to jump in with both feet and paddle as hard as we can until the wave takes us home. I'll try to stay in touch with all of you while I am in Salt Lake.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

### **HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...**

**Coffee Hour** – There are many, many spaces open in June and July. The sign up sheets are in Fellowship Hall. Did I mention there are many spaces open? If you haven't signed up recently now is your time. If you haven't signed up at all, now is your time. Thank you for helping out with this ministry.

**VBS** – Mark your calendars for July 14-19 as we will be celebrating once again Vacation Bible School. It takes a village to raise a child, but it takes a church to raise a village. We need all hands on deck to make it successful and to ensure that we are able to be instrumental in shaping and forming this village called Strasburg.

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### **e-news for June 20, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

Happy summer solstice everyone! Yeah, we don't really celebrate that do we? When we lived in Russia we had to leave the country periodically to renew our visas so we had the opportunity to go to some really neat places as we were renewing our visas. One year we went above the arctic circle in Finland. There were wild reindeer everywhere with population centers few and far between. We decided to camp out next to this beautiful lake and went to bed around 10 at night, the girls were young then. The sun was still out but we forced our eyes closed. Next thing we knew there was laughing and loud music playing, and our tent was surrounded by people caught up in revelry. We had no idea what was going on and this lasted well into the morning. As we headed out toward our car that next morning we asked someone what was going on last evening and they told us that since it was June 21 everyone stays up late on the longest day of the year to celebrate the summer solstice.

Who knew? European countries, especially the Scandinavian ones, consider this day as being exceptionally special, so much so that they hold parties and festivities across their nations. The closest thing that we have in the Bible that reflects any kind of a nod to this beginning of summer is found in three places: Genesis 1:14 which states – “And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years.” Then again in Genesis 8:22 we read: “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.” Lastly, we read in Psalm 19:6 this about the sun – “Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and nothing is hid from its heat.”

So, while you suffer under this pretty brutal heat that we have been having over these last few days and which is supposed to last through the weekend, know that there is precedent in Scripture

to celebrate the seasons as ordained by God. Today, this first day of summer, just might be another great opportunity to remember that God has ordained all things. That is something that makes us uniquely Presbyterian. We believe so strongly in the providence of God that not even our actions, or our inactions, is able to sway God away from the plans that He has for our lives. Those plans, if you remember from the many sermons you have heard on this, are for our good and for our success and for our building up and not tearing down.

We had one of our more memorable session meetings last evening. It wasn't just because it was that time again to evaluate your pastor, but part of it was that. But we were also discussing some pretty sensitive and potentially divisive issues. Last evening people felt strongly about things and those of us in the room understood that and it came across clearly. But those of us in the room have also lived life together, we know each other, we love each other, we disagree with each other, but we are family. Let me just say that last night reinforced for me again your awesomeness, and I'm not the only one who thinks this way. Church, your leaders are leading and taking initiatives that point to Jesus.

God's desire is that His church would be built up and that it would be a source of unity and strength for the world to see. Somehow as we stumble along trying to discern God's will, God is using us to show his love and mercy to the world. Your leaders are doing that, but you are doing that as well. On this summer solstice be reminded of the providence of God. God's will is always done, and that will is for our good. We see it in nature, and we see it in another routine meeting of our session, which was anything but routine. Thanks be to God!

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

### **HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH...**

**General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA)** – Pastor Bob has been asked to be a commissioner to this 226<sup>th</sup> meeting of our denomination. Wait, is that right? Yes, since 1789 your church has been meeting either yearly or every two years. What an honor it is to serve in this capacity. Starting on Tuesday he will be in committee meetings which will last through the week. He has been assigned to the Ecumenical and Interfaith Partnerships committee. After next week he will head to Salt Lake City where he will take part in the plenary session with about 500 other commissioners. Pray for him as he does this work for our denomination.

**Welcome to Jonathan Jones, our new interim organist/choirmaster:** We are so pleased to welcome Jonathan into the FPC family. He recently graduated from Liberty University and has played for us a couple of times in the past. His start date will be September 1<sup>st</sup> and he is so looking forward to getting to work. He will be starting the choir back up and is looking at possibilities of a children's choir as well. Let's get behind him and support him and our music ministry. If you wanted to send him a welcome to his email [jjones@straspres.org](mailto:jjones@straspres.org).

**Also, welcome Sarah McCauley to our FPC family:** Sarah was hired as our 3 year old teacher for our Great Beginnings preschool. We are so excited to have her on board as she cares for your children. If you want to welcome her you can reach out to her at this email: [smccauley@straspres.org](mailto:smccauley@straspres.org).

**Vacation Bible School: July 14-19:** The registration form can be found on the church website under Learn-Children's Ministry-VBS. Paper copies can be found on the VBS table outside of room #5.

**Save the Date!**

Tuesday, August 6<sup>th</sup> National/Strasburg Night Out

Sunday, August 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Church Picnic

Saturday, August 31<sup>st</sup> Bluegrass Festival

**FLAT JESUS:** Take Jesus with you on your next vacation or day trip! Stop by room 5 for a kid/family bag filled with activities to do while you're away or pick up a Flat Jesus and pick your own activities. This is a great idea if you're traveling as a couple or with Grandkids. Take pictures with Flat Jesus wherever you go and send them to Beth Feiler at [bfeiler@straspres.org](mailto:bfeiler@straspres.org).

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**e-news for June 6, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

I am not a fan of war. But I am a fan of soldiers and all those who serve in our military. I have been very outspoken in both the media, when needed and in person, about God's desire that peace would prevail on the earth through His followers. We are called to be instruments of peace in all that we do. This is the case not only for armed conflict, but also in regards to interpersonal conflict. We are called to pursue peace.

Today is an important day in our national history in regards to war. The country, the world for that matter, is celebrating the 80 year anniversary of D-Day. It has been eye-opening, and somewhat moving for me, to see soldiers who took part of that invasion honored today in Normandy, France. So much of what we consider to be "normal" in our country is often a result of the people who were willing to put their lives on the line in wars that could have gone either way. There is no stronger critic of war than the current author. But I think you will also find that there is no stronger ally for the soldier and recognition of sacrifice than the person who is writing to you.

Many of you have told me that the most difficult part of reading through the Bible was the violence and the bloodshed that is so prevalent in the Old Testament. It is not something you can ignore or disregard. But it is also not an aspect of Scripture that you can build a viable theology around. In Jesus we find one who does not want violence or war and who is able to make all things happen according to His will without war. But we are sinful and war is a result of the sin that we possess which we are not willing to let go. In WWII our involvement in D-Day was a result of the sin of greed and power which Nazi Germany was pursuing, Japan as well, during that time.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Today we see attempts to seize more and more power on a world stage which creates war that has the potential to get more and more countries involved. Russia today is similar to Nazi Germany during the WWII time. This reality has the potential of involving more and more countries until we get what we got 80 years ago. But even

in our own country it feels like the way of the follower of Jesus (humility, benefit of the doubt, grace) has given way to following the way of the world (pride, conspiracy theories, judgment).

We have not in any way become more civilized than the people of Jesus' day. We still hunger after those things that will hurt people and create division and factions across the globe. As a result of this truth 80 years ago men and women in the midst of a war took part in an action that changed the future of our nation and of the globe in general. Don't let anyone tell you that we don't need other people or other nations. We are all connected. D-Day proved that. Any type of political leader who attempts to be an isolationist leaves the world in a place where others will have to step into the vacuum that our nation might create by our exit.

While this may sound like a political statement, it has incredible overlap in regards to our faith. Jesus was not an American. I say that because I want to make it clear that his actions changed the course of our lives from across the globe. As Americans we are connected to Europe in a very real way. D-Day showed that clearly. That truth remains the same today. We are called as disciples of Jesus Christ to yearn for a world where peace is found, and peace can only be found if we care about our brothers and sisters across the globe. Don't let anyone put you in a box so that you think you must be disconnected from others. We are not. We are connected, thanks be to God.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

**HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...**

**Congratulations to our Seniors:**

**Katie Barge**

**Mitchell Ely**

**Liam Lutz**

**Artem Nebel**

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**e-news for May 31, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

It is hard to ignore the headlines in the paper this morning. My task as pastor is to help guide the church to follow our Savior Jesus Christ as closely as possible while living in this world that is so broken and does not reflect the kingdom that God wants to establish. I have stayed out of the fray during this whole time and I intend to do the same for the foreseeable future. I knew from the moment that I was ordained as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament that I had at that moment given up any future political activity. My call completely superseded any formal political involvement. So, for the past 30 years I have purposefully stayed out of the fray and focused on Jesus and his words and his actions and his life. That will not change today, nor will it change

tomorrow. My call is to preach Christ crucified and resurrected, and the headlines in the newspaper today does not change my call.

But it might change your understanding of the world in which we are living and the country which we love. I have used this space in my enews to comment on those issues that I consider to be “justice issues” where people within our society and culture are treated differently from others because of their race or their financial condition. But Scripture speaks very specifically to this reality and it defines for us who is our neighbor and how we ought to treat our neighbor. So, while some of you may think that I may have wandered into politics at times in this space, it is always within the framework of how Scripture addresses a very specific topic.

One area that is very close to my heart is how people of color are treated within the judicial system. I have used this space to talk about this in the past. The Bible is full of Scriptures that demand that people be treated the same in the judicial system regardless of their status. The Old Testament is filled with Scriptures that warn against taking advantage of those who are on the margins of society in the courts in order to take what is not theirs. I do find it very ironic that for decades now people of color have been telling us that the judicial system is not to be trusted because systematically verdicts and juries will decide in ways that are unfair to them. I’m grateful to hear others join the chorus that our judicial system is not to be trusted, but for a very different reason.

