

e-news for December 29, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

We are on the cusp of a new year. Each one of us looks at the new year and has different emotions than our neighbor may have. For some of us you can't wait for 2023 to be over. It may have seemed like one tragedy has struck after another and surely God would never allow another year like the last to come. For some of us it has been a great year. We have experienced a new birth in our family, we are at a new job which we love, we have graduated and are moving out of the house. For some of us it was just kind of a year like any other year: nothing special and nothing really earth shattering.

Scripture gives us a promise that we will be able to experience something new when we are in constant fellowship with Jesus. This is such an important promise that we would forget it at our own emotional peril. I would love to share with you those Scriptures that promise something new. Regardless of where you find yourself emotionally this past year, the newness that Christ promises will be far better than what we have experienced thus far in any year of our lives. I hope you enjoy these verses and I do hope that you have a Happy New Year.

Isaiah 43:18-19 – “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”

II Corinthians 5:17 – “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!”

Psalm 40:3 – “He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord.”

Isaiah 62:2-3 – “You shall be called a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.”

Isaiah 65:17 – “For I am about to create a new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating.”

Ephesians 4:22-24 – “You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Psalm 98:1 – “O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.”

Matthew 26:27-28 – “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins.”

Revelation 21:1 – “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more.”

Lamentations 3:22-23 – “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

e-news for December 15, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

I can think of no other season of the year that carries so many conflicting feelings. Christmas is generally a joyous time of year where we hear the peal of children laughing, we see the smiles of satisfaction, we experience the joy of the beauty of the lights and the greenery. The general consensus is that this is the most wonderful time of the year. I love this time of year and it carries with it a sense of anticipation, for me personally, to be together with my girls. Especially now that they are scattered to the 12 continents, it is something for which I look forward. (I know there are only 7, but it feels like 12 sometimes)

But Christmas is especially difficult for those who are experiencing loss and won't be able to be with a loved one because they have been resurrected with Jesus. For some this is the first year in their life that they are not with the loved one who was, in many ways, the center of their life. When the rest of the world is celebrating, how does one fit in and go along when the grief is too hard to bear? Jesus speaks about why his disciples didn't fast and didn't follow many of the laws that other religious folks did and Jesus says simply in Mark 2:19: "As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast."

This juxtaposition between celebrating and mourning is carried out within the life of the church throughout the year, both in individuals and collectively. While we celebrate Advent and get geared up for this most wonderful time of the year, we have more people in the hospital and recovering from surgery than I can remember ever having. We have brothers and sisters who are trying to decide between hospice and home care. We have families who have recently placed loved ones in assisted living because it is not possible for them to care for them on their own. We have families who are struggling to understand the changes in their youth and wondering what comes next. We have a whole litany of struggles and difficulties that we are facing in this most wonderful time of the year.

Church is not a place to avoid these struggles. Church is a place where God allows us to face them and then be equipped to handle them in a way that is healthy and God blessed. Ultimately, our fellowship provides us with a chance to understand how to live life that is complete in God while not avoiding or ignoring the real pain and the real joy that surrounds us. A relationship with Jesus doesn't take away our minds or our problems, but it does take away our sins which allows us to live for Him in a way that is complete. Without Jesus life is incomplete and pains and sufferings are deeper and extract a far larger toll.

I would never want to dampen the Christmas Spirit which is strong and powerful in this church and is a vital part of what we do together. But I would also want to not move forward like a train that has no ability to stop and contemplate and realize that not everyone is grateful for the lights and the trees and the laughter. That should not prevent us from laughing, but it should sow some empathy within us so that, if nothing else, we notice those who just aren't able this time of the year.

May the joy of this Christmas be far more to you than the trappings that surround you.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

NEXT WEEK ~ CHRISTMAS EVE ~ DECEMBER 24, 2023

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Traditional and Contemporary Services Ÿ 8:30am & 11am

Children's Christmas Pageant Ÿ 4:30pm

Candlelight Worship Services Ÿ 8pm & 11pm

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 4th. Please reference the information and registration form included in this bulletin for details. You may also register with the following link: [PSA Retreat Registration](#).

ADVENT CONCERT: CHRIS KEENEY, GUITARIST Ÿ Join us on **Sunday, December 17 at 7pm** for an evening of music and fellowship as we celebrate together this Advent Season.

SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE: Join us for a journey to the museum in DC **on February 15th**. 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.

Santa's Helpers: Thank you to all who participated in the program. The tags really flew off the tree. Please be sure that your unwrapped gift is placed under the tree in the church by this Sunday, December 17.

UNDECORATING THE CHURCH Ÿ **Friday, January 5th**, we will be un-decorating the church together to bring down the Advent and Christmas decorations. Come join in the fun at 6pm and grab some pizza while you're here!

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, January 7th @ 5pm**.

e-news for December 6, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

This past Sunday we took part in a process that in many ways provides the definition of who we are as Presbyterians. First and foremost, we are lovers of Jesus Christ and all that we do is for

the sake of following him more closely and bringing people to a saving knowledge of him. That is our purpose. But we do it in a unique way. We bring order and structure and purpose in how we obey God and how we encourage people to begin a relationship with him. That order and structure manifests itself in what we call “church officers”. This past Sunday we had a congregational meeting where we elected church officers to serve you, the people of the church, to ensure that this church remains a place where people can know, grow and go in their relationship with the Savior.

Within our church we have three bodies of officers. There are no higher or lower offices, but rather distinct callings for each office. We have a leadership team that is called the Session and it is composed of 12 elders. We are so pleased to welcome into leadership starting in February the following elders: Maggie Nadu, Steve Hess, Carolyn Groff, Linda Lawrence and for a one year term Linda Younger. The term elder in Greek is presbuteros which is where we get our name as a denomination. Look at Titus 1:5 and you’ll see the term used there. The elders, who compose the session, make every decision on behalf of the congregation except for the election of officers and the pastor, and the buying and selling of property. They are the clear overseers of all things that happen in the life of the church.

The session, composed of our 12 elders, oversees the pastoral care of the congregation and have entrusted the deacons, another board of officers, to that task. The deacons are under the direction of the session and carry out their work in the care for the sick, the shut in, those in need, and many other pastoral responsibilities that are a part of the life of a Presbyterian Church. You can see the origin of the role of deacon in Acts 6:1-6 where they were entrusted in making sure that the widows of the church were given all the attention, and food, that they needed. The Greek origin of the term for deacon is servant. Remember when Jesus told his disciples that in order to carry out his purposes they needed to be servants to all? Coming on to be deacons are: Margie Beers, Deb Welk, Barb Groff, Pam Johnson, Linda and Ed Bredin, and Tessa Kondratowski as a junior deacon.

The session also oversees the care and the running of our physical plant. The last set of officers are the Trustees whom the Session has asked to be responsible over the grounds of the church in order to ensure that they are fit to carry out the mission and the ministry of the church. The buildings and the physical plant are not there for its own sake, they are there so that the ministry of the church, which is dictated by session, can be carried out. This is a crucial distinction. It is very tempting for congregations to see the church building and all of its facilities as something that needs to be kept and protected for its own sake. As ministries create wear and tear it is tempting to want to curtail activities or ministries that might have the most impact on the health of the physical plant.

Historically it has been seen that there is a natural rub between ministry and maintenance, but we should always err on the side of ensuring that our ministries have all that they need, which may seem at times to be at the expense of the physical plant. Coming on as Trustees are: Steve and Donna Szczesniak, Dillon Sickler and Jerry Paparo.

Church officers are vital to the life of the church. They provide order, vitality, creativity, growth, enthusiasm, and structure. When you see the incoming officers make sure you thank them.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

Bible Study Thursday evening: Every Thursday evening we have Bible Study at 6pm. Feel free to join us here: [Youtube](#)

Church wide retreat: Start making plans now to join us on the church-wide retreat on February 23-25. You can register here: [Register for retreat](#)

Being in the Presence: Join us on **Saturday, December 9** at as we gather to pray together as a congregation in Fellowship Hall. Carole Turano will lead us in a time of guided prayer as we continue our pursuit of Christ as faithful disciples.

Advent Family Night: This Wednesday evening, tonight, at 6pm come and join us for an Advent night where children and adults can be together to celebrate this season as we prepare for the coming of the newborn king Jesus.

