

FIRST FOCUS NEWSLETTER

EDITION: 7 | JULY 2020 | FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NORMAL

Scripture is filled with incredible, inspiring accounts, from wondrous miracles to baffling prophecy to declarations revealing the power of virtues such as faith, hope, and love. When we approach the inspired Word of God, we can find both penetratingly personal conviction as well as world-encompassing revelation. Charles Spurgeon said, “Nobody ever outgrows Scripture. The book widens and deepens with our years.” While I agree wholeheartedly with Spurgeon on that truth, there still remains the reality that there are some portions of the biblical narrative that we tend to focus less on than others. Later chapters in the book of Exodus, 25-31 to be precise, make up such a portion.

These chapters detail, with meticulous specificity, the exact parameters necessary for building and using the tabernacle. The tabernacle was meant to be the dwelling place of the Most High among the people of God. It was to be a holy place that fostered connection, reconciliation, and purpose. The painstakingly detailed instructions for creating such a space reveal to us an important reality: care should be taken when we consider the place where God’s people gather.

We are amidst such a process of careful instruction and formation in our own church right now regarding how we return to gathering together within our church building in the weeks ahead. Your session of elders and I have been praying and deliberating over this critical matter. In addition, a specific task force was formed to intentionally develop, communicate, and execute our most faithful and careful effort to gradually return to worship and ministry within our property. Much of that plan can now be found on our website by clicking on the “Reopening Plan” graphic on the homepage.

I ask that all of us embody and demonstrate the same kind of compassionate patience we see displayed within Christ. These matters of reopening are different for every state, community, and church. The utmost goal for all the leaders involved (myself, our elders, the task force) is the safety and well-being of our church family. We are all anxiously awaiting a return to what we so fondly remember, especially regarding our church. We will make this journey together, my friends. - Pastor, Matt Wilcox



Meet Juliette Kuhn! New Director of Student & Young Adult Ministries

I just graduated from Eastern University with a degree in Youth Ministry and Biblical Studies. In college, I was on the Ultimate Frisbee team, and in High School I played basketball. I am a HUGE dog lover, and a massive Star Wars fan! I am a big Eagles and Nick Foles fan, so I will root for the Bears a little bit since he is on the team now, but not too much. I have felt called to ministry ever since High School, so I am very excited to get started here and to meet all of you!

NEWS FROM THE MISSION STUDY TEAM

On June 10, Session approved the Mission Study and sent the report to the Committee on Ministry of our Presbytery for their approval. On June 16, COM approved the study and gave permission for us to form a Pastor Nominating Committee and begin our search for the next head pastor.

The study will be made available to anyone who would like to see the results of the hard work of the Mission Study Team. We met as a congregation on Sunday, June 28, at 11:10am to elect the members of the Pastor Nominating Committee.

The meeting took place by Zoom. Ballots were mailed to all members for those unable to join the Zoom meeting and/or wanted to vote by mail. The PNC will begin their important work – discerning the call for leadership that God intends for the congregation at First Presbyterian Church of Normal. Please keep them in your prayers in the days ahead.

MIGHTY NIGHTIES!

This year during our virtual VBS “The Knights of North Castle,” we are collecting donations that will be given to The Baby Fold to purchase new pajamas and diapers for the children who live there. The Baby Fold can always use diapers and children who become residents are given new pj’s when they arrive. Since we are the knights of North Castle, we thought this project would be appropriate! If you would like to help with this ministry, please send a check to First Presbyterian Church, 2000 E. College Ave., Normal, IL 61761. Just write “Mighty Nighties” on the memo line. THANK YOU!

VBS KIT PICK-UP JULY 24

We still have kits available! Once we know who is coming, we will assign you a time to come to the east parking lot on July 24 to pick up your kit. The link to watch the videos can be viewed at the convenience of each family. It is not a ZOOM link. It will be fun! Pastor Matt makes a cool Knight!



MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK

From teenagers to people in their 80’s, you came to help move 60 cubic yards of mulch! Scooping and loading wheelbarrows, dumping and spreading that “black gold” into the Peace Gardens, around plants, and under bushes, around trees, and along fence lines, under benches, and throughout the labyrinth. What seemed highly unlikely was accomplished in shifts over four days! That mulch will help hold moisture, reduce weeding, and looks beautiful! That mulch was researched and ordered by Bill Schulz. The mulch moving team was assembled by Kurt Swearingen. The water station was arranged by Kelly Martin. The mulch volunteers are part of our church family. Thank you to each and every one of you for your gift of time and energy: Bob Beerup, Tom Deweert, Ken Doss, Mark Ehredt, Barbara Gaffron, Sara Garrett, Nathan and Stephanie Hansing, Eric and Sarah Jome, Carol and Ken Kashian, Kelly Martin, Becky and Rob Mentzer, Laura, Blake and Parker Meyer, Don Peters, Bill Schulz, Braydon and Matt Stombaugh, Kristen Swearingen, Kurt and Polly Swearingen, Marilyn Townley and Margaret Wolf.