Aside from having a daughter who is a public defender, and not being picked for jury duty a few times, I have very little experience with the judicial system. In the Bible we read that Moses was working himself to death so he set up a number of different people to do some of the less taxing cases while he took on the more important cases. It is in the times of Moses that we see the start of a judicial system. We even have a book of the Bible called Judges which lays out the individuals who were chosen by God to lead his people and to decide between right and wrong. We have books of the Bible filled not just with the 10 commandments but laws that were to be followed by the people of Israel.

Our country is run in such a way that the judicial system is an integral part of our democracy. Without the judicial system we would not recognize our way of life. It is even one of the three branches of government, but this is all very different from the way Scripture has the people of God run their government. But did you know that Presbyterians had a strong heavy hand in creating our current form of government? We were there at the beginning when this nation was being formed and the founding fathers were satisfied with the Presbyterian form of government to apply to our nation.

The decisions that were made yesterday do not impact our personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The decisions that were made yesterday do not impact the work that this church has to do in the community which God requires us to do. Our lives are intertwined with each other because Jesus has brought us together. I pray that as we continue to live our lives in this society and culture which is not the kingdom of God, that we will see Christ at work in our lives and in the life of the church.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

**HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH...**

**Last chance to fill out the survey for PSA:** We still need a number of you to fill out the PSA survey. We are lagging behind our responses from last August. You can fill it out here: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf-TLfxewn47VaBkXf2ZeuUV\\_my\\_UmPxfVsvFyGmH4SX91vgw/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf-TLfxewn47VaBkXf2ZeuUV_my_UmPxfVsvFyGmH4SX91vgw/viewform)

**The youth need your help on their mission trip:** Our senior high youth will be headed to West Virginia to help in construction projects. You can help by providing food to meet their needs while they are there. Follow this link to help with meeting the needs: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0E48ABAA2CA3F5CF8-47584232-materials#/>

**Last Day to experiment by tithing:** If you are not a regular tithing we gave the challenge to tithe during the month of May. I hope you were able to do that. I am looking for stories about how God has impacted you as a result of tithing. Please feel free to reach out to me and let me know how God has impacted you, your life, and your family as a result of your tithing.

**VBS CRAFT DAY is June 15th from 9am-12pm.** Meet in Fellowship Hall to help make decorations for VBS. If you can't help on the 15th there are take home plastic bags in room 5 with crafts that you can make at home.

**Coffee Hour:** We need people to sign up for the months of June and July. Please find the sign-up sheet in Fellowship Hall.

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**e-news for May 24, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

There are milestones in life that are really important to recognize as we make our way through this time that we have on earth. We are told about milestones in Jesus' life that were very important for him and his family. We read that when he was only 8 days old that he was taken to the temple in order to be circumcised in Luke 2:21. That was a big deal and it was there that he was given the name Jesus. When he was 12 we read that he again went to the temple with his family and we can assume that it was in order for him to have his bar- mitzvah in Luke 2:41ff. It would correspond to our confirmation and Jesus would have had to read the Scripture and answer question and then he could be recognize as taking the faith of his ancestors on for himself.

We have milestones in our lives that are important and which we tend to celebrate. Birthdays, anniversaries (thank you, thank you, thank you for your generosity and your many, many displays of love that you gave to me this past Sunday on my 30 year ordination anniversary), baptisms, deaths, new buildings and additions, weddings etc., they all have some sort of ceremony or celebration that takes place as a result of some milestone that you have reached in your life. There is nothing wrong in celebrating milestones.

We find ourselves on the brink of Memorial Day Weekend, a weekend dedicated to soldiers who have entered that final milestone and given their lives for our freedom. Jesus reminds us very

clearly that there is no greater love that a person can have than to lay down their lives for their friends in John 15:13. Every Memorial Day I think about how our veterans have lived out this verse of Scripture. Being willing to lay your life down for someone else is not something that we often ask of anyone except our soldiers, and yet we do ask it of them. We don't tend to do a whole lot during the worship service to recognize this day, maybe ask those who have served to stand up and sing a patriotic hymn, but I want you to know how grateful we are as a church. This church has been through the Civil War, World Wars, and our recent wars, and we are grateful for the veterans who were willing to sacrifice their lives and have given us a real life example of the type of love that Christ states we should all have.

When you celebrate your next milestone, whatever it might be, give thanks to God for a number of different things, not the least of which is that you live in a country that understands the cost of freedom and celebrates those who paid the ultimate price this weekend. How can we not make a parallel to the freedom that Christ provided for us with his death on the cross. Our salvation is real because Jesus chose to be tortured and hung on a cross so that in his resurrection he could conquer death. The love that Jesus has for us can be reflected in our lives as we look to live in such a way that we would be willing to die for our neighbor. That is a big deal, it is something that we should never take for granted.

This past Sunday you gave me a sign that has my favorite Bible verse, which is John 8:32 which states: "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." Freedom has always been a driving force in my life and it wasn't until I understood the entirety of freedom found in Christ that I was willing to give my life to him. I pray that you have found freedom in Christ and recognize the costly price that was paid for that freedom. Don't squander the freedom you have, use it to make a difference.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

**HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...**

**Memorial Day, Monday, May 27<sup>th</sup>** Walk with the Memorial Day Float, help throw candy, and represent First Presbyterian Church. Parade forms on Clearview Drive and Susan Ave at 8:30 am.

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**e-news for May 17, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

Did you know that since 2011 we have had 7 different transitions at our position of organist/choirmaster? Let me list the people by their first name that have led the music at the first service since 2011: Holly, Andrew, Adam, Tim, Bruce, Chris, and then Bruce again. The ability to play an organ and lead a choir is one that is hard to come by. It takes a very specific skill, and I would even say a very specific heart, to have the ability to not just play, but to lead the congregation in a way that they want to sing the hymns that are presented to them. Bruce has to be one of the most skilled organists that I have worked with in regards to leading the congregation in singing. It is clear that he loves Jesus and loves what he does and that emanates from his presence.



Bruce is going to fully retire after this summer both from FPC and LBC. He started here in 1978 and gave us two years then, he came back a handful of years ago and gave us a year, and this time around he gave us another two years. Bruce has been such a great colleague and friend to me personally, and I know to many of you as well. He will be missed so make sure that you let him know how much you have appreciated his presence with us during this time.

We will also be saying goodbye to two other staff people this year as the summer starts. Megan Childs and Samantha Mills have been our three year old teachers for our preschool. They both came on board at a very difficult time in the life of the school as we found ourselves in the throes of Covid, a transition in the director of the preschool position, and a lot of growth in our preschool as well. They stepped in and took on the responsibilities of teaching our children with the love and grace that you would come to expect. We are sad to see both Megan and Samantha go but we are thrilled for what God has in store for them next in their journey. Megan will be taking on the position of children's ministry director for her church and Samantha will be doing student teaching on her way to a teacher's certificate.

Growing up as a missionary kid it was very common for me to have people come and go in my life after only a few years. I learned to make quick and deep friendships and then transition and make new friendships. But I have found that having now been in one place for over a decade for the first time in my life, it hurts a little bit more each time someone is no longer a part of my life in the same way that they were before.

This is true of staff here at First Presbyterian that come and go. It is true of members who move away or choose to worship elsewhere. It is true of friends and family as they migrate to different parts of the world. It seems to hurt a little more now than it ever did when we say goodbye. When we look at Scripture we know that for the most part everyone knew each other and stayed close by. People didn't pack up and move across the country, unless you were being persecuted by Herod (see Matthew 2:14-15).

Scripture doesn't contain the assumption that anyone could move away, like really far away and still somehow keep in touch. But when you look at the Apostle Paul who planted churches all over the region it is no wonder that people were amazed by how the Holy Spirit was able to work in the people. They saw it!

This Pentecost Sunday I encourage you to reconnect with someone who may have moved away or maybe you haven't connected with in a long time. See how God might work in that reunion and remember that even if we are separated for a time, the bond that we have in Jesus Christ will always keep us united.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

### **HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH...**

**Wear Red this Sunday!!** Let's celebrate Pentecost together this Sunday as we wear red to celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the church.

**Memorial Day Parade:** Join First Presbyterian Church on our float in the Memorial Day Parade, May 27th. Walk along with us and represent the church. Free hot dogs will follow the parade and service.

**Interested in serving as a short term missionary?:** The Berliner Missionswerk, a partner with PC(USA) has a 10-month opportunity for two people. They need a volunteer to work in a parish with children and youths and a volunteer to work in a diaconal institution for people with disabilities. The position includes housing, pocket money, transport, language course, seminars and support, and insurance. It begins at the beginning of September and ends at the end of June, 2025. Contact Pastor Bob ASAP if interested in this position.

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### **e-news for May 4, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

For the second week in a row I am writing this enews in a location far away from Strasburg and in what is called the historic South. I am in Little Rock, Arkansas this week at a Presbyterian camp and conference center called Ferncliff, thanks to a Presbyterian grant for pastors where I am participating in what is called CREDO. There are three times that CREDO is offered for pastors: pastors who are beginning their ministry (Brett Foote was here last week in this category!), pastors who are in the middle of their ministry (I did this during COVID), and Late Career pastors. Yup, you guessed it, I am officially in that category that is called late career. Basically, I think it just means that you are old! Can you really be in your late career when you are 55? I feel like we just got started together and we have so much more to do together.