Advent Concert: We are so pleased to have Kris Keeney, a very accomplished guitarist, celebrate Advent with us in concert. Join us on **Sunday, December 17th at 7pm** for an evening of music and fellowship as we celebrate together this Advent Season.

Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture: Join us for a journey to the museum in DC on February 15th. 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.

e-news for December 1, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

Well, it happened again on Wednesday evening. We had our yearly decorating the church event, but it was very different this year. Since we have a brand new space we decided to decorate the church in some brand new ways. You'll see it when you come on Sunday. This year heading up the decorating crew were Whitney Sickler and Maggie Nadu. It was great to have over a couple of dozen folks show up, eat pizza, climb ladders without falling this year, laugh and enjoy each other's company as if we were continuing on with our Thanksgiving family gatherings. It was simply a great time. Thank you for everyone showing up in force.

Scripture is filled with examples of celebrations and times in which we are called to go to the house of the Lord. Look at Psalm 150. The entire Psalm is about celebrating. Look at Psalm 122 which tells us that the author was glad when people said to him: "Let us go to the house of the Lord." There is a certain gladness which fills the heart when you are able to take care of the church building in a way that makes it look pretty and ready for people to come and worship. It is not a superficial thing, it is something that makes us realize how much the people and the location matter to us.

We know, of course, that God does not inhabit the church. We know that God is never localized in a single place, ever. But after recently celebrating 191 years, dedicating a new space, and taking a new direction in decorating, it strikes me that God has been very good to our church, both building and people. This does not take away from the fact that even in the midst of the celebration and the expectation that we call Advent, that there is a real world out there that is tragic, sinful, and heartbreaking. No decoration can take away the reality of the world in which we live. But celebrating and grieving together allows us to journey together on this path that we call discipleship.

There is something different about coming to church and being with other people that really defines and shapes our faith. The positive of virtual worship is that when you are sick or traveling you can tune in to worship at your home church. There are many more negatives than positives with virtual worship. If you are traveling why not visit a local Presbyterian Church and bring greetings from FPC Strasburg? It is also time to come back and worship with the church family so that your faith can be strengthened on this journey. Especially now as we are emphasizing Prayer, Scripture and Action, it is important to live that out in person. It isn't about the building, it is about being with people in fellowship and faith strengthening.

On Saturday the 9th at 10am we will gather again for our time of Being in the Presence as we pray together as a congregation. We have the church-wide retreat coming up on February 23-25. Can I say again that we would love to have the whole congregation present for the retreat? Talk about a celebration where we do church in a way that leaves a lasting impact. That would be the place and the time to experience that.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

Being in the Presence on December 9 at 10am: Join us on Saturday, December 9 at 10am as we pray together as a congregation. It is a time of renewal and asking for the presence of God in our lives individually and as a church body.

Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture: Join us for a journey to the museum in DC on February 15th. 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.

Santa's Helpers: This year we continue the tradition of buying presents for families in need within the LS school district. You will be able to take a tag this Sunday and the 10th to buy a present for a family in need.

Congregational Meeting: This Sunday we will have a congregational meeting after the 11am service. We will be electing officers, voting on the salary of your pastor, and receiving the budget approved by session.

Advent concert: Chris Keeney, guitarist: Join us on Sunday, December 17th at 7pm for an evening of music and fellowship as we celebrate together this Advent Season.

Family Advent Night - Join us during Clubhouse time! ALL of you, young and not so young, are invited to come out and join the fun on December 6th from 6 – 7:30pm! Christmas stories, songs, and crafts along with cookies and hot chocolate will be on hand for you to enjoy. Hope to see you there!

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! Please reference the information and registration form included in this bulletin for details. Registration and payment is due by January 7th.

e-news for November 17, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

I wish you could have all heard the words of praise that those gathered for the Presbytery meeting gave to little old FPC Strasburg. On Tuesday 48 churches from Lancaster, Chester, and York counties gathered into our church to worship, to hear a presentation from the Donegal Racial Task Group, and to do business. In the business docket we welcomed Walter Kondratowski as an inquirer in our Presbytery and thanked Fran Carr for spearheading the Presbytery Liaison program. It was a very full day, but it was one where the planning, the dedication, the love, and the closeness of our family was on full display. I wanted this enews to be a big Thank You to all of you as you really did everything possible to put our best foot forward to welcome the Presbytery and to ensure that the meeting went off without a hitch.

As I think about the people who were involved: media, kitchen, parking, logistics, cleaning, cooking, eating (wait, that doesn't count), sound, worship, etc. etc. I come up with about 50 of us that were involved in one way or another. Preschool was also involved as we revised the pick up and drop off. It was a whirlwind of activity, and I loved it. The Presbytery loved it, and after it was over, I hope you loved it as well.

The frenetic activity of the life of the church often produces a joy that cannot be matched elsewhere. But this is only true if we realize that the reason why we are doing all of this is not so that First Presbyterian might be seen and known, but rather so that Jesus Christ might be seen and known through us. I think this is one of the reasons why I so enjoy being your pastor. It is obvious that you love Jesus and you want to do things not for any other ulterior motive other than your love for Christ. Jesus is what drives us to do what we do.

I think of the scene in Scripture where the woman pours perfume on Jesus' feet and the disciples grumble because that money could have been used for other reasons. Jesus reminds them that the reason they are disciples is to worship him and to celebrate his presence in their midst. We are like those pouring perfume on Jesus' feet and we do it in a way that reflects Jesus as our only agenda.

Let me also remind you that we have had a very, very busy week. On Sunday we had our 191st birthday. This church has survived a lot. It has survived a civil war, it has survived the Spanish flu and Covid, it has survived the cultural upheavals of the 60's and 70's. The reason it has been able to survive, and now thrive, is because, that's right, you guessed it, because our focus is on Jesus and on Jesus alone.

So much is happening in the world around us these days. So much is happening within our own community these days that it is easy to get fixated and caught up in one or all of the issues and world events that are taking place. When that becomes our focus, when that becomes our common goal then once that event or that issue disappears then our unity and our goal disappears. If, instead, our one common goal and the source of our unity is Jesus Christ and becoming better followers of Jesus and not just good church members, then that is something that can last a lifetime. As Gamaliel said about the Christian church: If this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail, but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them, in that case you may even be found fighting against God.

Thank you for being a church that loves Jesus and works so that He would be proclaimed.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH...

MINISTERIUM THANKSGIVING SERVICE at 4pm TODAY: Join Christians from Strasburg at St. Michael's Lutheran Church as we celebrate Thanksgiving together as a community and give thanks to God for God's provision. This is sponsored by the seven churches of Strasburg in the Ministerium.

CHURCH WIDE RETREAT PSA on February 23-25 at Black Rock Retreat Spend the weekend as a congregation as we pray, read scripture, act and have fellowship! Save the date and stay tuned for more details.

The Session has called for a **CONGREGATIONAL MEETING at 12:15pm on Sunday, December 3rd**. The purpose of this meeting is to review and act on the proposed 2024 Pastoral Terms of Call, elect New Officers for the terms starting in 2024, and to review and receive the 2024 Ministry Budget.

CHURCH DECORATING DAY - Wednesday, November 29th at 6pm, we will be decking the halls and preparing the church for Advent and Christmas. Come join in the fun and help us to decorate!

SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE: Join us for a journey to the museum in DC on February 15th. 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.

e-news for November 2, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

Well, the general has died. I'm guessing that most of you do not know who that might be, but for those of us who played basketball their whole life, even at the collegiate level, he was someone most of us admired and respected. Bobby Knight, the controversial figure in college basketball, passed away yesterday and he somehow has made it into my enews. Basketball was always a part of our life growing up. My dad played professionally in Europe, we all played in high school and most of us in college. Each of us had a coach who was a lot like Bobby Knight, demanding, crass, even violent at times, but, and I can only speak for myself, I loved him and admired him and he was definitely a mentor to me. When my coach passed away I grieved. I never knew Bobby Knight, never met him, but that sense of grieving is real.

The impact that mentors have on our lives is not something that can be measured. This is not just true in sports where you spend years together in very highly intense and emotionally laden moments together. I assume it is true in the military with an officer whom you may not enjoy, but you respect and they mean something to you. I assume it is true for some at work who might not have the best boss, but somehow they continue to view them as a mentor and there is a fondness in our hearts for them that never dissipates.

