

FIRST FOCUS

A NEWSLETTER OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NORMAL, IL



Renovations Underway

Many of you are aware of the construction between the offices and the Great Hall. A malfunction with the nursery toilet caused significant water damage. We are taking this opportunity to redeem an otherwise frustrating situation. Our nursery will be permanently relocated downstairs to where the Music Room used to be. This space is similar in size and renovations and refurbishing have already begun to make that room a warm, fun space for our children. The space near the Great Hall that used to be the nursery is being renovated into a large music room and gathering space. This room will be large enough to accommodate space for our bell choir rehearsals, to serve as a gathering space for the choir on Sunday mornings, and to be an everyday space for small group and ministry team gatherings.

A NOTE FROM PASTOR MATT

I'm thankful... for my family, for their health, for the personalities the Lord wove in them, and for the love they so abundantly share with me. I'm thankful for my neighborhood. For the schools in my community, for the kids that always come to our door asking if my boys can come out to play, for the waves I give and receive as we pass each other. I'm thankful for our church. For the grace of God that has so permeated into who we are, for the rich history of love and justice that is written in the more than 150 years of ministry, and for my brothers and sisters in Christ who encourage me and help me to grow.

But thankfulness does not necessitate the absence of concern or struggle. I worry about my kids. I become frustrated with my neighbors from time to time. Our church is not perfect (nor can it be) and we know we have growing to do. My concerns and struggles do not erase or weaken my thankfulness. Nor does my thankfulness render my concerns or struggles nonexistent or unimportant. Rather, I think these two realities are meant to foster a sort of sustaining tension. Pressed against one another as they are, our thankfulness and our struggle hold us in a tenuous but holy space of joy and dependence with our God. The words of the apostle Paul ring powerfully true from 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Paul wrote these words to a group of Christ-followers who were under almost constant persecution. They faced frustration, fear, and danger on a regular basis. And yet, we learn that the church was growing in this city. Their joy and the Gospel of Jesus Christ were spreading, despite the pain and resistance that seemed ever-present. Paul knew their circumstances. It's why he was writing to them. Paul's words at the end of his letter found in 5:16-18 are words of both encouragement and acknowledgment. He is imploring them to hold fast in that holy space of tension between thankfulness and struggle. I pray that we all might do the same as the followers of Christ in this time and place.



KNIT-CROCHET NEWS

NO 2021 ARTISAN SALE

The Knit-Crochet Ministry made the hard decision not to hold the 2021 Artisans Sale. We do want those with new babies or babies on the way to have a baby blanket from our ministry. We also are planning to share hats with Fairview Angel Tree and Kemmerer Village. If you have a particular need or want to see what we have to offer in the way of afghans, prayer shawls, scarves and cowls, please contact becky.mentzer@gmail.com and we can have a "trunk show" with you!



Playmates students used the green bags from Green Team on their field trip to collect items on a nature/garden walk at ISU Horticulture Center.

BOOK DONATIONS

CEDAR RIDGE ROCKETS READ

Books for ALL children! That's what Cedar Ridge Elementary School "Rockets Read" is all about. Before winter, spring and summer breaks, each classroom, kindergarten through fifth grade, are invited to the school library where tables of books have been arranged by reading level. The children are directed to the appropriate table to select a book to take home...and have as their very own.

If you would like to support Rockets Read, please share new or gently used books appropriate for elementary-aged children. Because Cedar Ridge is a bilingual school, books in Spanish are also needed. There will be drop-off boxes at the church entries. If you would prefer to make a monetary donation for the purchase of books, just designate it as a gift to the Cedar Ridge Rockets Read program. Thank you for supporting reading for Cedar Ridge students!

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY NEWS

November 7 | Kids of the Kingdom Youth Group | 5:30-7:30

Bring your items for Operation Christmas Child and we will fill our boxes.

November 19 | Almost Lock-In (K-5th) | 6-9pm

We will meet in the Great Hall. The cost is \$5 per child.

Friends are always welcome.

NEW ADULT
DISCIPLESHIP CLASS
CHRISTMAS
Lights
NOVEMBER 7 - 21



During this series, we'll push past the decorations and remember what Christmas is really about. Join us, 9:45-10:45am during the Sunday School hour in the Great Hall:

- Nov. 7: God is With Us
- Nov. 14: Go See for Yourself
- Nov. 21: You're Invited

Come decorate an Advent wreath on Sunday, November 28 during the Sunday School hour, 9:45-10:45 in the Great Hall. The cost is \$10 per family. A sign-up form will be available online at firstpresnormal.org starting Sunday, November 14th. Bring the whole family and come!

**Stewardship
Pledge Collection
is Sunday,
Nov. 7th**



As we prepare to conclude our stewardship campaign for 2022, we hope you will take the time and discernment necessary to faithfully fill out your 2022 pledge card.