It has been an impactful week. Unlike last week when I was in Nashville with Stacy, here I am by myself supposed to be doing reflecting and discerning on how God continues to work within my life so that I can come back better equipped to work in the life of the church. You know me well enough that I don't always do well at self-reflection or discernment. But I have learned a lot of practical information that relates to Presbyterian pastors and how well we are taken care of by our Board of Pensions.

There does seem to be a bit of a disconnect between Jesus who tells those who might follow him that the Son of Man, and so his disciples by extension, may not have a place to lay their head. We spend a lot of resources and energies in our denomination to take care of our pastors, and I'm so, so grateful for that. I have the best of both worlds. My congregation takes care of me big time, and so does the denomination. But the disconnect is that Jesus warns us that we should not be expecting what the world expects as followers of Jesus. When we demand or expect the same as what culture has to offer, then we stop following Christ for the kingdom's sake and it becomes more following Him for our sake.

Out of the 25 pastors who are here I have heard maybe only a partial handful of pastors who love their church and love what they are doing. I have to say, being here makes me soooo grateful to be your pastor. You are an awesome church filled with awesome people. Trust me, this is not the norm, I am seeing the norm, and you are not it, praise be to God!

What I see starting to happen within me is a sense of gratitude for you that can only be reflected in Paul's words to the Galatians where he tells them – I thank God every day for you. You are willing to listen and pursue the kingdom of God whether that is in focusing on Prayer, Scripture and Action (please fill out the survey here, we really want your feedback [PSA survey](#)), or serving our neighbor through the foodbank, and by agreeing to fund CIC which continues to have a powerful impact on our community. Consider that in the Presbyterian Church the average pastorate is 4 years and you have been able to have a pastor stay for 18 years (Jim Powl), 12 years (Steve and Jennie Clark) and we are working together on 13 years. This tells a story that you know how to love pastors and you want to have a pastor who is willing to push you to new understandings of the Gospel.

What's that saying: absence makes the heart grow fonder? I do feel that every time that I get away to do these kinds of continuing education events I can't wait to get back with you to not only share what I have learned, but simply because I have missed you and want to share life with you, again.

Your servant in Christ,

And your late career pastor (ouch)

Pastor Bob

**May is tithing month:** As we heard last Sunday during worship, if you have never tithed before, try it out in May and see how God is able to bless you in ways that you never imagined. Scripture clearly tells us that if we want to experience the fullness of a relationship with Christ we must trust Him with everything. Tithing is the most clear way to make that happen. I would love to hear how it goes so let me hear your stories as you go through May tithing month.

**Thursday evening Bible Study on May 9<sup>th</sup> at 6pm**

**Final steps for PSA (Prayer, Scripture, Action):** Next Sunday, May 5 we will have a minute for mission which will draw to a close our initiative of Prayer, Scripture, and Action. We have a survey that we would love for everyone to take which serves as a tool to measure the impact of our initiative. You can fill it out here: [PSA survey](#)

**Wear Red for worship on Pentecost, Sunday May 19**

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**e-news for April 27, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

Do you know this hymn? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbgG0Monvd8>

This past week I attended a preacher's conference called The Fellowship Community in Nashville, Tennessee. It was a powerful conference, and it was one of those conferences that ten years from now people will talk about as a transformative one for our denomination. The Fellowship Community tends to gather the remaining more conservative Presbyterian Church (USA) churches. We were led to consider what it means to be in the world but not of it. When I say we, I

mean both Stacy and I were able to attend. It is the first time in our 30 years of ministry that we attended together a preacher's conference.

The last day that we were there we were told that a special guest would be presenting and it happened to be the author of the above hymn, Keith Getty. Nashville is the home to a myriad of musical talents, which is no wonder why it is called the music city. The worship that we experienced at the conference was uplifting and incredibly moving. Picture yourself in a room with over 500 pastors and elders singing at the top of their lungs to the glory of God led by world talent who love Jesus. Yeah, that's what it was like.

I was certainly refreshed at the conference. I also learned a lot that I hope to share with you in regards to what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ who lives in the world and yet struggles to differentiate ourselves from the world. How do our lives look different as followers of Jesus from that of our neighbor who maybe doesn't know Jesus and has no interest in the Gospel? That's the challenge isn't it? We are called to live in the world but to not take on the interests and values of the world.

But the opposite is also true. We are not called to set fire to the world and declare all that is in the world to be evil. It simply is not. God created us in His own image and so we are fundamentally made good. Similarly, the world was created by God and he proclaimed: It is good! What we do in the church has to be directed to proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Savior and us as His followers. If there is anything that draws us away from God or makes people stumble when they look at our lives then we have to reconsider the direction of our lives.

I did notice something at the conference that made me extremely grateful for you and your loyalty to the church and to Jesus. There were many at the conference who were looking for pastors to serve in their church. I met three people from the church where I had interned while I was in Seminary, in Beverly, New Jersey. I recognized them and they recognized me and we reminisced about this 22 year old seminary student who thought he had the answers to everything (the more things change...). But today they are struggling and have been searching for 5 years for a pastor.

I am so grateful for your faithfulness to this church and your love for each other and Jesus. Our family is unique, our love for each other is nothing to take for granted. Our ministry is significant within our community and is making a lasting impact upon our children, youth, families and older adults. Every demographic group is represented in our church and has a desire to do the will of God. It could be very different, but you have made Christ a priority and so it is a joy to serve you. You have truly lived out the words of the hymn: "Till He returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I'll stand." Thank you for being faithful.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

### **HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...**

**May is tithing month:** As we heard last Sunday during worship, if you have never tithed before, try it out in May and see how God is able to bless you in ways that you never imagined. Scripture clearly tells us that if we want to experience the fullness of a relationship with

Christ we must trust Him with everything. Tithing is the most clear way to make that happen. I would love to hear how it goes so let me hear your stories as you go through May tithing month.

**50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary of John and Glenna Kirchner, shhhh... it's a secret:** How special it would be to send a card or a note of congratulations to John and Glenna on their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on May 4<sup>th</sup>. Let's cover them with cards and letters. You can do so by sending it to their home address or place it in their church mailbox. Their home address is: 253 Julia Ave, Strasburg, PA 17579.

**No Bible Study until May 9<sup>th</sup>, Pastor Bob will be away on continuing education next week.**

**Final steps for PSA (Prayer, Scripture, Action):** Next Sunday, May 5 we will have a minute for mission which will draw to a close our initiative of Prayer, Scripture, and Action. We have a survey that we would love for everyone to take which serves as a tool to measure the impact of our initiative. You can fill it out here: [PSA survey](#)

**Wear Red for worship on Pentecost, Sunday May 19**

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### **e-news for April 19, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

We had our monthly session meeting this past Wednesday. Each month there tends to be enough information and business that takes place that it is important that the congregation is aware of all that is happening within the life of the church. I guess this is something that differentiates us as a mainline church from other churches that maybe don't have the history or the transparency that we might have. You already know that you can look at our yearly report and see all of the details of our budget and our expenditures from previous years, as well as read up on what has been done in the church throughout the year.

But our monthly session meetings also provide incredibly transparency as each decision that is made in the life of our church is funneled through this primary governing body. This Session is composed of 12 men and women who have been elected by you to run the church as the Holy Spirit leads them. So what did we do Wednesday evening? We began the evening with what is called Lectio Divino, which is a fancy Latin term for the reading of Scripture with a deliberate method to welcome the Spirit of God to guide us as we read it. We read the Scripture, then we asked for a word or phrase that stuck out while we were reading it. People spoke up and offered a word or phrase that was in the Scripture. We then read the Scripture again and asked for a reason why that particular word or phrase stuck out. Then we read it a third time and closed by asking God to lead us in our decision making.

Your session is devoted to ensuring that all that is done in this church is led by God and inspired by His wisdom. We are blessed to have a significant memorial mission fund over which we our Mission and Finance Committee will have oversight. If you know of a ministry or missionaries that might need funding, please let your session know. As a result of this action we looked at our very own CIC (Community Impact Committee) and decided to fund it with \$10,000 for this year. This group within our church has been able to help 56 families over this past year and a half

with financial help for utilities, rent, and other emergent needs. This funding will help significantly families within our community.

We talked about our day of Action which is this Sunday. We want to be sure that you sign up to either write letters to those who have not been able to make it to church lately, we also have an opportunity to write letters to those who are having birthdays and anniversaries, as well as letters to the incarcerated. For those who are little more creative we will be decorating bags for Meals on Wheels as well.

As I have been saying we need people who are willing to mulch as well. We have five houses that we are going to mulch and we have teams set up to go to those houses. We can always use more people. It is not too late to sign up. Some people have wanted to know what to expect and what do they need to bring for this day of action. If you signed up to write letters or to decorate bags then after the luncheon we will all be in Fellowship Hall. We will have everything you need from markers and crayons and stickers and what not to paper and envelopes for the letters. We will also have templates that you can follow so you don't have to make things up on your own. There will be people there who can guide you and direct you and who will be overseeing the letter writings and the bag decorating. Just come and get to work!