When we read about the relationship of Jesus and his disciples I see a bit of a Bobby Knightish approach. Jesus does not hesitate to criticize his disciples, even, and at times especially, in front of other people. He calls them people of little faith. He tells Peter that he is Satan. Jesus is very demanding of his disciples, and yet we often don't highlight that aspect of his demeanor. We tend to focus on the love that he shows which is less demanding and much more mainstream. We like to forget that he told them that they will have no place to lay their heads.

I think we all, whether we like it or not, need someone in our lives who won't back down from us and requires certain things from us that we would never require of ourselves. We all are motivated in different ways, and yet we all need to see the potential in ourselves that we may not see unless someone unleashes that insight for us. Sometimes, however, the line is crossed and abuse takes place, there is absolutely no justification for that. A person loses any and all claims to mentorship or even leadership when abuse takes place. Abuse disqualifies a person from any platform in another person's life that they may be trying to possess.

The church is a strange animal. It is composed of volunteers who are working together for a common goal. Here at First Presbyterian the common goal is that people will come to know Jesus and as a result will love God and love their neighbor. Just as a person can volunteer to come alongside and be excited for this common goal, so they have every right to step out and unvolunteer. You can't treat church like a basketball team, or like a workplace, or like a military unit. If you are too demanding people will simply check out and say no thank you.

I feel strongly that we are called as disciples to not compromise, to be pushed to the limits in how we follow Jesus, but how that translates to this community and to the FPC church family as a whole is up to each one of us individually.

Who is the Bobby Knight in your life for your faith? Who has pushed you to ask the questions maybe you were afraid to ask, or who challenged you in a way that you were never challenged? It is

important to know Jesus in a way that transforms your life, and doesn't just give you more information about God. Know Jesus in a way that moves you powerfully.

Your servant in Christ

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

NO IN THE PRESENCE THIS SATURDAY

Bible Study this evening at 6: Join us this evening at 6pm for Bible Study here - [Youtube](#).

Church Birthday Celebration: On Sunday November 12 the church will celebrate its 191st birthday. There will be a brunch in Fellowship Hall between services and we will be dedication our newly renovated space.

Wings and Things: This Sunday evening at 5pm the men of the church gather at the Spring House for fellowship. Come and join us!

Churchwide Retreat: Mark your calendar for February 23-25 as we go on a retreat with all of us together. We will be there from dinner on Friday to worship on Sunday.

Presbytery Meeting on November 14: If you wanted to see the inner workings of the Presbyterian Church join us for the meeting of the Donegal Presbytery on November 14 here at FPC from 9:30-3.

Trip to the Smithsonian African American History and Culture Museum: Join us for a journey to the museum in DC on February 15. We will be leaving on a charter bus at 7am and returning from DC leaving there at 3pm. There is not 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.

e-news for October 27, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

I ran across an article from Christianity Today where they have come out with their results of what the post-Covid church looks like in the United States. It was all very familiar since we lived through it. If nothing else it emphasized the struggles and the triumphs that we faced as a congregation during that time. Here is a link to the article: [post-covid study](#) I really encourage you to check it out, it might ring familiar to you. We continue along on our journey of PSA: Prayer, Scripture, and Action, which has come about as a result of a Lilly grant that we received meant to rekindle congregations post-Covid.

I do want to highlight something that is coming up in February so that you can all put it on your calendars. We have scheduled a congregation-wide retreat for February 23-25. When I say congregation-wide, I mean congregation-wide. We want every single one of you to come and participate in this retreat. We would love for the entire church to be at Black Rock Retreat center from a Friday through a Sunday. The retreat begins with dinner on Friday evening and ends with

worship on Sunday morning there at Black Rock. This is for everyone, singles, couples, families with little kids and families with big kids. Please mark your calendar and plan on attending.

The beauty of Black Rock is that if you have difficulty getting around everything is pretty much in one building and that building has elevators. There isn't a whole lot of walking around and there are great opportunities for study and growth. We will be offering activities and events that are focused on Prayer, Scripture and Action as well as have plenty of opportunity for fellowship and fun. We have not done this in the last 13 years, gone away as a congregation to strengthen and build up our bonds as a church family, so it is about time that we do it.

There is something unique about being off campus and in a setting where you are able to experience God outside of your ordinary. Mission trips provide a perspective you simply would not have if you were here in Lancaster County. The change in venue provides a heightened sense of ministry and awareness of the presence of God that simply is not present in our normal, everyday lives. But this doesn't take away from the abundance of opportunity to do ministry right here in our neighborhood. We continue to have strong representation at Water Street. We continue to have strong representation at our Food Bank and our CIC committee.

Even while wars rage in the world around us, needs locally and domestically do not cease to exist. We never have to set up a false dichotomy that if we are wanting to help out locally we have to stop thinking about helping beyond our community. Often people approach it as a scarcity of resources problem when in reality we can do both. This church has done both historically and in the present. While our gaze might for a season rest on the tragedies of the wars in Israel and Ukraine, we do not lose sight of the needs of our own youth who might be spending some time in the Lancaster Intervention Center or of our member families who are having a hard time making ends meet.

The needs of the youth do not take precedent over the needs of the family nor do the family's needs tie our hands so we can't send relief overseas. This is part of what Jesus meant when he responded to the indignation of the perfume being poured over his head in Mark 14 as being a waste of funds: "For you always have the poor with you." The implication is that don't pick and choose when you are going to help those who are in need, it has to be part of our life day in and day out.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

Service of Healing and Wholeness: Join us at 2pm in the sanctuary as we gather to pray for specific physical healing. If you are in need of physical healing and would like to have the elders and the pastor pray over you as we follow the words of James 5:14.

Trunk or Treat: We need more cars! Join us in the parking lot at 4:30 with candy and some decorations and you are in as a helper to the community. We will be reaching out to the children of this community from 5-6:30.

Celebrate the Church birthday with us on Sunday, November 12: From 9:30-10:30 we will be celebrating the church's birthday with a brunch given in honor of all of our 50 year

members. Come and join us as we eat together and reminisce about the church and its people and its ministries. During this time we will also be dedicating the space that was recently renovated. Come and join us!

FPC is hosting Donegal Presbytery on November 14: We will be hosting the Donegal Presbytery meeting on Tuesday, November 14. If you are at all interested in the inner workings and machinations of the Presbytery feel free to stop by and witness what 49 churches gathered together are able to do. The meeting begins at 9:30 and last until about 3.

Ministerium Thanksgiving Service: Join Christians from Strasburg on Sunday, November 21 at 4pm at St. Michael's Lutheran Church as we celebrate thanksgiving together as a community. This is sponsored by the seven churches of Strasburg in the Ministerium.

Links to the survey results: We recently had a survey done for our Prayer, Scripture and Action emphasis. You can find the results here: <https://www.straspres.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/PSA-Results-in-Charts-September-Final.pdf>

Reminder about new construction: We are so pleased with how things have come about with our new construction. I wanted to send out a few reminders now as we begin with our new normal. Some of the light switches have changed location and it might be a bit more challenging to find them when you leave the building. We encourage everyone who is on the campus to turn off the lights when they leave and are finished with the space and close the door behind you to conserve energy and protect the building in the case of fire. Enjoy the new spaces!

e-news for October 16, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

It has rained every day since we have been here. It is what you come to expect from the Pacific Northwest. If you expect that things are going to be a certain way, then you don't really complain, you just live your life in a way that adapts to what can be universally perceived as a negative. We read this morning about the Israelites in Moses' day who complained because they had no meat and actually said it would have been better to be slaves back in Egypt than to go through life without this seemingly necessary dietary offering. They weren't expecting to go meatless in their journey to the promised land and it wasn't something to which they were willing to adapt

At what point are you willing to take what is clearly an offense or a way of life that anyone looking in from the outside could categorically classify as a hardship or as a way of life that they would never sign up to live? And then at what point once that line is crossed and you are not willing to take it do you react to remedy the reality which you are facing? Then, and this is the most difficult part, what does your remedy entail and can that remedy ever involve violence and bloodshed? From my biblical perspective violence is never an option if we are truly looking to follow Jesus in all of His ways. I know, this is a debatable point and many of you may not only disagree but actually feel angry that I may say such a thing.

We have all been horrified by what is happening in Israel these days. The tragedies and horrors seen at the hands of Hamas reflect the tragedies and the horrors experienced by Palestinians in that region for years. Whenever we go to Israel we spend the majority of our time with Zionist Israelis who show us the lands where Jesus walked. They present us a perspective that closely matches a perspective of thought that sees Israel as having the right to do as it pleases with that land and the people in that land.