This year, we are offering multiple ways for the friends and members of First Pres to offer their pledge cards. On Sunday, November 7th, we will have an intention time within our worship services for those present to return their pledge cards. That afternoon, from 1-2pm, we will also be holding another drive-thru pledge drop-off. Both our in-person and drive-thru pledge card drop-off opportunities will have treats for everyone to enjoy! There is also the option to mail your pledge card into the church office, if that is more convenient. May God bless First Presbyterian Church of Normal in 2022 as we share our Presence & Treasure!

SPOTLIGHT ON MISSION

UPDATE FROM JEFF AND CHRISTI BOYD

Our Mission, Peacemaking and Justice Committee recently decided to allocate a portion of our 2021 budget to a program recommended by Jeff and Christi Boyd, mission workers in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The program is focused on orphans and other vulnerable children in DRC. Following are excerpts from a recent message from the Boyds:

Greetings! Christi and I remain in Kinshasa, continuing to follow a work method that more-or-less follows public health recommendations. We work from home, avoid large gatherings, limit other in-person meetings, try to maintain safe distancing, wear masks and wash hands frequently when out. And we were able to get vaccinated with the Astra Zeneca vaccine back in May-June.

Thank you for sharing this news of funds available to support ministries of our partners. We would like to suggest that your gift go toward a training needed to implement a strategic shift in how the Presbyterian Community of Congo cares for vulnerable children. The shift is away from institution based care to reintegration of children with families with possible short-term (3- months) foster care as families of children are sought and reintegration discussed. Trainings have been held in four synods to equip short-term foster care families, who are supported by congregations in their presbytery. Two of four synods have received training for “alert-teams” in each Presbyterian Church. Those teams look out for vulnerable children and work for the rights and well-being of the children. The third training will soon take place and as funds become available we hope to support the fourth and final training in the East Kasai region of the Congo.

Pastor Benoît, who has envisioned and spearheaded the strategic shift, has been appointed as the Coordinator for vulnerable children’s ministries for the whole Presbyterian Community of Congo (CPC). The CPC church leaders have asked him to also implement the new strategy in West Kasai, where the CPC headquarters are located. There is a ministry in Kananga that followed the center-based model and for various reasons it has proven unsustainable. So, once the ground has been prepared there, we can anticipate similar trainings for West Kasai. This shift has been very exciting, it is such an appropriate model for a church-wide ministry in an economically challenged context. The church’ courage and efforts to undertake this overhaul can be lifted up beyond Congo’s borders!

This shift in strategy should allow the church to support many more vulnerable children, these children will be more quickly reintegrated into family life (often extended family), and congregations come along side the vulnerable families to support them. The Church works to ensure that children can attend school without paying school fees, with modest contributions from the PCUSA helping to provide “school kits” for these children. That includes notebooks, pens, pencils, uniforms, shoes, and backpacks.

NILE THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

You may remember that Bob and Kristi Rice returned from South Sudan to the USA in the early days of the Covid-19 outbreak. They have recently returned to South Sudan and have been excited to get back to work there. Our MPJ committee has allocated funding to the scholarship program at Nile Theological College, where Bob teaches. NTC provides theological and practical training to equip men and women for effective ministry in fulfilling the Great Commission in South Sudan. It also helps secondary education school by providing teachers who teach Christian Education.

NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Tim Rink	1	Lynn Litwiller	11	Karen Schulz	23
Marilyn Townley	1	Matt Stombaugh	12	Glenn Kinley	24
Brian Jome	1	Jane Turley	13	Dan Cobert	24
Chris Anderson	3	Julie Koh	15	Scott Henderson	25
Miriam Zappa	3	Susan Smith	15	Bryan Bathe	25
Josh Hoffman	3	Greg Frankowiak	16	Pat Warren	25
Kathy Tosh	5	Marilyn Hargesheimer	19	David Koh	26
Debbie Hanchett	5	Tyler Gatto	19	Ella Cryer	26
Scott Tippy	5	Grace Henderson	20	Allen Melzer	27
Joyce Reinmann	7	Clint Kruger	20	Claire Koh	29
Scott Elder	7	Maddie Woodward	21		
Shelley Bruning	8	Lucy Walles	21		
Melissa Pish	8	Ben Henderson	22		
Rowen Kruger	10	Kyle Pott	22		

Contact the church office (info@firstpresnormal.org) to be added or removed from this list.



November Care & Share: The Salvation Army

- Hamburger Helper
- Stove Top Stuffing
- Taco seasoning packets (Aldi ¢.38)
- Side dishes (boxed potatoes, Rice, Pasta, etc.)
- Gravy Packets
- Canned Yams
- Canned Vegetables
- Jiffy Corn Mix
- Instant Oatmeal
- Instant Grits
- Soup (esp. chicken noodle & cream of mushroom)