If you are signing up to mulch at homes then it would be great if you can bring your mulching tools. If you have a wheelbarrow, gloves, rakes, weeding tools etc. But, if you don't have any of those things, that's okay too! Just show up and we will put you to work. We are blessed to have great teams of people willing to help out and be involved in this day of Action. We are blessed to be a part of a church that is willing to pursue the will of God in an open and transparent way.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

### **HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...**

**Pentecost Sunday on May 19:** Join the rest of the FPC family in wearing red when you come to church on that day. Let's celebrate the birthday of the Christian church by praising God for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Mark your calendars for the church picnic:** It is not too early to put down August 18 for the date of the church picnic at Tinney Pavillion. Mark the date down and get your corn hole team together!

### **DAY OF ACTION THIS SUNDAY, APRIL 21**

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

**Burn the mortgage at Shiloh Presbyterian in Oxford:** Two representatives from First Presbyterian have been invited to take part in the celebration at Shiloh Presbyterian Church in Oxford as they celebrate paying off their mortgage for this multi-purpose building. This church which is very active within its community with a variety of outreach programs is celebrating this milestone which FPC Strasburg helped to accomplish. Steve Hess and Pastor Bob will be celebrating on your behalf.

**Delegate to this year's General Assembly in Salt Lake City, Utah:** Pastor Bob has been asked to serve as a delegate to this year's PC(USA) General Assembly in Salt Lake City Utah. Please join in prayer for him and the church as they seek out God's guidance for the future of the denomination.

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**e-news for April 11, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

After the service this past Sunday I had a conversation with one of you and you said something like: "I was proud to be a Presbyterian today." It is rare that a local church gets a visit from a serving Moderator of the PC(USA). Worship was stunning, the Holy Spirit was moving not only in a palpable way but in a visible way as well. One of you mentioned to me that you saw a glow surrounding the participants and could only attribute it to the presence of the Holy Spirit. It was a Sunday that we will all remember probably for the rest of our lives. Thank you for being a part of it, thank you for allowing the presence of the Holy Spirit to move in a way that impacted all of us powerfully. You are a great church and the Holy Spirit is moving greatly among us.

These moments in the life of a church can shape it and have the potential for transforming it. I can think back on the life of this church and identify a number of pivotal moments that have if not changed the course, at least had a very significant impact on the trajectory of the church. There are positive events, like what we experienced this past Sunday. And there are also events that have set us back. But we have all lived through and can identify ways in which that which takes place will be remembered and will be looked back on as being pivotal. This past Sunday was such an event.

Let's switch gears a bit and let's keep talking about PSA because we have the third part of it, Action, coming up very quickly. We do need everyone to sign up to take part in the action that we have laid out before us. There is something for everyone. If you are not able to go out and mulch then you are able to decorate bags for meals on wheels. If you are not able to mulch then you can write letters to the incarcerated and those who are shut in. But if you can mulch, sign up to mulch!

After church on April 21<sup>st</sup> we will be having a meal together. Please plan on joining us even if you are not involved in the day of Action for some reason. There is so much to be said to breaking bread together. There is a lot to be said for working together side by side and shoulder to shoulder as we serve those that God has put before us. I know it feels like for two weeks in a row we are addressing the importance of action as a church community. It should feel that way because it is that way.

You have heard ad nauseum the emphasis that we have on Matthew 25 and the command that we receive from our Savior to be involved in action that alleviates the every day stresses of life. If people are living around us without the basic necessities or without the presence of people who love them, it is our responsibility as a church to meet those needs. We can't wash our hands of the needs that we see around us and say that it isn't our job. We can't place parameters around people to try to distinguish who deserves our help and who doesn't.

Remember what we learn from Scripture, that even while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. In the midst of our own sin, Jesus didn't choose to place an obstacle to prevent our salvation, he removed all obstacles. Doesn't it make sense that we do the same with whatever resources that we have, that we remove whatever obstacles might be in the way that prevent us from providing support, companionship, real love of neighbor action to those with whom we come into contact? Yes, it not only makes sense but from my viewpoint it seems to be a commandment.

So please take this day of Action seriously and consider signing up to do something after church after we have our meal together. This strengthens us as a community while at the same time strengthening the greater community in which we find ourselves.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

### **HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...**

**Day of Action on April 21:** Join us for a meal after worship and then we go out and serve the community. There are sign up sheets in the welcome area under the TV screen where you can sign up to take part in this action. We need all of you to participate.

**Pentecost:** Join us in worship on May 19 and wear red to celebrate the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

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

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### **e-news for April 5, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

The steering committee for Prayer, Scripture and Action met this week. We are in the very last home stretch of this initiative. We only have two items left to accomplish: the day of action and the final evaluation. We will be having a day of action on Sunday, April 21, 2024. That is two weeks from this Sunday! During this day of action we are asking every person in the church to sign up to do something that will reach out in help and concern to their neighbor. We will have opportunities for you to write to people who are incarcerated (see Matthew 25), you can write to our shut-ins, you can decorate food bags for Meals on Wheels, you can get on a team of people who are mulching houses of individuals. We will have enough spaces for everyone who wants to volunteer to help out.

But wait, there is more. After church on the 21<sup>st</sup>, before we head out to do our action, we will be having a meal together. We have talked a lot recently about the work that Jesus did around a table. Jesus at the Last Supper gave his disciples a new commandment which was to love one another. This may not sound new, but loving one another in deed and truth (look at I John 3:18) is part of the action to which we are called. Remember what righteousness is? *Acting* according to the will of God.



Once that day is completed and we have purposefully carried out actions of righteousness toward our neighbor, we will then evaluate ourselves once again. Remember when we did that in January? Remember when well over 100 of you filled out forms that helped to measure our relationship with Jesus in regards to our Prayer, Scripture and Action? Well, we are going to do that again. So here is what I am asking. Can you please sign up to do action on April 21<sup>st</sup>? There is something, at least one thing, for everyone. If you aren't into writing letters, then come mulch with us. If you aren't into writing letters or mulching, come decorate a bag with us. If you aren't into any of those things, then call people who haven't been here in a while and tell them you miss them? We will have sign up sheets under the TV in the common area where you can sign up for one of these things.

This church has been and continues to be a church of action. Your support for our foodbank has created opportunities for people to live a higher quality of life as a result of your outreach. Your support of the church budget where over 10% of your donations go out to organizations and missionaries who are helping people in need is another manifestation of your devotion to ensuring that you not only believe in Jesus, but that you want to act like Jesus. We can never separate what we believe from what we do. I mean we can, but it does create a hypocrisy which drives people away from the church.

When a church is only interested in its own future, or in its own growth, or in its own safety and resources, then it stops being the bride of Christ and becomes a self-absorbed social club. That is never what we want to become. We exist to bring people closer to Christ. We exist to bring the love of Christ to the community in tangible real ways. We do a pretty good job of that, but we should never rest on our laurels thinking that our job is finished. It is not, we work, hopefully tirelessly, for the kingdom. Thank you for welcoming this final phase of Prayers, Scripture and Action. Now sign up!

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

**ONE SERVICE THIS SUNDAY, APRIL 7, AT 10AM AS WE WELCOME THE MODERATOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA) Ruth Santana-Grace**

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**e-news for March 28, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

Maundy Thursday is this evening. I went back over some old yearly reports and did you know that in the mid 80's we had two Maundy Thursday services and close to 250 people attended those services? I think last year we had 30 people attend. I love Maundy Thursday and the recognition that Jesus and his disciples were gathered around the Upper Room to take part in their last supper together. As we gather around the table we are fully aware that when we take part in the sacrament of communion something is happening that is bigger than we are, and bigger than what the church is as well.

I looked at our virtual attendance on Sundays. Did you know that on our website we get close 50 people logging in and watching our services? On Facebook between the church site and my own site we have over 100, and on Youtube we get close to 50 people who are watching. Now, those numbers aren't totally accurate. You could watch five minutes of our service on a Friday morning and that would count as a view, but there are real people who continue to follow along in the life of the church and the worship of the church who do not come into the church. So, for example, we had more people streaming the Maundy Thursday service last year than attended, a lot more.

This is all very new to me and so I don't know exactly how to interpret it. Theologically I can't even put a Scripture to it to help me understand what is going on and how to contextualize a whole third group of people who make up a part of this church (first service, second service, and virtual watchers). How do we minister to those who participate virtually? How do we meet their spiritual, pastoral, fellowship needs? These are all questions that I simply don't have an answer to, and so I wanted to share them with you, burden you with them, so that we can work together to figure out what all of this means.

I do know that church is not a location, that it is a gathering of people. But when the people are not gathered together in person but separately just at the same time, is that still church? Of course it is! I think, I mean we know that the Holy Spirit moves most powerfully when his faithful, and not so faithful, followers are together doing God's work. Church has to be something we do together, in person. That is where God is able to move more powerfully. The power of Maundy Thursday is not in witnessing communion, but in taking part together in communion, around the same table, hearing the same words, and being equipped by the same Holy Spirit.

I don't want to sound like the get off my lawn guy, but maybe it is as simple as church is people gathered together in one place at the same time. Anything else is watching church, or spectating church, but not the church acting and active and alive. We know that location matters in real estate, I am convinced that it matters for church as well. Will you spend some time in trying to help us figure out how do we minister to those who are actively part of FPC and yet worship with us virtually? Send me some of your ideas. Part of the problem is that we don't have a footprint of their watching which identifies them. We actually don't know who is joining us on Sunday morning, just how many and from which state.

That's a lot to think about on a Maundy Thursday. I pray that you are having a blessed Holy Week, and maybe you might consider joining us in person this Maundy Thursday at 7, or Good Friday at 7, or Easter Sunday at 8:30 or 11.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

### **HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...**

**One service on Sunday, April 7, at 10am** – Join us on April 7 at 10am as we greet the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA) Ruth Santana-Grace. There will be no Sunday School that Sunday. We will have a massive choir that Sunday. Won't you join us in the choir? Rehearsals will be Thursday, April 4 at 7:30 and Sunday the 7<sup>th</sup> at 9:15.