But we also spend some time with Palestinian Christians who have been in that land since before Jesus walked on the earth. The difficulty in claiming that land for one group or another, especially when it is based on a religious perspective, is that there are others who claim it for their own reasons, religious or otherwise. Palestinian Christians are not only our brothers and our sisters just as Israeli Jews are, but religiously they come directly from the family of Jesus. They tend to be forgotten behind the walls built around them and locked out of the good jobs because they are assumed to be something that they are not.

In our own civil rights battles the most progress has been made when non-violence was used as a tool to bring people to the bargaining table. When we look at Palestine and Israel it is impossible to see progress because violence has been the tool used over the past millennia. The Bible tells us to overcome evil with good. The Bible tells us that vengeance is mine says the Lord. Our Savior won the victory through grace and truth. Trust me when I say that I know how naïve that sounds, but how have things been done up to now? Through a prism of violence we have tragically seen families torn apart on both sides is the result up to now.

I have good friends from high school and college who live in Israel and see things differently than I do, and their pain and anguish is real. We cannot minimize the atrocities that have been committed and we must recognize that this is real life, this is truly happening. But we cannot distance ourselves from our commitment to be disciples of Jesus Christ which means that we act and believe and think in a certain way which reflects our Savior's actions, and beliefs, and teachings. There is nothing that can happen in this world which would cause us to put that on hold. Pray for Israel, for all the people there.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

e-news for October 6, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

It's all in the details. We are so close to being finished with the construction. Our construction began with the big demolition and then over time it moved to the smallest of the details. We are in that final phase where we no longer have a dumpster, but we are trying to figure out how to connect a phone to the new welcome area. You would think that is something very simple, while the demolition of an office seems to be complicated. But the opposite is true. It isn't hard to tear something down, but once you get to the final days, the details of making everything work and making everything look nice and presentable, well, that's not easy.

This week's Scripture for Sunday addresses what it looks like being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Believing in Jesus is not the most difficult part of being a disciple. We see that where James says in 2:19 that it is good of you to believe in God. That is a great first step. But you can't just leave it at that. Even the demons believe and shudder. The work that it takes to be a disciple, to follow Jesus, is at a different level than just believing.

We are currently on a journey where we are catching a glimpse of the work that it takes to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. It takes work to read the Bible. I have you on a path where you are reading probably over 30 minutes a day in Scripture. That sounds like a lot and for some of you it seems interminable. But it is something that a disciple does. It is part of the details that produces an end result where the disciple understands better what it means to walk with Jesus. Reading the Bible is not an end to itself, having a closer walk with Jesus is.

It takes work to consistently be in prayer. As a congregational family we are meeting regularly to pray together. This Saturday at 10am in Fellowship Hall won't you join us for a time of Being in the Presence? The details of being a disciple have to include prayer. Without prayer we don't have a relationship that matters with Jesus. There is no nice way to say that. As we are in the presence communally this Saturday I hope and pray that it motivates you to be in the presence individually on your own time with Jesus. Being in prayer isn't an end to itself, having a closer walk with Jesus is.

It takes work to purposefully reach out in action in a Matthew 25 way. As a congregation we have so many programs that this church sponsors. They aren't all with children, but many are. If you have ever been a part of any church you know that they all have one thing in common: the need for volunteers in their children's program. Currently we really need help in our Sunday School, in our nursery, at Clubhouse. But we also have opportunities for service at our Food Bank, and with our CIC committee which is reaching out in concern. Terry Sweigart continues to lead our efforts at Water Street and more volunteers can be used there as well. Acting in concern and love for others isn't an end to itself, having a closer walk with Jesus is.

It is all in the details. If you are not Praying, reading Scripture, or Acting in love for your neighbor, then you may have done the heavy lifting of believing, but the details that draw you closer to Him are still missing. Look for ways to pay attention to the details.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

Being in the presence this Saturday, October 7 at 10am: Join us as we gather to pray together as a congregation in Fellowship Hall. Carole Turano will lead us in a time of guided prayer as we continue our pursuit of Christ as faithful disciples.

No Thursday Bible Study for the next two weeks: There will be no Bible Studies on October 12 or October 19. We will pick up again on October 26 here: [Youtube](#)

Harvest Home Sunday, October 29: Please refer to the list in the ad in this bulletin as a guide for purchasing and delivering food. The PW committee appreciates your donations. Thank you!

Women's Tuesday Bible Study: Join us at **9am** or **7pm**. This fall we will be working on a newly released study entitled "*When You Pray*." This 7-week session looks at 6 prayers in the Bible presented by some authors/speakers we know and – for us – some new ones. Both classes will be held in rooms 3-4. All are welcome. For any questions, please contact Lorraine Oliver, Stacy Bronkema, Linda Bredin, or Sandy Wenger.

Deacons' Friendship Tea on October 23 at 1pm: Everyone is welcome and wanted for the annual Deacon Tea! This year's theme is Chocolate and Friendship (with a side of Prayer, Scripture, and Action). Come for the BINGO, sandwiches, scones, tea, coffee, or chocolate...just COME! Laughter starts at **1pm in Fellowship Hall**. Sign up in Fellowship Hall. ALL are WELCOME!

Trunk or Treat on October 29: Sign up at the welcome desk and have your car parked and decorated with a suitable theme by 4:30pm. Children should arrive in a costume between 5-6:30pm. Anyone who would like to donate candy and snack items should sign-up at the welcome desk. For more information contact Beth Feiler at bfeiler@straspres.org or 717-572-9683.

e-news for September 28, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends

Airports and airplanes are a little bit my happy place. Alice Eisenhooth and I are traveling back from Decatur, Georgia after spending some time at Columbia Theological Seminary. While we were at this Presbyterian seminary we got to spend time with the other 9 churches that received the Rekindle grant which we received as we kicked off Prayer, Scripture, and Action. We both learned a lot and we are looking forward to sharing some of this experience with you as we participate together in this focused project to bring us closer to Christ.

We spent some time talking about what a thriving congregation looks like. The definition of thriving that we came up with for the conference was when everyone in the church is moving in the same direction. That doesn't mean that we all think the same or believe the same individual things, but it does mean that we are all moving in concert for the same goal. So what is the goal? We came up with that as well. The why of this project is this: To bring people closer to Christ. This is our why, this is why we do what we do as a church. Every single program, every single worship, every single preschool class, every single...you fill in the blank, is for the primary purpose of bringing people closer to Christ.

When you read Scripture my prayer is that your walk with Christ will be enriched. When you read Scripture my prayer is that you find the living Lord among the pages and then you can apply it to your life. When we are involved in action, whether it be with a group of men to West Virginia, more on that later, or the myriad of social ministries that Alicia and others have founded and continue to foster, I hope that you see Christ in the midst of the work.

I saw the presence of Christ clearly in the work of Ryan Fulmer, Todd Allison, Steve Giberson, and Steve Hess. I was privileged to travel to West Virginia with them and my brother David and I were able to serve them lunches and clean out trash on the work site and drive to get material. These men worked to rebuild an outdoor porch and fix a roof that was leaking and falling

apart for more than 20 years. As you can imagine, things were a bit dilapidated. But they worked hard for two days and got the job ahead of time. We had devotions in the morning and in the evening and the general consensus was that we had no idea that such poverty existed in a region not far from home. Every one of us was determined to come back to the community and find ways to continue the small work that we did, so that relationships could be built and not just houses. This will be done.

The presence of Christ manifested itself in a closer walk with Him for these men as they took action to reach out in concern and care for their “neighbor” in West Virginia. What we found out in Georgia is that if we can extend this sense of walking closer to Christ to all within First Presbyterian either through Action or Scripture or Prayer, then we are able to move together in harmony. I think we are pretty close to being there, but it doesn’t hurt to encourage us to try to do a touch more to reach that thriving together.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

Being in the Presence on October 7 at 10am in Fellowship Hall we will have our gathering of *Being in the Presence* led by our very own Carole Turano.

Confirmation begins this Sunday: If you have a child who is 7th grade and older they are welcome to join the confirmation class. We will be meeting in room 3/4 after the second service, so around 12:15.

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

Women's Tuesday bible study begins Tuesday, October 3rd – The morning class begins @ **9am** & evening class will start @ **7pm**. This fall we will be working on a newly released study entitled “*When You Pray*.” This 7-week session looks at 6 prayers in the Bible presented by some authors/speakers we know and – for us – some new ones. Both classes will be held in rooms 3-4. All are welcome. For any questions, please contact Lorraine Oliver, Stacy Bronkema, Linda Bredin, or Sandy Wenger.

