



# FIRST FOCUS NEWSLETTER

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NORMAL

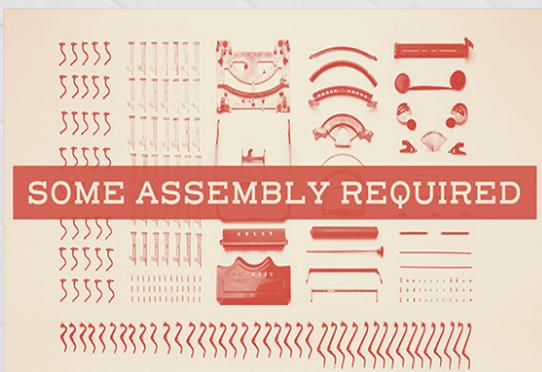
EDITION 2 | FEBRUARY 2021 | 2000 E COLLEGE AVE | NORMAL, IL | 61761

## A NOTE FROM REV. MATT WILCOX

I have not spent much time around farms, and I have to admit, much of what I do know, I have learned since making the Midwest my home. Many might assume because my family relocated from Lancaster, PA, that I'd be more familiar with the ins and outs of farming, but, in truth, the area of Lancaster where we lived was more suburban than anything else. I am very grateful for friends within the church that have both shared their agricultural passions with me as well as invited my family and me to visit firsthand. Of all the things I've learned about farming in recent years, there is one practice that has been particularly impactful in shaping the way I think about our faith - crop rotation.

This is the practice of intentionally not planting and growing the same crop season after season, year after year. Instead, something different is grown the next season. Growing the same thing in the same plot of soil over and over depletes that creation space of nutrients and can foster the growth and spreading of weeds. The lesson I take from this practice is the need and beauty of seasons. When I say "seasons," I don't mean winter or summer; I'm referring to chapters of our stories. Sometimes we need a shift, a change, to foster a different form of growth. And this is powerfully represented in the liturgical season of Lent.

Lent is a season of our faith where we intentionally seek to plant and cultivate something different. We pivot towards practices of reflection and fasting that give us a new perspective. Yes, this season and these practices can be difficult. (Did I ever tell you about the Lent when I gave up coffee?) But there is deep value as well. Our soil is refreshed and enriched by this deep and different season of faithful obedience. So I encourage you to look to your own soil. What new thing do you believe God wants to see grow in your life over this 40-day period? What will you do to cultivate and nurture this promising new harvest? What will be different for you this Lent?



God has a grand design for the Church. Our purpose is wide and deep and is transformative as it is inspiring. It takes each of us to embody and become all that God intends the Church to be. And so, Some Assembly is Required. There are certain elements, traits, and practices that we need to bring together so we can faithfully be and share the love of Christ in this world. Our Lenten message series will give us the opportunity to explore several of markers and disciplines that God's people have always possessed that help us meaningfully and personally be the Church in this place.

**Tough Conversations with Kids**

**HOW TO TALK TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT HARD THINGS | FEBRUARY 21 | 2PM**

Join us for a live-stream presentation! Melissa Box, the Clinical Director of ABC Counseling and Family Services, will present a program on talking, listening, and taking care of each other during times of stress. She will discuss “scripts” that families can use as they navigate challenging topics like anxiety, fear, and depression. This teaching is applicable for families with children of all ages.

**FEBRUARY 5 AT 7PM**

**NIGHT IN A CAR** YOUTH FUNDRAISER FOR HOME SWEET HOME MINISTRIES

Donations can be made out to First Presbyterian Church With "Night in a Car" on the memo line  
THANK YOU

A Night in a Car simulates the hard and hidden aspects of homelessness - prevalent right here in McLean County and around the world. Participants will “live” in their car - overnight, right here in our parking lot. Our Youth Group will be participating and hope to reach their goal of \$1,000 in support of Home Sweet Home Ministries. If you would like to donate, please make checks payable to First Presbyterian Church, with “Night in a Car” on the memo line. Thank you!

**ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING**

**FEBRUARY 7TH, AT 11:15AM**

*Meeting details and the Zoom link will be made available on the church website at [firstpresnormal.org](http://firstpresnormal.org)*

We will be having our annual congregational meeting on Sunday, February 7th, at 11:15am, via Zoom. We encourage all church members to be in virtual attendance. The Annual Report will be available online and paper copies will be available in print here at the church on Friday, February 5th. During this meeting, we’ll reflect and praise God for all the ways God has moved within our church and greater community. We’re so thankful for this congregation and our community partners!

**17** FEBRUARY

**ASH WEDNESDAY**

**DUST AND DONATIONS**  
AT YOUR DOOR - IMPOSITION OF ASHES

On Ash Wednesday, Pastor Matt will drive to the homes of those who sign up to give them the imposition of ashes on their hand and offer a blessing. He will also be collecting donations of individually packaged, peanut-free snacks for the Boys & Girls Club of Bloomington-Normal. You can sign up at [firstpresnormal.org](http://firstpresnormal.org), under the Resources tab > Sign-Ups/Surveys. Please contact Pastor Matt with any questions. Thank you for your donations!




# 2021 PER CAPITA

## \$35.25 PER MEMBER

The money goes towards expenses for:

- Great Rivers Presbytery
- Synod of Lincoln Trails
- General Assembly

Your generosity helps to strengthen our local church budget. Please write checks to First Presbyterian Church, and mark for "Per Capita" on the memo line. Payments may also be made online. Thank you!



# 10am Live-Stream

FIRSTPRESNORMAL.ORG

## FEBRUARY BIRTHDAY LIST

Please contact the church office at (309) 452-4459 to be added or removed from this list.

Sam Redd	1	Teresa Herbert	7	Nan Rutledge	18
Ladaricus Coleman	2	Connor Herbert	7	Mary Jo Hillyer	19
Maia Doss	3	Thomas Rule	7	Jill Timbers	20
Shirley Redd	4	Christy Bartel	8	Jon Thetard	21
Devon Elder	4	Jeff Bartel	10	Claire Herbert	21
John Wolter	5	John Burrill	10	Eldon Brewer	22
Sally Rodriguez	5	Vicki Majercin	11	Grant Leber	23
NK Martin	5	Dana Anderson	13	Carol Baker	24
Quinn Martin	5	Jim Thompson	13	Sheila Allen	24
Berit Rice	6	Kenneth Leber	15	Joan Frazier	24
Eyvoughn Reinitz	6	Suzie Thetard	16	Lizzie Shepard	26
Daniel Sutton	7	Ann Lamkey	17	David Kennedy	27

# SPOTLIGHT ON MISSION

In this issue, we are focusing on Boys and Girls Club of Bloomington-Normal, one of our local mission partners. BAGC's mission is to empower all young people to meet their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens. In 2019, the Club served more than 1,100 kids ages 5-18. First Pres member Darren Brant has been involved with the Club for many years, currently serving as a member of the board of directors. Here are some excerpts from a recent conversation with Darren.

**Question: Tell us about your involvement with Boys and Girls Club.**



Darren: I became involved with the BAGC as a result of a relationship that our former Sr. Pastor, Jim Bell, had forged with the Club and their previous Director, Evelyn Young. I was chairing our church Marketing Committee in the early 2000s, and our committee decided to host their annual golf outing fundraiser. I have now been involved with the Club for 15 years, either as the Chair of their golf outing and/or as a member of their Board of Directors, which I have been on for the past eight years.

**Question: What is it about BAGC that keeps you engaged?**

Darren: I have always had a soft spot for children; I've been a youth group leader, a VBS leader, a Sunday School teacher, and obviously, I am a parent to two children of my own.

**Question: What are the most important results from the work of BAGC, and what is most gratifying to you personally?**

Darren: I think one of our most important results is our graduation rate for kids that are a part of the Club. In our annual Impact Report for 2019, 93% of kids surveyed expected to graduate high school. This is actually higher than the national average. Seeing the growth of the Club over the years is the most gratifying. Having a wait list for kids to join the Club speaks volumes to its reputation and the services it provides to the kids and their families. When I first became involved, we only had our Club House location on Illinois Street in West Bloomington but now also have satellite locations at both Bloomington Junior High School and First Christian Church in Bloomington.