**Bible Study this evening at 6pm here: [YouTube](#)**

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**e-news for March 20, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

We have session this evening. Believe it or not I do look forward to the session meetings and being together with those elected by you to make decisions on behalf of the congregation. Our constitution states that there is no reason to deny anyone membership not related to their profession of faith. So, if you love Jesus Christ you are welcome into membership in this church. Our constitution also states that the session should conduct a “careful examination” of all those seeking membership. This evening session will be involved in a “careful examination” of those confirmation youth who have spent the last 6 months with me and Kristin learning about their faith and about the life of the church.

Confirmation is not unique to the Presbyterian Church, but we certainly do take it seriously here. The youth undergo a 6-month process where they learn about Bible basics, History of our people, Theology and Sacraments, and Church Government. They are plied with a lot of information and hopefully some of it will stick with them once they meet with session this evening. But from the beginning of the class Kristin and I have emphasized that the head knowledge which they receive is not nearly as important as their heart following Jesus. Without a personal relationship with your Savior this information will remain that, information.

Confirmation is a time when these youth make a decision for Jesus and confirm the promises that their parents made to the congregation that they will raise the child up in the church so that this child will one day confirm that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior. They are no longer coasting on the coattails of their parents’ faith. It is now their faith that matters, and that faith needs to be one that is personal and not just a summary of information that might label them as a Christian. We do confirmation so that these youth can know Jesus personally and follow him for the rest of their lives not as a name, but as a person with whom they have a relationship.

I ask that you pray for these youth this evening and for the rest of their lives. They are Connor Allison, Lucas Ely, and Garrett Thomas. Connor and Garrett were baptized by me about 12 or 13 years ago. Lucas will always be remembered for a lot of things including when he was a second grader and asked during the service why he didn’t get a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade Bible. He did eventually get one. They are children of this church, they grew up in this church, we have seen them wander our hallways and we have prayed that this day would come for them. Confirmation Sunday is always on Youth Sunday and this year it will be held on April 14. Come and join us and see your youth make a decision for Jesus Christ.

I pray that as you read about the decision that they have made and the road that led to this decision you may be inspired on your own to take your own faith more seriously. What does it mean to be not just a member, or a Christian, but a follower of Jesus? What do we do on a daily basis to strengthen our faith so that we and our family can be drawn closer to our Savior. Historically Easter was the time when new believers would come into the fold. In the first few centuries of the

Christian church baptism only took place on Easter. Let this season of the church year be a motivation for all of us to understand how God is calling us to be in a new relationship with Him.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

### **HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...**

**Bible Study on Thursday Evenings:** And we're baaack! Join us this Thursday at 6pm here for our weekly (almost) Bible Study. [Youtube](#)

**READ THROUGH THE BIBLE in 78 hours:** Sign up to read through the Bible for an hour (or more) here at FPCS. From 6am, Tuesday, March 26th – 11am, Friday, March 29th we need volunteers to read for one hour in the Sanctuary here at church. Please sign up on the green sign-up sheets located on the welcome desk. Right now we have 32 spots that are open. If we are not able to get that number down to single digits we won't really be able to do it. Consider it!

**WEDNESDAY MORNING WALK/RUN GROUP:** Wednesday mornings (weather permitting) we will meet at the church parking lot at 5:25am and take off at 5:30am sharp. We will embark on 3, one mile loops through town, each loop ending at the church before starting the next. All are welcome! You can walk, run, or both. You can do 1, 2, or all 3 miles and then some! Questions, or to be added to the text message update group please contact Dillon Sickler at 484-467-1587.

**Stuffing Easter Eggs:** We will be stuffing Eggs for the Easter Egg Hunt on Sunday, March 24<sup>th</sup> right after the second service in Fellowship Hall. Please sign up on the sign-up sheet under the TV by the welcome area. We need lots of hands to help and lunch will be provided. Also, you will find a sign-up sheet under the TV in the welcome area for items needed to fill the eggs. Please have all donations back to the welcome area by Friday, March 22nd. All items should be individually wrapped and nut free.

**Wings and Things:** Gather with the men of FPCS for wings, or another dish of your liking every first Sunday of the month at 5pm. Our next gathering will be April 7 @ 5pm at "The Tavern" at Springhouse.

**Lenten and Easter Services: Today:** 12 pm Wednesday Lenten Service Schedule with lunch March 20 First Presbyterian Church of Strasburg

### **HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE**

Palm Sunday March 24 8:30am and 11am

Maundy Thursday March 28 7pm

Community Good Friday Tenebrae March 29 7pm

Community Easter Sunrise Service March 31 6:30am - St. Michael's Lutheran Church,

40 E. Main St.

Easter Sunday March 31 8:30am and 11am

**Easter Egg Hunt:** Join us for our 12<sup>th</sup> annual Easter Egg Hunt on Saturday, March 20 at 10am. Invite all the children that you know in this world to come and take part. It is a big community outreach for the church and a great opportunity for you to get to know and meet the families of Strasburg. Come and help and invite others.

**IF Women's Conference:** Begins on Friday evening and goes through Saturday afternoon. It can make a difference in your life! All women are invited. Speak to Kristin Kondratowski if you are interested or just show up.

**APRIL 7 SINGLE SERVICE AT 10AM:** We are so pleased to welcome to First Presbyterian Ruth Santana-Grace the current co-Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Following the 10am service we will have a luncheon with an opportunity for Q and A. Join us!

**March Madness:** Don't forget to fill out your bracket to take part in the FPC bracket challenge. Deadline is Thursday at noon.

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### **e-news for March 7, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

We have an event that is coming up which is exciting for me personally and historical for our church as a whole. The Presbyterian Church (USA) is composed of over 1 million members across the United States. The denomination's oldest Presbytery is in our back yard, Philadelphia Presbytery, which began gathering Presbyterian churches in 1706. Now, that may not sound very old to our Anabaptist brothers and sisters around us, but for us that's pretty old. Every two years the national church body meets as a whole at what is called the General Assembly. At this bi-annual General Assembly the body elects a Moderator of the church whose responsibility it is to represent the church for their two year term in all matters ecclesiastical. They are, for lack of a better word, the figurehead of the church for those two years.

We are honored to have the current Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA) Ruth Santana-Grace come and preach for us on April 7, 2024. While we do not tend to rely upon church tradition or religious trappings for our worship and faith, history matters. From where you come makes a difference for who you are. Think of the impact that your father and/or your mother has made upon who you are today. I know, I know, not all of it is good, but you are shaped not just by your own experiences that you have personally gone through, but you are inevitably shaped by the experiences of those who have gone before you as well. You cannot avoid that as much as you may want to.

As a result, the presence of a Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA) is not going to change the course of the church in the present or in the near future. But it is still pretty cool. Let me tell you something about Ruth. Stacy and I went to seminary together with her and some of our interests aligned. When we served in Italy at the orphanage she headed up the Waldensian Society which provided some of our support here in the US. We stayed in touch and went to Israel together in 1999 with a group of classmates from Princeton. When she moved to Philadelphia as its

Executive Presbyterian, after a stint on the West Coast, it was nice to have her close by to call and ask for insight into pastoral realities that I was facing here in Strasburg.

Ruth represents the denomination well. Her loyalty to the church and her love for Jesus is unquestionable. Her determination that the church work out with fear and trembling their responsibility in regards to Matthew 25 is tireless. I think you can see how many of our passions and our goals overlap for the church. We are looking to celebrate her presence with us together. As a result, we will have one service at 10am on April 7. After our service together, we will have a luncheon where we can meet her more personally. In her role of Moderator we are inviting the other 49 churches of the Donegal Presbytery to join us for worship and for the luncheon. I hope it will be a huge celebration.

I do hope you will come and join us for this historic occasion. There probably will be a little more pomp involved than what we are used to, but that’s also okay. For every season under heaven there is a time. We find ourselves in a time where God is at work powerfully in this church here in little old Strasburg, a little national exposure won’t hurt. But remember, our goal remains the same. What can we do to fulfill Colossians 1:28 which is to present everyone mature in Christ? This might be a step in the right direction as we continue to fulfill this mandate.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

**HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...**

**Lenten services & luncheons:** Join us for weekly services here at First Presbyterian Church offered by the Strasburg Ministerium. 12 pm Wednesday Lenten Service Schedule with lunch

March 13 St. Michael’s Lutheran

March 20 First Presbyterian Church of Strasburg

*\*All services will be held in the sanctuary here at First Presbyterian Church. The noon services will be followed by a luncheon. Join us!*

**Holy week schedule**

Palm Sunday	March 24 8:30am & 11am
Maundy Thursday	March 28 7pm
Good Friday Tenebrae	March 29 7pm
Community Easter Sunrise Service Lutheran	March 31 6:30am-St. Michael's Church, 40 E. Main St.
Easter Sunday	March 31 8:30am & 11am

**Great Beginnings preschool registration** for the 2024-2025 school year is open! Contact Heather Reynolds, Administrative Director at [hreynolds@straspres.org](mailto:hreynolds@straspres.org) or 717-617-9501, or pick up an application at the church office or the preschool mailbox.