Deacons' Friendship Tea **October 23 at 1pm** Everyone is welcome and wanted for the annual Deacon Tea! This year's theme is Chocolate and Friendship (with a side of Prayer, Scripture, and Action). Come for the BINGO, sandwiches, scones, tea, coffee, or chocolate...just COME! Laughter starts at **1pm in Fellowship Hall**. ALL are WELCOME!

Community Impact Fund Update: Did you know that September marked the one year anniversary of the Community Impact Fund? Over the past year, we have been able to assist **40** families with their rent, utility, and emergency needs through this fund. If you find yourself in need of assistance or would like to contribute to this work, please contact us at 717-400-1837 or aeltman@straspres.org.

Trunk or Treat on October 29: Sign up at the welcome desk and have your car parked and decorated with a suitable theme by 4:30pm. Children should arrive in a costume between 5-6:30pm. Anyone who would like to donate candy and snack items should sign-up at the welcome desk. For more information contact Beth Feiler at bfeiler@straspres.org or 717-572-9683.

Church Parking Lot Closed on Monday, October 9 The Trustees have scheduled the repainting of parking space lines and traffic flow lines/symbols for Monday, October 9, starting at 7 am, weather permitting. There will be NO parking in the lot until the work is finished that day. Please use Decatur Street parking during that time for church access. Thank you.

e-news for September 23, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

We are here in West Virginia in beautiful, sunny, mild weather. I hear you all are getting a touch of rain in Strasburg. As a result of the rain and the forecast for a deluge, the ministerium has decided to cancel tomorrow's service of unity. We will not be having service tomorrow at FPC, instead here is what I would ask of you to do. We were going to have a day of unity among the churches in Strasburg, I would love for that to still happen. Would you consider worshipping in one of our sister churches in Strasburg? You will find below the times of the services and the addresses of the churches. Let them know that you are from First Presbyterian and let's continue to bring this community together for Christ.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

Strasburg Mennonite Church

10:00 am Worship Service

ACTS Family of Churches – Strasburg

10:00am Worship Service

Wesley United Methodist Church

9:00am Worship Service

High View Church of God

10:15am Worship Service

St. Michael's Lutheran Church

10:00am Worship Service

e-news for September 14, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

In our Bible reading for this week we see Jesus on the cross and his mother and the disciple whom he loved, the disciple John, by his side at the foot of the cross. In that scene Jesus looks at his mother and says to her: 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he looks at John and he says to him: 'Here is your mother.' I have always seen this scene as a time in Jesus' life when he makes sure that his mother is taken care of for the rest of her life. When we traveled to Turkey we were able to go to Ephesus and see the place where historically John the disciple lived and where Mary may have also lived to finish out her life.

The responsibility as the oldest child in the family to ensure that his mother was taken care of was something that Jesus took seriously and was also something he was thinking of as he was on the cross. This scene has remained with me as a very human and responsible action on Jesus' part. I can't say taking care of your parents would be on most of our minds as we are being tortured on the cross.

This week I am in Florida and helping my mom and her husband move into transitional housing. I've spent all week so far up in the attic of their house taking things down and ensuring that they find a home for all those things that aren't going to make the move with them. It has been an incredibly productive week and one that I am treasuring being able to spend with my mom. We don't spend much time together, so I'm loving this. In my ministry I have heard from many of you and lived through with many of you transitions as your parents have moved or faced different stages in their lives. I feel like I have lived a bit of a charmed life in that I haven't experienced many of the highs and the lows of family transitions.

But this time in Florida with my mom has given me a bit of a better insight into what it looks like and what it feels like to walk alongside a parent in a transitional time in their lives. While the physical effort that it takes to move someone is not difficult, the emotional and spiritual impact that a massive transition like this can have on people should never be overlooked. The transitions that we experience as we age are unique and hit each of us in different ways. We don't tend to think about them as we are raising a family or living by ourselves in our younger years.

But just as Jesus wanted to ensure that his mother was taken care of and he took concrete steps to see that to fruition, it is so important for us as a church to identify those within our community and beyond who might be facing similar transitions in their lives as a result of age related changes. How can we meet the needs of those who may not have a John to walk alongside them in these changes? The church needs to be the John of those who are looking for answers as they transition from one stage of life to the next. I'm not sure we emphasize enough this time of life in our ministries or our programs. Hopefully we can remedy that in these years to come. Keep your eyes open to where we might be able to step into the void.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

No church on Sunday September 24. We will all be meeting at the community park at 10am with the other churches of Strasburg to worship together. Come and join us and bring a chair.

Bible Study this evening: Join us this evening at 6pm for Bible study here: [Youtube](#)

Welcome Nicole Keays: Nicole has begun her work as our office administrator. You can reach her at nkeays@straspres.org. It is so great to have her on board.

Continue to join us as we read through the Bible here: [Bible Reading](#)

WOMEN'S TUESDAY BIBLE STUDY BEGINS TUESDAY, OCT. 3rd – The morning class begins **@ 9am** & evening class will start **@ 7pm**. This fall we will be working on a newly released study entitled “*When You Pray.*” This 7-week session looks at 6 prayers in the Bible presented by some authors/speakers we know and – for us – some new ones. Both classes will be held in rooms 3-4. All are welcome. For any questions, please contact Lorraine Oliver, Stacy Bronkema, Linda Bredin, or Sandy Wenger.

OFFICE HELP NEEDED: During this time of transition in the office we would love to find two or more people who might be willing to volunteer for three hours at the church welcome desk. We need someone on Thursdays from 9-12 and one or two people who might be willing to jump in when one of our regulars might be out. Let Pastor Bob know if you are willing to help.

e-news for September 8, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

I'm really enjoying reading through the Bible and having a disciplined, scheduled time to read Scripture. I choose the mornings because I like to start my day with the presence of the Lord that is undeniable before I get into things that might take my focus off of the Lord. Here is the link to the brochure to read through the Bible: <https://www.straspres.org/2023/08/read-through-the-bible-brochure/>. Follow along with us as we make our way through Scripture, and you can also follow along on the blog as I post daily where I see God's hand at work in the Scripture for that day. Here is the link to the blog: <https://www.straspres.org/category/bible-reading-challenge-blog/>.

There could be some of you who might be a bit skeptical as to what this whole Prayer, Scripture, and Action initiative might be. There is a big question mark as to where it will lead. I hope the Holy Spirit takes hold and leads us to a place we cannot predict and expect. Can I encourage you and remind you to participate in the first part of the PSA? Tomorrow at 10am in Fellowship Hall we will be in prayer together as a congregation. Carole Turano is going to lead us in a time of Being in the Presence. You actually have to agree to spend time with God in ways that you may not be used to and in ways that you may not want to spend with God in order to experience God fully.

I'm not sure I can let you off the hook if you just signed up to come along for the ride here at FPC. It is an exciting ride, but there aren't many passengers who don't eventually get asked to help steer the ship every now and then. We had our first nominating meeting last evening. It is that time of year that we ask you to step forward to agree to serve as an officer of the church. For many,

seeing the inner workings of the church can be a bit offsetting. I mean, who wants to see how the sausage is made after all? It isn't always pretty, but it is always transparent. That is one area of the life of the church that has to be consistent. We can't have the pastor, or any leadership for that matter, trying to get their agenda across in a way that undermines the transparency of the church as a whole.

There are very few churches that have their yearly reports sitting out on a table when you walk into the church. In this yearly report you don't just have the work of the church for the year, but you also have the budget and all of the financial figures. We have nothing to hide and we want people to know that we are committed to supporting our missionaries, we are committed to supporting dozens of ministries locally, nationally, and internationally. We are committed to ensuring that our children and youth do not find themselves without resources as they try to navigate this life and all that is thrown at them. We are committed to providing curriculum to our adult Sunday School classes and our mid-week Bible Studies. You can see how much we invest in all of you, but that is only possible because you all invest so much into the church.

The more we invest in each other, the more possibility there is for us as a church to invest into the community. Thank you for sharing this common goal to bring people to a saving knowledge of Christ so that His kingdom would come.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH...

WORSHIP ON SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 24 AT STRASBURG COMMUNITY PARK. JOIN US!!! No activities at the church that day.