July Birthday List

Nancy Wolter	1	Terry Tosh	8	Paul Harmon	17	Ron Guthoff	24
Calem Kruger	1	Joe Long	8	Margaret Foster	17	Marian Schulz	24
Dave Schulz	2	Catherine Holland	8	Caitlin Wilcox	17	Darren Brant	24
Becky Pull	3	Douglas Sutton	9	Marilyn Long	18	Conner Morton	24
Anne Eaton	4	John Crew	10	Mary Evenson	18	Julie Ewan	25
Cameron Herbert	4	David Cobert	10	Lisa Ehlers	18	Sarah Butler	29
Kevin Byrd	5	Kyle Byrd	13	Levi Wilcox	18	Wally Crouch	29
Jim Wilson	5	Barbara Gaffron	13	Rebecca Bishop	19	Bill Schulz	29
Brenda Pish	5	Wendy Satchwell	13	Rex Woodward	19	Cruz Martin	29
Bob Hunt	7	Evangeline Herbert	13	Zachary Toulon	19	Emily Rule	29
Tom Buckles	7	Glenn Katzenburger	13	Faith Ten Haken	20	Ken Kashian	30
Becky Cobert	7	Margaret Wolf	14	Cash Martin	20	Brandon Nice	31
Jenny Johnson	7	Norman Larsen	14	Judy Stone	21	Parker Meyer	31
		Sue Burrill	15	Chris Blair	21		
		Fred Schultz	16	Laura Dulee	22		

The apostle Paul faced an important but difficult set of circumstances when he ministered to the Christ followers who lived in the city of Corinth. Corinth was a city saturated with different people groups and even more opinions. Within this diverse and lively city existed a group of people who had begun to follow the teachings and example of Jesus Christ. The unity of this body of believers faced a difference of opinion regarding how best to faithfully live out their daily lives as followers of Christ. We, as the church today, face our own opportunity to seek out the good of our church community amidst a variety of opinions regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

All of us have had our lives altered by the presence of COVID-19, and like many organizations that serve the community, our church has had to adapt and change as well. A new change approaches First Presbyterian Church of Normal and the community where we have been called: the process of reopening the facilities and programs of our church. While we have seen some restrictions lifted in other communities, we must approach our return to the facilities and programs of the church with compassionate care and mindful consideration for all who call this their church home. With that goal in mind, we all should foster the attitude and wisdom of Paul in his direction to the Corinthian church:

“We are allowed to do all things,” but not all things are good for us to do. “We are allowed to do all things,” but not all things help others grow stronger. Do not look out only for yourselves. Look out for the good of others also. -1 Corinthians 10:23-24 (CEV)

Your session of elders and I have been discerning these important decisions with prayer and careful attention. Our foremost concern has been and will continue to be the health and well-being of all who participate in the life and work of First Presbyterian Church of Normal with special emphasis on those who are the most vulnerable within our family of faith. We understand that there is very little permanence right now as the situation, both locally and nationally, continues to remain fluid. We also understand that as we progress through our phased plan of reopening, there will be some who will feel more comfortable continuing to worship from home for some time. Thanks to the efforts of our staff and volunteers, we are thrilled that everyone will continue to be able to join our worship services through live streaming.

As we embark on the journey of reopening and returning to the familiar spaces and opportunities of our church, we want to assure you that we will do so with the utmost care and consideration for everyone within our congregation. From the children who frequent the nursery to those who have called this their church home for decades. All of our decisions will be made based on the knowledge offered from the scientific and medical communities and will also adhere to all of the guidelines and precautions given from our local and national leaders.

It is our hope that our church community might practice the patience and wisdom displayed by the apostle Paul. There is no perfect or standard method for this process. Opinions will vary and grace will be needed as we navigate these unprecedented transitions together.

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There will undoubtedly be awkward moments as we adjust to the necessary measures and protocols put in place for the safety of all who gather with us. As a family of faith, we will endure moments of disappointment and frustration. We will likely also mourn the loss of what used to be normal, but we must also move with care and compassion. Ryan Landino, the Lead Presbytery for Transformation of Great Rivers Presbytery, offers this encouragement: "Let us remind ourselves in good faith that our operation is different than the many services at the center of our cultural debates, for our primary trade is not in goods and services, but rather in relationships and community." We must remember that while we seek to discern our own level of safety for ourselves and for our families, we are also called to humbly consider the needs and well-being of others. We will have the chance to embody values that this world is desperate to see: patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control, and love. Most importantly, love.

We also hope you begin to perceive the excitement and hope fostered within this plan. We are hoping that this phased plan of reopening feels like an extended homecoming - a homecoming complete with great joys, reunions, celebrations, and unexpected blessings. We fully intend to dedicate a specific Sunday in the future as our Homecoming Sunday, where we hope many, if not all of our members and friends will be comfortable joining us in person. Once that date is determined, we will share it with great joy.

In the meantime, we hope you will continue to join us for worship through our live stream and Facebook page. In addition, please remember that our staff and deacons are available to you for prayer and support. I pray you are finding encouragement in God's Word, hope in your personal prayers, and warmth in the new and innovative forms of connection we have established during this season. I have said every Sunday since I have served in this wonderful place that you have not left the church - you are the Church! A building does not change our identity and our calling. So, until I can greet you in person, I offer you blessings and the reminder that our God is sovereign and most loving.

Sincerely,



Pastor Matt Wilcox

& The Session of First Presbyterian Church of Normal

CLASS 2020

Carpenter, Rachel
Garrett, Sara
Gillespie, Kathryn
Pantaleone, Tim

CLASS 2021

Herbert, Teresa
Schaup, William
Stombaugh, Matt
White, Marilea

CLASS 2022

Schwalm, Doug
Smith, Sabrina
Swearingen, Kurt
Warren, Pat