**READ THROUGH THE BIBLE in 78 hours:** Sign up to read through the bible for an hour (or more) here at FPCS. From 6am, Tuesday, March 26th – 11am, Friday, March 29th we need volunteers to read for one hour in the Sanctuary here at church. Please sign up on the green sign-up sheets located on the sign up racks.

**Easter Egg Hunt:** It is that time of the year again. Join us as we celebrate Easter with a fun filled activity for our youngest in the church family. The hunt will be on March 30 at 10am. All children up through 5<sup>th</sup> grade are welcome.

**IF Conference:** A global event for women will be live streamed here at FPC. You can register for the conference by reaching out the Kristin Kondratowski at [kristin@straspres.org](mailto:kristin@straspres.org).

**NO BIBLE STUDY FOR THIS EVENING!!**

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**e-news for March 1, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

Of course we sang Sanctuary. The retreat was a time when in all that we did we asked the Lord to prepare us to do His bidding so that we could be prepared to work for His kingdom. Now, not everything we did at the retreat seemed to track with the theme of Prayer, Scripture and Action, but much of it did. Our time watching Sister Act reminded us that it takes being in the lives of those inside and outside the church in order to revitalize and fulfill God’s desires for us. Saturday was a day full of focused opportunities to pray, read Scripture, and understand more about God’s calling for us to act according to his purposes.

I led us in a time where we could understand prayer better. I gave a background to the Why of prayer (because the Bible and our history tells us so). This then moved to the How of prayer (make sure our bodies are open to a posture of receiving the Holy Spirit as He indwells us and that our minds are focused upon the presence of God in Scripture that draws us back to His presence). Then finally we prayed for about 20 minutes, which felt like 2 minutes.

Jen Eisenberg led us in a practical course on how to read Scripture as we looked at John 4. We learned to identify the people who were present, the crises which may have found themselves all throughout the Scripture, the location of where it was all taking place. There are so many details in the Scripture that speak to the meaning and the purpose of Jesus’ teachings that often we miss the most basic, but important details. Did you know that the woman left her jar at the well when she went back to tell her people in the Samaritan village?

Finally, my brother David led us in an in depth study of Christian social action. He identified the differences between relief, development, and justice work, all of which are required by the people of God. He called out the difficulties which could arise if a body of Christ sees one as more important than the other, or when one of them is described as not being the work of the church. Each of these things are actions that are required by the body of Christ, but none of them should be exclusively emphasized.

After the hard work of focusing on prayer, Scripture, and action we were able to enjoy lazer tag with only a couple of casualties. That was followed by an evening around a campfire highlighted by a full moon and smores. Then off to glow in the dark dodgeball which left its mark as the next morning some of us could barely move our right arm. It really felt like a wonderful mix of learning and fellowship combined with fun and great food. Yes, we ate really well over the entire weekend and they had a fancy coffee maker where we could get a double espresso or latte at any time you wanted, 24/7. What more could you want?

We left the retreat desiring greatly to do this again. If you were not able to make it this time, know that there are about 100 folks in the church who could speak to the retreat and its efficacy. Keep your eyes peeled for a similar opportunity in 2025. No decisions have been made yet, but why not keep doing things that work?

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

### **HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...**

**READ THROUGH THE BIBLE** in 78 hours. We will be reading through the Bible from beginning to end during Holy Week. Sign up to read through the bible for an hour (or more) here at FPCS. From 6am, Tuesday, March 26<sup>th</sup> – 11am, Friday, March 29<sup>th</sup> we need volunteers to read for one hour in the Sanctuary here at church. Please sign up on the green sign-up sheets located on the welcome desk.

**One Great Hour of Sharing:** This year we will be celebrating **ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING** on **Palm Sunday, March 24<sup>th</sup>**. It is a yearly special offering that helps the Presbyterian Church (USA) reach out to millions of people who lack access to sustainable food sources, clean water, sanitation, education, and opportunity.

**Stuffing Easter Eggs:** We will be stuffing Eggs for the Easter Egg Hunt on **Sunday, March 24<sup>th</sup>** right after the second service in **Fellowship Hall**. Please sign up on the sign-up sheet under the TV by the welcome area. We need lots of hands to help and lunch will be provided. Also, you will find a sign-up sheet under the TV in the welcome area for items needed to fill the eggs. Please have all donations back to the welcome area by Friday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>. All items should be individually wrapped and nut free.

**WINGS & THINGS** ☺ Gather with the men of FPCS for wings, or another dish of your liking **every first Sunday of the month at 5pm**. Our next gathering will be **March 3 @ 5pm at “The Tavern” at Springhouse**.

**WEDNESDAY MORNING WALK/RUN GROUP** ☺ Wednesday mornings (weather permitting) we will meet at the church parking lot at 5:25am and take off at 5:30am sharp. We will embark on 3, one mile loops through town, each loop ending at the church before starting the next. All are welcome! You can walk, run, or both. You can do 1, 2, or all 3 miles and then some! Questions, or to be added to the text message update group please contact Dillon Sickler at 484-467-1587.

**Sunday, April 7, 2024 First Presbyterian Church of Strasburg**



## 10am Worship Service

Join us for a visit of the Co-Moderator of the PCUSA,

**Rev. Ruth Faith Santana-Grace:** Rev. Ruth Faith Santana-Grace was a classmate of Pastor Bob and Stacy at Princeton Theological Seminary. Following seminary they worked together with the Waldensian Church in Italy. She then served as an Associate Pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Bethlehem, PA. She then became Executive Presbyter of San Gabriel Presbytery in Southern California.

**Want to follow along with the work of Melissa Long:** You can sign up to receive her newsletter here: <http://eepurl.com/ijf2KT>

**Bible Study every Thursday evening:** You can join us here - [Youtube](#)

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## e-news for February 22, 2024

Dear FPC family and friends,

Two weeks in a row and we are going to be talking about the church-wide retreat at Black Rock. Wait, before I do that I need to tell you something: **WORSHIP THIS SUNDAY AT 10AM ONLY!!! WE WILL BE AT BLACK ROCK BUT YOU CAN COME TO FPC AND SEE THE STREAM FROM BLACK ROCK.**

We are so looking forward to welcoming you at Black Rock and know that you will experience the presence of the Lord in a powerful way in your time there. There are a few things you should know that we wanted to get to you before you head over to the center tomorrow.

When you arrive at Black Rock head straight to the Maranatha building. There you will see FPC folks ready to greet you. We will be registering at the Cedar room in the Maranatha Center. When you get to the Cedar room you will pick up your room key along with your lanyard and folder, which includes a full rundown of what will be happening. If you are not staying overnight, please come to the Cedar room to register. If you happen to have any food allergies, please let Black Rock know by following this link: [Food Allergy Form](#). If by chance you have any questions or wanted to know more, or if you happen to arrive on Saturday and need to talk to Alice, her number is 717-725-2675.

We have a lot of meaningful and fun activities and events lined up for you. See the attached schedule of events to get a feel for what we will be doing. We are looking forward to worshipping together at Black Rock on Sunday at 10am in the Maranatha Center. Please note that there will be no Sunday School at 9am on Sunday, the 25<sup>th</sup>.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to Alice if you have any questions, and maybe spend some time in prayer as you prepare yourself to come to know Christ better through prayer, Scripture, and action.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

**PSA • Black Rock Retreat • Schedule**

**Friday, February 23**

- 4 – 6pm Arrive and check in at Maranatha Retreat Center
- 6pm Dinner
- 7pm Worship and Getting to know one another Michael Wilson
- 8pm Sister Act

**Saturday, February 24**

- 7am Get up and Go! (Walking, running, yoga)
- 8am Breakfast
- 9am Worship and Getting to know one another
- 10am Prayer Bob Bronkema
- 11:15am Getting to know one another
- 12pm Lunch
- 1pm Scripture Jen Eisenberg
- 2:30pm Action David Bronkema
- 4pm Laser Tag and Free Time
- 5pm Dinner
- 6pm Fire Pit and worship with s’mores
- 9pm Glow in the dark dodge ball
- 10pm Open gym

**Sunday, February 25 (\*room check out by 10am)**

- 7am Get up and Go! (Walking, running, yoga)
- 8am Breakfast
- 10am Worship

*\*All events will take place in the Maranatha Retreat Center*

*\*Even if you are coming for just the day please register so that we can get you a meal ticket.*

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**e-news for February 2, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

As the weeks roll on we get closer to our time together at Black Rock Retreat Center on February 23-25. We finalized the itinerary and I am so pleased to be able to spend this time together away and to be able to worship together offsite at the center. I hope you take the time to join us as we gather to focus on praying together, reading Scripture together, understanding what acting according to the will of God looks like together, worshipping together, playing together, eating together. I have to say that this is the first time in my 30 years of ministry that I have taken the church off campus for an all-church retreat. Pray that the Holy Spirit would descend powerfully on us in a way that would leave us transformed.

There are certain things in our lives that can produce anxiety. Each of us has different trigger points which create a sense of loss of control which then can lead to anxiety. I have to be honest, this retreat has produced some anxiety in me. It is not because of the amazing group of people that we have who are helping pull this off. On the Steering Committee for PSA is: Marcia Andersen, Alice Eisenhooth, David Bronkema (ex-officio), Michael Wilson, Tricia Wilson, Alicia Eltman, Kristin Kondratowski and me. Besides the last name on the list, that is a strong committee and one that could only instill confidence in the product.