Women's Bible Study: Beginning on October 3rd at 9am and 7pm there will be a women's Bible study offered that is going to look at "When you pray". This 7 week session looks at 6 prayers in the Bible. Both classes will be held in room 3-4. All women are welcome. For questions please contact Lorraine Oliver, Stacy Bronkema, Linda Bredin, or Sandy Wenger.

Office help needed: During this time of transition in the office we would love to find two or more people who might be willing to volunteer for three hours at the church welcome desk. We need someone on Mondays from 1-4 and one or two people who might be willing to jump in when one of our regulars might be out. Let Pastor Bob know if you are willing to help.

Welcome to Nicole Keays, our new interim part-time Office Administrator: Nicole and her family, husband Will and children Harper, Ainsley, and Grayson, have been at First Presbyterian now for a number of years. Nicole has a teaching degree from Millersville and is looking forward to working at the church. Make sure you welcome her when you see her. In order to reach her and the office you can use her new email at nkeays@straspres.org.

e-news for August 23, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

I led a futile search throughout the Bible for a verse that would echo the hymn: “Count your blessings.” There simply is no Bible verse that says those words. But there are plenty of verses that tell us to rest assured that: “God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” We also find in Psalm 103:2 the author tells us to: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits.” The Psalmist then goes on to give a short list of benefits in vs.3 such as: forgiveness, healing, redemption, steadfast love, mercy, goodness. I wanted to find a verse that said “count your blessings” because I am going to give you a list of things in this e-news which I consider to be incredible blessings that we are currently experiencing. Here we go.

At session on Wednesday evening we laid hands on Walter Kondratowski and prayed over him as session endorsed him to Presbytery as an Inquirer. This is the first step toward ordination to become a Minister of the Word and Sacrament. We have a history of doing these types of things. Within the last 10 years three of our people have been ordained while members of this church: Brett Foote, Holly Miller, and Karen Bachman. When you see Walter encourage him as he begins this new journey. What a blessing it is for us to have one within our midst who wants to become a shepherd to others in this way.

I continue to remain amazed at the timing of God’s financial blessings that we have been receiving through inheritances and other sources such as grants and federal ERC funds. While our weekly giving is slightly above last year’s, it is nowhere near our budgeted needs. But God has provided and continues to provide in other ways to offset the lower giving. In fact, we have been able to put aside a significant amount for mission giving through inherited funds. Also through inherited funds we have been able to contribute to the Presbytery initiative to help pay off the Shiloh Presbyterian Church mortgage on their community life building. Your session some months back committed \$50,000 to help pay that off and just recently those funds were disbursed.

Your giving allowed session the freedom to trust that when we have been given much, it is our responsibility to bless others at least in a small fraction of the way in which we have been blessed. Shiloh Presbyterian in Oxford has an amazing story. It is one of the remaining historically black Presbyterian Churches in our Presbytery. It grew out of Lincoln University and remains a pillar of faith and community growth within the city of Oxford. We are thrilled to be able to be a small part of their recent history. We also are working with a team down there to help with their streaming.

I guess this past week during the benediction at the first service I was a bit overcome with a recognition that the blessings we have received as a congregation are a bit overwhelming. Looking out and seeing you all be impacted by the witness of our youth hit home. Okay, “Here I am Lord” also had something to do with it. We do not deserve these blessings, but we are experiencing them together as a congregational family. I encourage all of you to be reminded of how God has blessed you and the responsibility we all carry to bless those with whom we come into contact. We often wonder how us blessing others will impact our ability to carry on. My challenge to you is to wonder how our blessing others will impact our relationship with Jesus. I can assure you that it will only provide you with a closer walk with your Savior.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING AT FPC...

Worship on September 24 is at the Strasburg Community Park. There will be no worship services or Sunday School on that day.

Bible Study: Join us for Bible Study this Thursday at 6pm here: [Youtube](#)

Bible Challenge - Beginning **September 4**, we will once again provide the opportunity to take part in a 9 month read through the Bible Challenge. It is going to be very similar to the one we did in 2022 except that it will begin in September and carry us through to next year. Bible Challenge brochures are available on the information table in the glass foyer.

Being in the Presence - On September 9 at 10am in Fellowship Hall we will have our first new gathering of *Being in the Presence* led by our very own Carole Turano.

Join us on a construction mission trip to West Virginia: We will be taking part in a mission trip to West Virginia to help build steps and a large outdoor porch for a family in need in West Virginia. The dates of the trip are **September 22-24**. There will be an informational meeting for the trip after church on September 3 at 12:15pm.

Annual Church Picnic at Tinney Pavilion this Sunday, Aug. 27 at 12:15pm, after 2nd service: Food, fellowship, games, including the corn-hole tournament, Bingo, pulled pork sandwiches, hot dogs, drinks, and place settings are provided. Please bring a dish to share! It is a great opportunity to invite a neighbor, family, and friends to experience the life of First Presbyterian.

Blessing of the backpacks - On Sunday, August 27 at both services we will be blessing the backpacks as kids head off to school. Make sure your child has their backpack with them as they come to church that Sunday.

New Member's Classes - Interested in finding out more about First Presbyterian or joining the church? Come and join us for new member's classes starting on **August 27 at 3pm** in the library. Pastor Bob will lead you on a journey to answer your questions and give you insight into the church.

Last chance to fill out the congregational survey: If you have not filled out the congregational survey yet, please, please, please fill it out. Here is the link that you can click to fill it out, It takes less than 10 minutes: [PSA survey](#)

e-news for August 16, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

Did you realize that once preschool begins in less than a month we will have 25 people working for First Presbyterian? Wait what? That's right, we have 25 people who have agreed to spend their time and their effort in a paid position to help with the ministry and mission of First Presbyterian. Twelve years ago when I got here we had 8 people who were working for the church with four of them being full time. We now have 25 people working for the church and three who are

full time. Granted that most of those on staff find themselves on the side of the preschool, but the numbers are there.

With that many people on board it is inevitable that there will be transition. Over this month we have received notice that two on our team are moving away from paid positions here at the church. Alicia Eltman began a couple of years ago in her contracted position as the social worker for the church. In her short time here she has been able to kick off CIC, a fund that she secured through grants that is able to meet the financial needs of those in crisis. Dozens of families have been helped through this fund. She has created an opportunity for those who have incarcerated family members to receive a care package from the church as a sign of solidarity and love. She has set up a computer center for those in need at our church where people are able to access online benefits and find help.

She has found financial resources for our food bank and was instrumental in setting up an initiative to have a home available for children from the LS school district who might be in need of a few nights stay with volunteers. While this program never got off the ground, we have the skeleton in place should we ever want to resurrect it. She has helped individuals within the church family understand benefits that are available to them and has been a listening ear of concern to those within the community.

While she is stepping away from her responsibilities as a social worker at the church, her interest and involvement in the church has not waned. I wanted to take this space to give her a shout out and a big thank you for the lives that she has touched and for getting the social worker position off to a great start here at FPC. We are looking for someone to fill her spot, it is for 10 hours a week. Let me know if you know of someone who might be willing to take on this calling. It takes a special person.

Also this week Mary Tunison has informed the session that she is stepped away from her position as Administrative Assistant. Mary came on nearly three years ago at the height of Covid. She has had to maneuver and juggle so many different unknowns in her time here. There has been no more difficult time to work at First Presbyterian than over the three years that she has been here.

Her years of experienced were invaluable to us as she took over from Karen Cooper who was on the helm for over 30 years before her. Being able to step in at the time she did and in a position like this one is no easy task. Again, thank you Mary for your three years here, and make sure if you see her between now and her last day which is September 14 you express your appreciation to her.

We are so blessed here at First Presbyterian with people who love the church and love working for the church. You all make that possible and you make the mission and the ministry of the church viable. To God be the glory!

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

P.S. If you have not filled out your congregational survey yet please take a few minutes to do it here. We want everyone to fill it out once. Thank you sooo much. [PSA survey](#)

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

Bible Study this Thursday evening, August 17: Join us this Thursday, and every Thursday, at 6pm here at this link for Bible Study. [Youtube](#)

September 24 church is at Strasburg Community Park at 10am: Join us and all the Strasburg Community Park as we worship God together on Sunday, September 24 at 10am at the Strasburg Community Park. We will not be having Sunday School or worship here at FPC on that day.