**Question: How has the COVID pandemic impacted BAGC's programs, activities, and delivery of services?**

Darren: COVID has forced us to change our entire way of life at the Club. We have opened and closed a couple of different times since last March due to outbreaks or state mandates. We have had to create a "Virtual Club Experience" for our kids to provide them opportunities to learn and share from their homes. When allowed in our facility, we have had to operate with a very limited number of children in the Club to allow for social distancing. COVID has also impacted our Club from a financial standpoint as well because we had to upgrade our technology, in addition to some donors not being able to continue to financially support the Club as a result of lost employment due to the pandemic.

**Question: How does BAGC collaborate with other nonprofits, the faith community, and governmental agencies?**

Darren: The Club has always had a strong and positive relationship with other nonprofits, including United Way, YMCA, and Western Avenue Community Center, to name a few. The Club joined forces with United Way and other nonprofits at the outset of the pandemic to provide lunches for our kids that were not able to receive a lunch in school when schools were closed. We have strong relationships with several faith community organizations, including First Christian Church, Second Presbyterian Church, and Eastview Christian Church, to name a few, that have provided either facilities for our use, finances for our programs, or work days by volunteering at the Club and helping with projects that need assistance. From a governmental agency's standpoint, we have a strong

relationship with both the City of Bloomington and the Town of Normal. The City of Bloomington has allowed our Club to purchase property in Sunnyside Park (just down the street from our Clubhouse on Illinois St) for \$1 to build a new facility to allow us to serve even more children in the community.

**Question: What is the biggest challenge facing BAGC in the near term?**

Darren: Space is becoming that much more of a concern as a result of our continuous growth. It's a nice problem to have with so many families wanting their children to become members of the Club, but with more children to serve, we need additional space and staff to address growing needs.

**Question: What opportunity is the most exciting to you personally?**

Darren: The building of a new facility to provide our kids a larger and safer space is the most exciting at this time. Our building is owned by the Bloomington Housing Authority and it is a very outdated building with structural issues that can be costly for us to maintain. Every time we get any significant amount of rain, our basement floods. We use that space for our game room and it becomes unusable for periods of time, and then requires time and money to get it back to where it needs to be to allow our kids to use it again. We pay rent to BHA to use its facility and yet we are the ones that typically pay for any upkeep that needs to be done.

**Question: What opportunities are there for our congregation to become more engaged with BAGC?**

Darren: We are always looking for tutors for our kids. We are also looking for new and exciting programs to be created for those with knowledge and passion on a particular topic to come and share it with our kids. There are also work days at the Club where organizations can come and perform a needed task. Of course, financial support is always welcome. The State of Illinois is in such dire financial straits that we do not receive any consistent funding from the State so we rely so much on community support so we can continue to provide the services we do for our kids.

**Question: What else do you want us to know about BAGC?**

Darren: We are now doing limited tours; if anyone is interested, it just wouldn't be like a tour in past years where people can see the full "hustle and bustle" of what it's like when the building is full of kids taking part in our programs or our Study Hour. The Boys & Girls Club of Bloomington-Normal is led by a very talented staff, a very dedicated Board of Directors and Community Advisory Board, and countless volunteers that make it an organization that I am so proud to be a small part. The BAGC allows kids to have a safe place to go and to spend time with positive role models to help them in any way they can to one day be the smart, caring, and productive adults we know they can be.

**You can learn more about Boys and Girls Club of Bloomington-Normal by visiting their website:**

**<http://www.bgcbn.org>**

## HAPPY FIRST ANNIVERSARY TO OUR COLUMBARIUM WALL!



Here's what we watched in December 2019. We expected to see no change in that view until at least late March, 2020.



To our surprise, there was MAJOR activity on January 31 and February 1, 2020. Thanks to Kelly Martin for monitoring and taking photos!



Eickhoff workers setting up the units, measuring – and re-measuring – to be sure each niche front fits its specific niche exactly.



FEBRUARY 2, 2020

Completed and all cleaned up.

Today, the Memorial Garden is beautiful with the paving, plantings and benches.

In service to God our Creator and Redeemer.

For more information, email [FPCMemorialGarden@gmail.com](mailto:FPCMemorialGarden@gmail.com)