But we have never done this before and I don't know how it is going to turn out, and so that produced some anxiety in me. What a lesson this has been for me to trust not only that God is at work with these amazing people, but also to see how a church ought to work. When people gather together and each is a part of the body (I Corinthians 12:12-31), then that working together produces what we call the church. The church reflects God's perfect love only when it works in harmony. However this retreat goes, the process has been wonderful to behold and to see people at work together to make it happen. Come and join us and be a part of the movement of the Holy Spirit.

I also wanted to take a few lines to remember a person with whom I have spent the most time in this church. For ten years of my time here Karen Cooper was the church administrative assistant. For five days a week we were together for 8 hours a day, often for even longer than that. She was not only the institutional knowledge that I so desperately needed when I got here (she ended serving for close to 35 years as administrative assistant), but also someone with whom I could run ideas by and get her opinion on things. I knew that she knew the church and the people of the church. The thing was, I knew that she not only knew the church, she loved each and every one of you. That came out in our time together. I will miss Karen.

There are many within the church who will miss her, most of all her parents Clayton and Joyce Frackman. We pray for her husband Dan and their two boys. We lift up her sister Denise and her husband and the gaggle of nieces and nephews which make up her family. Her time and her impact on this church remains a fixture not just because of her longevity, but her continued activity with the Stitching Sisters who will miss her greatly as well.

This church is composed of great men and women who love Jesus and serve him over a long period of time. Think of your time in the church and who has come and gone just while you have been a member here. For some of you that has stretched over many, many decades. For others of you, you are just working on your first few years. Time will pass by quickly, don't forget to invest in people along the way. The retreat is one way to do that.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

### **HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH...**

**CHURCH WIDE RETREAT ÿ PSA ÿ February 23-25 at Black Rock Retreat** Spend the weekend as a congregation as we pray, read scripture, act and have fellowship! **Registration and payment is due by FEBRUARY 4<sup>th</sup>**. Please reference the information and registration form included in this bulletin for details. You may also register with the following link: [PSA Retreat Registration](#).

**WINGS & THINGS ÿ** Gather with the men of FPCS at Bespoke Brewing for wings, or another dish of your liking **every first Sunday of the month at 5pm**. Our next gathering will be **THIS SUNDAY @ 5pm**.

**WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY ÿ** Join us on Tuesday's for Bible Study at **9:00am or 7:00pm in Room 3/4**. All are welcome! The morning class will be using a new 7 session study called "Jesus & Women" by Kristi McLelland. The evening class will be using a new 8 week study called the "Sermon on the Mount" by Jen Wilken. For any questions please contact Lorraine Oliver, Stacy Bronkema, Linda Bredin, or Sandy Wenger.

**WEDNESDAY MORNING WALK/RUN GROUP ÿ** Wednesday mornings (weather permitting) we will meet at the Church parking lot at 5:25am and take off at 5:30am sharp. We will embark on 3, one mile loops through town, each loop ending at the church before starting the next. All are welcome! You can walk, run, or both. You can do 1, 2, or all 3 miles and then some! Questions, or to be added to the text message update group please contact Dillon Sickler at 484-467-1587.

**SOUPER BOWL SUNDAY • Sunday, February 11** - Our church will be participating in **The Souper Bowl of Caring** campaign. to help fight hunger and poverty in our communities. We hope that you will take part in this along with our children's ministry, who will be collecting canned goods and/or monetary donations at both doors to the sanctuary before and after both services on February 11<sup>th</sup>. All donations will go to our own food bank. Let's see if we can get everyone who is going to watch the Big Game to make a donation.

**\*Please consider donating some of our most requested items:**

- Canned meats (tuna, chicken, spam)                      -Hamburger Helpers or Tuna Helpers
- Canned tomato sauce    -Canned Fruit (peaches, pineapple, oranges, mixed

\*We currently have a surplus of green beans and corn so other vegetables are always welcomed. (canned peas, potatoes, carrots or mixed vegetables)

### **LENTEN SERVICES & LUNCHEONS**

**Lent is almost upon us!** Join us for weekly services here at First Presbyterian Church offered by the Strasburg Ministerium.

**Ash Wednesday, February 14, 2024**

**Error! Filename not specified.**6am with ashes

**Error! Filename not specified.**12pm -

Strasburg Mennonite Church      **Error! Filename not specified.**6pm with ashes

**12 pm Wednesday Lenten Service Schedule with lunch**

February 21	Wesley United Methodist Church	March 6	Acts Covenant Fellowship
February 28	High View Church of God, Lutheran	March 13	St. Michael's
		March 20	Waypoint

*\*All services will be held in the sanctuary here at First Presbyterian Church. The noon services will be followed by a luncheon. Join us*

**PSA • Black Rock Retreat • Itinerary**

**Friday, February 23**

4 – 6pm	Arrive and check in at Maranatha Retreat Center	
6pm	Dinner	
7pm	Worship and Getting to know one another	Michael Wilson
8pm	Sister Act	

**Saturday, February 24**

7am	Get up and Go! (Walking, running, yoga)	
8am	Breakfast	
9am	Worship and Getting to know one another	Michael Wilson
10am	Prayer	Carole Turano
11:15am	Getting to know one another	
12pm	Lunch	
1pm	Scripture	TBD
2:30pm	Action	David Bronkema
4pm	Laser Tag and Free Time	
5pm	Dinner	
6pm	Fire Pit and worship with s'mores	
9pm	Glow in the dark dodge ball	
10pm	Open gym	

**Sunday, February 25 (\*room check out by 10am)**

7am	Get up and Go! (Walking, running, yoga)	
8am	Breakfast	
9am	Sunday School	TBD

10am          Worship

*\*All events will take place in the Maranatha Retreat Center except for Sunday worship will take place in the Dogwood meeting room.*

*\*Even if you are coming for just the day please register so that we can get you a meal ticket.*

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**e-news for January 24, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

Last week had a very Russianesque feel to it. The frigid temperatures, the snow on the ground, it all took me back to our five years in a city where snow was on the ground from October through April. You just learned to live with it. Our snow will probably be gone by the end of this week, but last week was something that I feel we haven't experienced in quite some time. There is a part of me that misses the snow on the ground for days and the cold that reminds us that we are in winter. I have often highlighted the seasons of our individual lives and the seasons of the church as opportunities to see the grace and presence of God, but we are talking about weather here.

There are many weather events in Scripture which cause the people of God to act or react in certain ways. When Jesus stills the storm on the water it is done in such a way that it was reflected as a testimony to who Jesus was. Jesus was the one who was able to control the weather, the storms, the perilousness of our environment. Before we go straight to a metaphor to how Jesus can control the storms in our life, we should rest a bit in that reality that Jesus is the one who can control nature itself, including, but not limited to, the weather.

We see in the Old Testament the prophet Elijah who flees from the king and queen of Israel for he just defeated their prophets of Baal. He flees to a cave and there God puts before him a whole array of weather related events. From the violence and power of a wind (hurricane, tornado?) that was able to split the rocks of mountains, to the presence of an earthquake that shook the foundations of the ground, to a fire that probably came from a fantastic display of lightning. All of this God was able to bring to the presence of Elijah to teach him a lesson. We often focus on the lesson that God brought to Elijah but miss the power and the presence and the ability of God to control the weather.

When our faith goes straight to the metaphorical we miss the literalness of the presence of God in our lives. We could easily spiritualize our lives so that there is a clear demarcation between our lives of faith, which find themselves equipped with metaphors from Scripture, and our lives of daily routine and earthy realities that may find themselves ill suited to be matched with our life of faith. But our lives need to be consistently imbued with that which comes from God. When we see a beautiful day it is the presence of God which allows it to happen. The same goes for these next few rainy days that we have coming up. God is in the midst of all of it, not just where we are able to understand a deeper meaning behind it all. Even in the most superficial of it all, a rainy day, God is present with us in the midst of that day and in the midst of that weather as well.

Faith is not meant just for the champions of faith. It is meant for all of us. We don't have to understand the hidden meanings of Scripture to understand the ever-present reality of God in our

midst. We don't need a Master's degree to see God right in front of us, but we do need to believe that God reveals Himself to us on a daily basis, to all of us. I guess my encouragement is to seek out the presence of God in a way that may not be surprising, but pretty routine, and know that God is wanting to be in your routine, whatever it may be.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

### **HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...**

**Bible Study every Thursday!:** Join us tomorrow evening for Bible Study at 6pm here: [Youtube](#)

**Wednesday Morning Walk/Run group:** Wednesday mornings (weather permitting) meeting at the Church parking lot at 5:25am and taking off at 5:30am sharp. We will embark on 3, one mile loops through town each loop ending at the church before starting the next. All are welcome you can walk, run, or both. You can do 1, 2, or all 3 miles and then some. Questions or to be added to the text message update group please contact Dillon Sickler at 484-467-1587.

**Church wide Retreat PSA February 23-25 at Black Rock Retreat** Spend the weekend as a congregation as we pray, read scripture, act and have fellowship! **Registration and payment is due by February 4<sup>th</sup>.** Please reference the information and registration form included in this bulletin for details. You may also register with the following link: [PSA Retreat Registration](#).

**Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture:** Join us for a journey to the museum in DC **on February 15<sup>th</sup>.** We will be leaving from FPC on a charter bus at 7am and returning from DC leaving there at 3pm. There is no cost for the trip since it is sponsored by the Racial Justice Task Group of the Donegal Presbytery. If you are interested in going contact Pastor Bob.