Being in the Presence: Join us as we kick off the P in the Prayer, Scripture and Action initiative on September 9 at 10am in Fellowship Hall. Let us all pray together!

Read through the Bible Challenge: We will begin on September 4 and you can find a link to the brochure and the blog here: [Bible Reading Challenge](#)

FPC church picnic: Join us for a church picnic on Sunday, August 27 right after the second worship. Bring something to share with others. Bring others to share in the fellowship and activities.

Bluegrass Festival on September 2 at the Strasburg Community Park. Join us!

e-news for August 10, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

So if last week was a paint fumes induced sermon, this week it is a plumber's glue induced enews. Time marches on and so does the construction. It is fascinating to be in the midst of an area where people are hard at work to ensure that the final product is exactly as the customer wants it. The noise, the dust, the smells are all a part of the process that eventually leads to the results that everyone would want. If you took any of that out then the finished product would not be nearly what you would want it to be.

Last Sunday we saw that it is hard work being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Our Savior himself warns us that the road is hard that leads to His kingdom. Who would choose a more difficult, narrow, treacherous road when the easy, wide and smooth road is right in front of us for the taking? Well, I hope all of us will take that difficult road, because that is the road that leads to life. I have people tell me that they don't understand what is happening in their life, they just feel out of sorts and sucked dry of life. My guess is that the road they are on is the easy road. The difficult road leads to life and purpose and fulfilment, and while it is hard, it is well worth it.

What are some things in life that you choose which are more difficult because you know that the end result is going to be worth it? In my younger years I used to love spending hours in the gym shooting baskets, or hitting serves on the court, or running sprints on the soccer field. It was hard, but my heart was full and I really, really enjoyed the discipline and the hard work. I can't say it really paid off all that well. While I did play basketball in college, I didn't really set the world on fire, even though the older I get the better I was in my mind.

But that hard work was not only worth the effort, it was also enjoyable in a twisted sort of way. My brothers and I still comment on how much fun it is to play tennis when it is hot and the sweat is pouring down. While this might be TMI, can't we make the same analogy with our faith? While it might be difficult to be disciplined in reading Scripture daily, it is so well worth it. While it might seem incredibly daunting to put aside every single day time to pray to our Savior, it does produce incredible fruit. While it might seem overwhelming to plan a mission trip to West Virginia to help build homes, the results are undeniable. The hard work that goes into being a disciple of Jesus Christ is worth the effort both on this earth and to prepare us for eternal life.

When Jesus tells his disciples that the animals that surround them have places of lodging and rest, but as disciples they do not know from one day to the next where their provision might come (Matthew 8:20), it could be disheartening to the less dedicated. But to those who understood the sacrifice that is involved in being a follower, it was well worth the effort and the sacrifice. My prayer for all of us is that we would be able to say the same and live in a similar fashion. My prayer is that we would not count the cost as loss, but rather as an opportunity to sacrifice so that our time with the Lord is well worth the effort.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

Bible Study this evening, join us! You can join us every Thursday evening, including this evening, for Bible study here at this link: [Youtube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zOmTvN-oE4HjHNleJQ)

Join us on a construction mission trip to West Virginia: We will be taking part in a mission trip to West Virginia to help build steps and a large outdoor porch for a family in need in West Virginia. The dates of the trip are September 22-24. There will be an informational meeting for the trip after church on September 3 at 12:15. The cost of the trip will be \$50. Please come to the informational meeting and let Pastor Bob know you are interested.

Please fill out your Prayer, Scripture, Action survey: Follow this link to fill out the survey, and please fill it out only once: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdzd72f5DIT6f5shhWlGcMFUCRQEe6zOmTvN-oE4HjHNleJQ/viewform>

Coffee Hour: We need someone to fill in the open spot for Sunday, August 20. Remember, you are welcome to reimburse yourself from the donation that come into the basket. Our church family so values this time during coffee hour, join in the effort to make it a special together. There are a few other openings as well.

Community Service at Strasburg Park on September 24: We will not be having worship at our location on Sunday, September 24. The Strasburg Ministerium will be worshipping together at 10am at the Strasburg Park on that day. Please come and join us!

Church-wide picnic: On August 27 we will be having our yearly church picnic at Tinney Pavilion. Following the second service we will meet for food, fun, and fellowship at the pavilion. This is a great opportunity to invite friends and family over for the occasion.

Blessing of the Backpacks: On August 27 we will be asking for a blessing upon all the children who are heading back to school at both services. Your child and youth is encouraged to bring their backpack to church where it will be blessed in an opportunity to focus on the beginning of the school year and God's presence in our children and youth's lives.

e-news for August 2, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

Can I talk to you about PSA for a second? You will be hearing this acronym a lot over these next 9 months. The letters stand for Prayer, Scripture and Action. First Presbyterian received a Lilly grant from Columbia Theological Seminary to launch a program that is called Rekindle. In the words of the seminary these “grant projects will support a congregation’s capacity to enhance their vitality in a post-COVID-19 context. The program will help congregations realize their goal of being a thriving congregation by supporting their focused attention on an identified mission priority.” We put together a team of folks who are on the steering committee for PSA: Kristin Kondratowski, Marcia Andersen, Alicia Eltman, Tim Ott, Carole Turano, Tricia Wilson, Alice Eisenhooth, Michael Wilson (ex-officio) and my brother David Bronkema is consulting.

We decided to choose our mission priorities from our mission statement of Know, Grow, and Go. In this way over these next nine months we will be focused on Prayer, Scripture, and Action. Our emphasis on prayer will bring us to monthly gatherings of Being in the Presence led by our very own Carole Turano. On September 9 at 10am in Fellowship Hall we will have our first gathering of Being in the presence supported by this grant. Each month after that we will have an opportunity to deepen our prayer habits.

Our emphasis on Scripture will begin on September 6 when we will have once again the opportunity to take part in a concerted 9 month read through the Bible Challenge. It is going to be very similar to the one we did in 2022 except that it will begin in September and carry us through to next year. Also, this year during Holy Week we will have continuous reading of the Bible over a span of 4 days. You will all have a chance to take part in that and read for an hour or more if you wanted to help us read Scripture continuously.

Our emphasis on action will culminate on March 3 as worship together, have a meal together, and then go out and do some action together in the community. We will have opportunities for ministry in the surrounding area, and if you are not able to get out and do something, we will have a chance for you to write letters to prisoners, make phone calls to shut-ins and other ministries in the comfort of the church.

Part of this initiative is to evaluate how we are doing as individuals and as a church in our prayer, Scripture, and action. To this end beginning this Sunday you will have a chance to fill out a survey that our PSA committee has put together. Please fill it out, we want everyone in the church to fill it out. You can also fill out the survey here: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdzd72f5DIT6f5shhWlGcMFUCRQREe6zOmTvN-oE4HjHNleJQ/viewform>. Please fill it out only once, but at least once.

Also, as part of this initiative we will have a church wide retreat from Friday evening through Sunday worship at Black Rock Retreat Center. We want everyone to be able to come to this retreat. We have built into our budget some funds to help offset the cost for this retreat for each of you. It isn't free, but it will be offset by an amount from the grant. Stay tuned for more information.

I feel like I am almost out of breath as we launch this initiative. I am really, really excited to see where it takes us. I pray and I hope that it takes us to walk closer with our Savior Jesus Christ. After all, that is our purpose here on earth, to walk closer with our Lord.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

Community Wide worship on September 24 in the Strasburg Park: Once again the Strasburg Ministerium is offering a time of worship for the entire Strasburg community. The church will be closed on that Sunday, September 24, and we will all be gathered at 10am to worship together at the Strasburg Park. Come and join your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ of Strasburg.

Church-wide picnic: Join us for our annual church picnic on August 27 as we gather after the second worship service at Tinney Pavilion for a time of food, fellowship, and fun. Make it your mission to invite friends and family members who are not connected to any church community.

Blessing of the backpacks: On Sunday, August 27 at both services we will be blessing the backpacks as kids head off to school. Make sure your child has their backpack with them as they come to church that Sunday.

Looking for preschool aides: The preschool has grown and we are looking to hire a few aides to help our teachers. If you have one morning a week where you can help out for a few hours we would love to bring you on board, and you'll get paid as well! Let Pastor Bob or Heather Reynolds know if you are at all interested.

e-news for July 28, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

We are in the midst of what is being called a heat wave. I do love being outside and playing sports when it is unbearably hot. There is something about sweating and competing that is fun for me. I have never been one to pay a whole lot of attention to our contribution to the degradation of the environment or the effects of our abuse of the planet on the future of the planet. I have always seen Genesis 1:28 where God says to Adam and Eve: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it", as a command for us to be responsible and good stewards of God's creation. I have never seen it as a green light to abuse the earth and all that is in it.

