

First Presbyterian Church

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2018

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

04/01 Michele Hopp
04/03 John Eckhart
04/03 Bill Ferger
04/09 Nicole Behmer
04/10 Teyla June Wendt
04/11 Thomas Hopp

04/12 Chuck Hage
04/13 Richard Holtam
04/14 Bill Cole
04/17 Vicki Jones

04/21 Julie Hage
04/26 DeLores Meiners
04/29 Lois Heaton
04/29 Emily Wendt
04/29 Jacob Wendt

APRIL ANNIVERSARIES

04/16 David & Amy Badger

The Belltower

A Monthly Publication of

**First
Presbyterian Church**



Much will probably be made this year of the fact that Easter falls on April 1—the first time it has happened since 1956. If we try to enter into the biblical stories of Jesus’ resurrection through the eyes of those first witnesses, the connections aren’t hard to find. For many it may have seemed like a cruel joke—an April Fools’ bait and switch. Maybe the women went to the wrong tomb. Maybe the appearance of mysterious angelic messengers on the scene was a hallucination. Maybe the encounters between the disciples (male and female) and the risen Jesus were imagined, too. Of course, according to Matthew, Jesus’ opponents tied it all up in a big conspiracy theory—the disciples slipped in past the armed guards, rolled away the stone, and took his body away. But the testimony of those first disciples has prevailed through the ages – what seems impossible is true. Christ has risen!

At its heart Christian faith is all about resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul stakes everything on it. Christ’s resurrection is our own hope of eternal life, but it also has a much more immediate significance. He writes, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” (1Corinthians 15:17) And he explains this more fully in another passage in Romans,

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. (Romans 6:3-6)

Our present day hope is that we are not captive to the sins and failures, the wounds and disappointments of the past. We’re not doomed to repeat them! New beginnings and real change are possible as we follow Jesus in the path of dying to the old and rising with him in newness of life.

Although we do it quite often, I’m cautious about using analogies from nature for Jesus’ resurrection. There is much more to dying and rising with Jesus than just another cycle in the “circle of life.” It opens up the door for real transformation, beginning with each one of us. And that possibility is our hope for our troubled world.

Jesus says that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed planted in a garden, or yeast mixed into a batch of dough. It may not seem like much, but it can lead to tremendous change.

May this season of Easter be a time for each one of us to experience once again the power of Christ's resurrection!

David



Remember Newsletter information to be turned into the office by the 15th of each month.

OUR PURPOSE STATEMENT

As followers of Jesus Christ, we will, by our intentional actions, seek a deeper relationship with God, listen for the Spirit's call to mission in our community, and prayerfully lead others to know the joy of God's love, and to realize God's purpose for life's journey.



The time is fast approaching for graduation. If you have a child, or a grandchild who will be graduating from eighth grade, high school, college, or graduate school, please let the church office know the graduate's name, where they are graduating from, and also send a paragraph telling the church family about their future plans.

Kenya Corner- Churches in Kenya

The vast majority of Kenyans, about 85%, are Christians. Of Kenyan Christians, about half are Protestant and represent a wide range of denominations, including the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Kenyan Constitution. Most Kenyans consider themselves religious and attend weekly worship services.

April Prayer Guide

Thank you all for your prayers, gifts, rides, hugs, cards, encouraging words, and time. You don't know how much each of your prayers etc., keep me and David going.

Thank you, Lorri

APRIL PRAYER GUIDE

Please ask God to forgive us and our nation for not helping the poor, the widow and orphan, the lonely, the foreigner, the stranger, not sharing, for worshipping materialism and not God. Help us to share and live out the gospel.

Pray that we listen to Jesus' words and share God's good news! Praise Him for His death and resurrection. Praise God for the free gift of life and His Holy Spirit. Help us have the joy of Christ.

Thank you for other people, animals, birds, plants, clean water, and all of nature's beauty that You Lord created.