**WINGS & THINGS** Gather with the men of FPCS at "The Tavern" Springhouse for wings, or another dish of your liking **every first Sunday of the month at 5pm.** Our next gathering will be **February 4<sup>th</sup> @ 5pm.**

**WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY** Please mark your calendars that we will be starting new Bible Studies on **Tuesday, January 23rd.** Classes will be held at **9:00am and 7:00pm** in **Room 3/4.** All are welcome! The morning class will be using a new 7 session study called "Jesus & Women" by Kristi McLelland. The evening class will be using a new 8 week study call the "Sermon on the Mount" by Jen Wilken. For any questions please contact Lorraine Oliver, Stacy Bronkema, Linda Bredin, or Sandy Wenger.

**Lent is coming!** Join us as we begin Lent on Ash Wednesday, February 14 here at First Presbyterian Church. We will have a traditional Ash Wednesday service with ashes at 6am and 6pm. See below for the schedule of ministerium lunches and services which also begins on Ash Wednesday.

**Lenten Lunches:** Every Wednesday at noon, beginning on February 14, each church in the ministerium will be providing worship and lunch here in our sanctuary at First Presbyterian Church. Join us on Wednesdays as we celebrate Lent together.

**Clothing drop-off:** We now have a clothing drop off here at the church. If you have clothes which you would like to donate please place them in the basket close to the water fountain in the hallway.

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**e-news for January 13, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

As I was preparing for my sermon this week it struck me how relevant the Scripture is for us as a family in this season. While the title of the sermon is “Hanging out with Sinners”, I really address how do we relate and interact with sinners who are in our midst. There isn’t an easy answer to this question. Some may think that the easy answer is “do not judge”. We should just over look sin and move on because, after all, we are all sinners. But this answer seems to squeeze out the real impact that sin has on people.

I found myself wondering what did the families of the Christians martyrs think when Paul came to know Jesus and was welcomed into the church as not only a member but a leader. This did not bring back their dead loved ones. “Do not judge” would not have been on their minds. We don’t see the details of these types of dynamics in the early church, but we know that they must have existed.

How did the husband and the children of the woman caught in adultery feel when Jesus saves her and lets her go? There was much to question and wonder if all of this was the best thing. For them the statement do not judge may not have been sufficient because her husband was now the laughing stock of the town and her kids could no longer play with their friends. Real sin has real repercussions.

When we live in a community that is called a church and sin manifests itself publicly our first instinct could be anger. This is especially true if we have been victims of sin committed against us. The statement do not judge simply doesn’t cut it because our lives have been impacted and changed forever, tragically, because of the sin against us. We have little room for sympathy for sinners who seem to be treated as heroes in our midst.

But even in this, and especially in this, Scripture speaks to us. When Jesus is over at Matthew’s house, a tax collector who was on the bottom of the dregs of society because of his sin, Jesus tells those who would hear that our operating mode of being has to be mercy. Mercy does not wink at sin, but it does love the individual. Mercy allows us to be angry at sin and protect our children from sinners, but also demands us to love people as Jesus loves us. I encourage you to read Matthew 9:9-13 with new eyes especially as it may relate to our church family.

I’m looking forward to worshipping with you tomorrow.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

**HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH...**



**CHURCH WIDE RETREAT PSA February 23-25 at Black Rock Retreat** Spend the weekend as a congregation as we pray, read scripture, act and have fellowship! **Registration and payment is due by February 4<sup>th</sup>**. Please reference the information and registration form included in this bulletin for details. You may also register with the following link: [PSA Retreat Registration](#)

**SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE:** Join us for a journey to the museum in DC **on February 15<sup>th</sup>**. We will be leaving from FPC on a charter bus at 7am and returning from DC leaving there at 3pm. There is no cost for the trip since it is sponsored by the Racial Justice Task Group of the Donegal Presbytery. If you are interested in going contact Pastor Bob.

**ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING** **Y Sunday, January 21<sup>st</sup>** the church will have our annual meeting to elect two Members-At-Large to serve on the 2024 Church Officer Nominating Committee and review and receive the FPCS 2023 Annual Report, as well as elect an additional Deacon as an officer.

**WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY** **Y** Please mark your calendars that we will be starting new Bible Studies on **Tuesday, January 23<sup>rd</sup>**. Classes will be held at **9:00am and 7:00pm in Room 3/4**. All are welcome! The morning class will be using a new 7 session study called "Jesus & Women" by Kristi McLelland. The evening class will be using a new 8 week study call the "Sermon on the Mount" by Jen Wilken. For any questions please contact Lorraine Oliver, Stacy Bronkema, Linda Bredin, or Sandy Wenger.

**GREAT BEGINNINGS PRESCHOOL REGISTRATION** for the 2024-2025 school year began on **January 2, 2024** for First Presbyterian church members and current preschool families. Contact Heather Reynolds, Administrative Director at [hreynolds@straspres.org](mailto:hreynolds@straspres.org) or 717-617-9501, or pick up an application at the church office or the preschool mailbox.

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**e-news for January 5, 2024**

Dear FPC family and friends,

As we look back at the past year someone could very easily call 2023 as the year of rebuilding. While the foundation is still in place, Jesus as our Lord and Savior, some of the pieces have moved and some of the work looks different from what it did in years past. We have introduced this past year the emphasis on Prayer, Scripture and Action and it has seemed to dominate a lot of what we have done. We have spent time focusing on our prayer life and on our reading of Scripture and on our righteousness, which is defined as acting according to the will of God.

But I am someone who likes to look at things more concretely. How are we doing compared to the previous years? When I ask that question normally the answer comes back to me in the form of numbers. The numbers on attendance or giving or in our programs normally is the tool that we use to measure how we are doing. With our emphasis on PSA there really isn't a number schematic that we can look at and respond: This is how we are doing.

But let's look at the numbers and see how they add up to previous years. Once Covid hit in 2020 I had mentioned to Session back then that it would probably take us until the end of 2024 to fully recover in regards to our attendance and our giving. That seems to be playing itself out, but maybe I was a bit optimistic. We were up in attendance about 15% from last year, but we are still well below our levels from 2019. This year we averaged 175 in combined services and in 2019 we averaged 221 combined. That means we are still 26% below in attendance than where we were in 2019, but again up about half that in respect from last year. I think it will be difficult to make up that difference this year completely.

Our giving in respect to last year tells a different story. While we don't have the final figures just yet, it does seem like our offerings are down from where they were last year. Now, this doesn't reflect the income we received from ERC nor does it reflect the inheritances that we received over this past year either. Overall our bottom line is in much better shape than it has ever been, I mean ever. We have been able to remodel a significant part of our campus and also make other capital improvements all as a result of your generosity outside of your regular giving. But the downward trend in regular giving is somewhat concerning. If you have adjusted your giving to below 10% this would be a good time to remedy that going forward.

Programmatically our attendance at youth group, Sunday School, Bible Studies, and other activities has been increasing and has some very promising signs. But how do we measure how our faith is growing? How do we measure the extent to which we have grown in our faith over this past year? While we do have a tool with PSA that will be used to measure how we have done compared to last year in Prayer and Scripture and Action, this is a question that is not as easily answered as these concrete numbers that we see before us.

So how did 2023 go? I would say that it went as scheduled. We are recovering from nearly two years of doing things so very differently. Those two years left your leaders somewhat sore from having to do things that we simply weren't used to doing. You know when you do something that you aren't used to doing and your muscles get sore? Something like that, but in this case leadership can feel somewhat bruised after an extended period of time of trying to make decisions for things that no one has ever faced before. Please keep your elders in your prayers as we look forward to the year ahead of us.

My prayer for all of us in 2024 is that we would be able to work our spiritual muscles in such a way that the soreness will fade and will be replaced with a strength that is unmatched in our commitment to God and to our neighbor.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

### **HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...**

**Undecorating Day:** This evening at 6pm, in just a few hours, we will all gather to undecorate the church. You are all welcome to come and help us tear down after Christmas and Advent. Pizza will be provided if you are so inclined.

**No Bible Study next week:** We will pick up our Bible Studies on Thursday, January 18 at 6pm. You can join us here: [Youtube](#)

**CHURCH WIDE RETREAT PSA February 23-25 at Black Rock Retreat** Spend the weekend as a congregation as we pray, read scripture, act and have fellowship! **Registration and payment is due by February 4<sup>th</sup>**. Please reference the information and registration form included in this bulletin for details. You may also register with the following link: [PSA Retreat Registration](#).

**BEING IN THE PRESENCE** Join us on **Saturday, January 13<sup>th</sup> @ 10am**, as we gather to pray together as a congregation in Room 3/4. Carole Turano will lead us in a time of guided prayer as we continue our pursuit of Christ as faithful disciples.

**SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE:** Join us for a journey to the museum in DC **on February 15<sup>th</sup>**. We will be leaving from FPC on a charter bus at 7am and returning from DC leaving there at 3pm. There is no cost for the trip since it is sponsored by the Racial Justice Task Group of the Donegal Presbytery. If you are interested in going contact Pastor Bob.

**POINSETTIAS** ÿ Feel free to pick up your poinsettias and take them home or give them to someone who may enjoy them! We will have to throw them away if people don't take them, so take them!

**WINGS & THINGS** ÿ Gather with the men of FPCS at "The Tavern" Springhouse for wings, or another dish of your liking **every first Sunday of the month at 5pm**. Our next gathering will be **Sunday @ 6pm**.

**ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING Sunday, January 21<sup>st</sup>** the church will have our annual meeting to elect two Members-At-Large to serve on the 2024 Church Officer Nominating Committee and review and receive the FPCS 2023 Annual Report and elect another deacon to the board of deacons.

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