I don't believe I have ever given a biblical perspective to global warming and its obvious dangers, probably because it has become, like most things, an incredibly politicized topic. I know I

have children who are devoting much of their lives to understanding how we can better take care of God's creation because they have a sense of responsibility about this earth that I was never taught. The factual basis of global warming and its visible impacts is really hard to argue if we pay attention to what is happening around us. But what does the Bible have to say about it? How do we as disciples of Jesus Christ understand the reality that we are facing without hiding our heads in the sand?

Jesus uses a variety of imagery from creation. He speaks about birds and foxes, one of my favorite Bible stories is Jonah and the whale. In Genesis God destroys creation in the flood and that is a major apocalyptic event. I don't believe that global warming is an event that points to God punishing us. I do believe that it is a result of our abuse of creation. For those of us living in Strasburg, and Lancaster County in general, the take away is that God calls us to be good stewards and it is up to us to find ways in which we are able to care for His creation as opposed to being oblivious as to how our actions impact creation.

It is pretty clear if you work with the land that things are changing. Now, the reason for why things are changing may be debatable, but it is obvious that there are real challenges that we are facing. As we move out of summer, although it feels like we are smack dab in the dog days of summer, I hope we recognize our responsibility to creation around us. As we look at this topic the hymn: For the beauty of the earth comes to mind. Earth and all its creation are beautiful, but as the hymn also reflects, it is our responsibility to sing praises to God for His creation which allows us to live in ways that we can only count as a blessing.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING IN THE LIFE OF FPC...

Annual church picnic: On Sunday August 27 after the second worship service we will have our yearly picnic. Bring a dish to share and we will be providing the pulled pork. It is a great opportunity to invite friends and family members. The annual corn hole tournament will also take place.

Bluegrass Festival: On September 2 at the Strasburg Community Park we will be having our yearly bluegrass festival. Come and take part.

Strasburg Ministerium Community Worship: On Sunday, September 24, the Strasburg Ministerium will be hosting a community worship service at 10am. We will not be having church at First Presbyterian that Sunday, but we will be joining all the other churches of Strasburg together at the Community Park. Mark your calendars!

e-news for July 20, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

How many plates can you spin at once? Apparently quite a few here at First Presbyterian. Let's just get a quick rundown of what is happening around here this week. The construction is moving

along. We are a month behind schedule so instead of finishing at the end of August, the goal is now the end of September. VBS is in full swing with over 80 kids showing up to learn about Jesus. We have such a great group of volunteers that I really don't have much to do except eat snacks between sessions. I love this time of year!

The high school youth just got back from their mission trip but the middle school youth are heading out in a couple of weeks. There was so much momentum from the high school trip that a group of adults are looking to go to West Virginia for a weekend to finish a project in September. This church is amazing! I am currently planning not only a trip to Israel, for those interested join us for a meeting on August 6, but I am pulling together for the Presbytery a trip to the African American Museum in Philadelphia on August 31. If you are interested let me know, it is an all expense paid trip and one that you will never forget.

The food bank continues to serve clients in its new digs and in between all of the construction. Even in the midst of all these changes they haven't missed a day. It is really fun to see two volunteers each time it is open and the interest within the church it is drumming up. Good job food bank! Preschool is meeting parents and getting ready for the new year in about two months. We still have openings in the afternoon pre-K but the teachers, we have 7 now, have been busy preparing for the coming school year.

This week once again we have our Sunday School classes on Sunday morning. It is unusual for a church to have three adult Sunday School classes, but we have them. It just speaks to our desire for everyone to grow in Christ. Speaking of growing, your steering committee for the Prayer, Scripture, and Action initiative is hard at work and have sent out a sample survey to a controlled group to get feedback. On August 6 we will be launching the initiative, so stay tuned to this space and come to church to see what we will be doing together as a church on this journey of discipleship and growth.

All of this is happening at the same time through a gaggle of different people here at the church. We have others who are managing some inheritances that we have received over this summer, others who are ensuring that our outreach remains strong with concerts in the park and a church picnic in August, others who are making sure worship remains the center of our life as it should, others making decisions for our 20 staff members. It may not look like much is happening when you step in here on Sunday morning, but it is a bit of an ant colony where all of us are workers running around getting things done.

I pray that as we run around we will take moments to stop and give thanks to God that He has allowed us to be a part of this family that values the relationships that we are building with each other and with our Creator. Let's not ever take either of those two things for granted.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob

HAPPENING AT FPC...

No Bible Study this Evening due to VBS

Interested in the Holy Land? We will be having an organizational meeting on August 6 at 3pm in room 3/4 here at FPC.

Journey with us to the African American Museum in Philadelphia: Join us for trip to the AAMP on August 31. The charter bus will leave at 1, we will visit the museum, have dinner together and then head home. This journey is sponsored by the Racial Task Force of the Donegal Presbytery. The bus

trip and the ticket is complementary and there will be a subsidy provided for the meal to help offset some of the cost. To register you must let Pastor Bob know to sign you up.

You can help out with the Middle School mission trip to New Jersey: You can sign up to help out with a list of food items using this link: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0e48abaa2ca3f5cf8-njmission#/>

Annual Church Picnic: Mark your calendars for August 27 when we will be having our annual church picnic at Tinney Pavilion. We will have food, corn hole, egg toss, and a great opportunity for fellowship. Invite a friend and all your neighbors and family.

e-news for July 8, 2023

Dear FPC family and friends,

Did you notice what happened? For the past two weeks we have had missionaries speak at the church about their work in distant lands. Both of these families have their young children in tow with them while they are doing God's work in these distant lands. Until you actually meet, hear, and interact with missionaries who have their children with them, it is hard to imagine that you yourself could pick up your tent stakes and move to a distant land and do God's work. After all, I can't go because of my kids. I have always said that one of the driving reasons why we served in Russia was so that our kids could have that experience and be transformed and changed by living in a different culture.

After the Harrars spoke this Sunday we have a number of families with kids wondering if they might also be called to serve overseas for a couple of years. I responded with a resounding: YES!! Let me be clear, I have also always said that you don't have to travel overseas to do God's work. You can stay right here in Lancaster County and do plenty of God's work. We do already! But there really is something different and more visceral and more intense and more lasting in taking your family to a place where you are working together for the kingdom.

The heightened interest in doing this type of work took me a bit by surprise. I guess I should have known, what do you expect the Holy Spirit to do when you invite missionaries to come and speak? This week we are sending off missionaries from our own church to go to West Virginia and bring God's Word through building and construction. A group of 23 of us will be working hard from Sunday through Friday recognizing that it is for such a time as this that God calls us to do this type of work. It isn't for a couple of years, but these youth and leaders have agreed to take a week out of their life to use what skills and gifts they have for the kingdom of God.

I would love for you to pray for them so here they are: Jackson Allison, Gannon Black, Madison Brenneman, Rylee Diem, Ephram Claycomb, Gavin Elias, Landon Giberson, Rex Giberson, Elijah Hitchings, Jackson Howe, Tessa Kondratowski, Gabi Nonthaken, Avery Planck, Cameron Straley, Trent Thomas. The leaders will be: Kristin Kondratowski, Amanda Allison, Bill Payne, Dan Colvin, Bob Bronkema, Sam DePue, and Steve and Donna Szczeniak. Your prayers would be coveted as we go from July 9, after church, until July 14.

I heard from a few people after the missionaries spoke about the congregation potentially not being aware that we support these missionaries in our budget. Your tithes that you give to the

church have a direct impact upon the ministry of our missionaries in Asia, upon the Harrar family, upon Vladimir Tatarnikov in Belarus, on Melissa Long in Boston, on our youth going on mission to West Virginia and our middle school youth going on mission to New Jersey. It is because of your generous giving to the church that we are able to send people out into the world.

I hope this is clearly understood by everyone. What you do and what you give makes a difference in the Gospel message being proclaimed throughout the world. As a missionary at heart, I know first hand the impact that a single congregation's giving could have upon my work while we were both in Italy and in Russia. Please know, your giving makes a huge difference, so thank you.

Your servant in Christ,

Pastor Bob