Pray for Kenya, Malawi, India, Syria, the South Sudan, the DR of Congo, and many other places in the world who have been suffering from flooding or drought, war, violence, and evil. Thank you for our partner church, and that Pastor Joe and family are safe during flooding. Be with places where people are neglected. Help us to care with Your heart. Thank you Dear Lord!!

Notes from the Session – February 2018

The Session met for its monthly meeting on February 27, 2018. Pastor Spaulding led the session in worship, including a time of prayer for the joys and concerns of the church.

Pastor Spaulding reported that our new liaison with the Commission on Ministry of Blackhawk Presbytery will be the Rev. Christina Berry, Pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Sterling.

Buildings and Grounds has been in contact with an electrician who will present them with some ideas on updating the sanctuary lighting.

Christian Education reported that we had 15 campers for Presidents' Day Camp. The March Dinner and Movie night was also well attended.

Finance Committee is looking at other options for funds currently invested in CDs to find better returns. The committee will create a schedule of special offerings and fundraisers to try to avoid overlapping efforts.

Innermission is making plans to do an updated photo directory.

Mission Witness presented, and session approved, a proposal for a youth-adult mission trip to the Urban Immersion Service Retreat in Minneapolis, June 17-23. Jeremy Garbat-Welch our PC(USA) mission worker in Malawi will be here on June 11.

Worship Committee presented concerns about the decreasing numbers of people serving as fellowship hosts on Sunday mornings. The Maundy Thursday service will be at First Baptist Church this year.

Presbyterian Women reported that they will host a blood drive on August 23. Session approved a request to host the Dixon Area Christian Women's Fall Fest luncheon on October 12, pending obtaining Health Dept. permits to host a public event.

Priscilla Brickley report on the February meeting of *Blackhawk Presbytery*. David Gambrell of the PC(USA) Office of Theology and Worship made a presentation about the revised Directory for Worship in the Book of Order and the new *Book of Common Worship*, which will be released this spring. It was announced that Stronghold had a very successful year and 2017 and came very close to breaking even financially. Presbytery approved forgiving previous years' debts. Churches are being asked to send LED light bulbs to the June presbytery meeting to help Stronghold modernize its lighting.

Pastor Spaulding shared plans to attend a continuing education event at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, March 11-15

Notes from the Session – March 2018

The session met for its monthly meeting on Tuesday, March 20. Rev. Spaulding led opening worship which included a reading and discussion of the story of Jesus' washing the disciples' feet in John 13. What does it mean for a leader to be a servant of all?

The committees reported their joys and concerns:

- *Worship* shared some ideas about reviving interest in providing flowers for Sunday services and ways to encourage folks to volunteer to serve as ushers, greeters and fellowship hosts.
- *Buildings and Grounds* gave updates on ongoing projects.
- *Christian Education* shared that the Confirmation Program is in process and that we anticipate celebrating two high graduates in May. Publicity materials are being readied for this summer's Day Camp.
- *Finance and Personnel* reported an operating deficit for the fiscal year at the end of February. In itself this isn't unusual, since giving isn't even throughout the year. However, we carried a very small balance into the new year, so the deficit is appearing earlier than in previous years. The committee will be monitoring the situation carefully.
- *Innerness* will offer another opportunity for church family members to provide emergency contact information to the church office, in the event that there's a need to communicate with out-of-town family members in a time of need.
- *Mission and Witness* shared that a bake sale planned for March 18 to support our Kenya Partnership was postponed.

Pastor Spaulding

- noted that the session members all have received a copy of the current *Book of Order*, and that he will provide some orientation to it at the next meeting, followed by a study of the Directory for Worship in the months ahead.

- led a discussion of the Belltower. Due to changes in the postal system, the delivery date for the Belltower has become very unpredictable. Efforts are being made to get in the mail earlier, and copies of the next month's Sunday volunteer roster will be made available in the narthex before the end of the month. There was some discussion of the future of the Belltower—discontinuing bulk mailings, only publishing electronically, etc. It was agreed that for the present, bulk mailings will continue.

Update on Lorri

As always, thank you for your constant prayers and all the other ways you have shown love and support as we continue on this challenging journey.

As we shared last month, an MRI in February showed that one of the lesions in Lorri's brain had begun growing again. We were able to schedule an appointment at the Mayo Clinic, and on March 7, Lorri underwent a form of radiation treatment called "Gamma Knife"—a high-intensity dose of radiation targeted very precisely to treat that lesion and the vestiges of another one left from her earlier treatment. The doctors were very positive about the treatment's ability to control these growths, possibly eliminating them completely. It all went very smoothly with negligible side-effects. We were able to drive home immediately after the procedure. They will do a follow-up MRI in three months.

Meanwhile, Lorri's blood counts dropped severely once again, making it necessary for her to have a transfusion on March 13, and for her to be taken off the targeted therapy medication until her counts could recover. (Just as I'm writing this Lorri heard from her oncologist that her counts have rebounded, so she's back on the medication.)

We're thankful that these events have been manageable, and are thankful for some of the incredible advances that are being made. I (David) am especially thankful for this congregation's and our neighbors' support – including dog sitters who made it possible for us to travel to Mayo and those who took Lorri to appointments while I was away doing continuing education.

David and Lorri

Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I've Loved, by Kate Bowler (Random House, 2018)

One day as I was driving around town, I heard part of an interview with Kate Bowler, author of *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I've Loved*. Dr. Bowler is a young assistant professor at Duke Divinity School, who specializes in American religious history. I was taken by the interview because Kate Bowler is a very engaging person to listen to, because it's unusual to find a clearly Christian author received so positively on the particular program I was listening to, and because her book is memoir and reflection on her ongoing struggle with stage four colon cancer.

She arrives at that part of the story in due course, but she lays the groundwork by letting her readers know quite a bit about herself. She grew up on the Canadian prairie in a Mennonite family, married her middle school sweetheart, studied at Yale and Duke, where she was offered a professorship immediately after completing her doctorate. An ongoing irony and theme of her story is that her doctoral dissertation was a study of the history of the "prosperity gospel" in America. So as a student and scholar she has spent countless hours interviewing leaders and members of congregations who believe that God's plan for all believers is prosperity – material, family, health – in the present world. And the only impediment to enjoying these things is one's own lack of faith.

Prior to her cancer diagnosis Kate had experienced a couple of medical challenges. She had a mysterious debilitating neuro-muscular condition that defied diagnosis by the medical profession. (To avoid being a "spoiler," I won't tell you the story of how it was eventually resolved). She and her husband also faced fertility issues, which also were ultimately addressed so that she became the mother of a baby boy.

Kate writes – and presumably lives – with a great deal of passion, obviously deeply in love with her husband, her son, and life in general. When she received the cancer diagnosis as a new mother in her mid-thirties, her world was turned upside down. The cancer was so advanced that she immediately began preparing to die, but after the initial shock took up the struggle to live.

In many ways her story continues as a cancer story. She tells of the battle she fought to qualify, and for her insurance to cover, an experimental treatment. It's a story of weekly trips from her home in North Carolina to Emory University in Atlanta for treatment, of side effects and tests, of being unable to work at the job she loves.

It is also the story of a spiritual journey. She retraces her steps through the months and seasons of the church year—Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time—reflecting on her spiritual questions, and her own attachment to the easy, but ultimately empty answers provided by the prosperity theology that is so prevalent in American Christianity.

Because she has written about her experiences, including an article that was published in the NY Times, she has received an abundance of advice, empty platitudes, and admonishment from a wide variety of people. Kate's story doesn't lead to any simple answers. She says that her greatest spiritual learning is how fully confident she has become in the love of God.

This is an engaging book, one that gives a deep but personal reflection on some of faith's most challenging questions.