

First Presbyterian Church

110 East Third Street

Dixon, IL 61021

Phone: (815) 284-7741

Fax: (815) 284-6725

Email: firstprespastor@grics.net

Email: firstpresoffice@grics.net

Website: www.fpcdixon.com

NON PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 212
DIXON, IL 61021

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



2018

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

02/04 Janette Rugh
02/08 Virginia Eckhart
02/08 Emily Dempsey
02/13 Mary Lou Gaffey
02/14 Sue Coers

02/14 Millie Saathoff
02/15 Lorraine Spaulding
02/16 Don Gaffey
02/18 Linda Ebbens
02/19 Jane Landreth
02/20 Keith Rugh

02/22 Elizabeth Presley
02/23 Helen Branson
02/26 Sophia Wendt
02/29 Christian Hage

FEBRUARY ANNIVERSARIES

02/28 Dean & Jane Sheaffer

The Belltower

A Monthly Publication of

First Presbyterian Church

Dixon, IL 61021



Pastor's Note

(As has become my practice, I am reproducing here my annual report to the congregation, since the Belltower ordinarily reaches a larger audience than the Annual Report booklet. Copies of the Annual Report are still available in the narthex. – David)

Pastor's Annual Report 2017

I don't like the idea of leading off my Annual Report, or for any report for that matter, with personal matters, but Lorri's journey with cancer played a major role in shaping my ministry with the church in 2017. I'm grateful for your patience and grace as I have taken time away, sometimes unexpectedly, to be with Lorri through hospitalizations in May and August, and trips to Rochester and Davenport for appointments, tests, and treatments. At many times, especially through the middle of the year when even Lorri's short-term prognosis was uncertain, I know that my work for the church was reduced to just getting from Sunday from Sunday.

Through it all, I've been thankful to have a job that affords the flexibility to be able to set my own schedule, and I've been equally thankful for the medical insurance provided through the Board of Pensions. I'm grateful for all your expressions of love and concern, for your prayers for us, for gestures of practical assistance that I know may not have seemed like much to you but meant the world to us, and for the generous gifts that allowed us to enjoy our frugal selves a bit more than we might have on our vacation in Hawaii this spring. And above all I'm thankful for Lorri's faith, hope and persistence—her unwillingness to give up or feel sorry for herself—for Lorri teaching Sunday School and singing in the choir and walking the dog. I'm not sure how we would have made it this far without God's grace and power made visible in your love.

My experience over the past 18 months or so has given me a new perspective on what it means to lead this church. At the end of the GPS process, the GPS Team, session and I, presented you with a broad framework for following Jesus into the future, embodied in our Purpose Statement. From the outset it has been a challenge to discern steps to take, which could potentially grow into new habits and ways of living around the themes of growing deeper in our relationship with God, following Jesus in the community in new forms of mission, and sharing the joy of knowing his love. It has been a bigger challenge to start in a new direction and then be able to sustain it.

If all we had to do was launch new initiatives and nurture new habits this would be a lot easier. In presenting the purpose statement at the end of 2015, we showed a video of people trying to rebuild an airplane while it's flying. When we already have a lot on our plates just sustaining the things we're already doing—doing new things or doing things differently can take more energy than we feel like we have. But the thing I've grown to appreciate more deeply in the last 18 months is that we all have other challenges in our lives beyond participating in the church, that sometimes just getting from one Sunday—or one day—to the next feels like a victory. If I feel that way having the privilege to work 40 or 50 hours a week for the church, how much more is that the case for you!

So what would a “doable” goal look like for this new year? It might be as simple as committing to work on one new “habit” or “lifestyle change” in each area of the our purpose statement – one new spiritual practice that we can sustain, one new form of mission we can give consistent energy to, one new practice for inviting someone to join in this blessed way of life to which we have been called by the grace of God.

This time has given me a renewed appreciation for how important the ordinary work of preaching, praying, leading worship, and giving pastoral care is. I'm blessed to be able to spend my days doing this work, and blessed to be able to do it here in Dixon with you.

Respectfully submitted,
The Rev. Dr. David A. Spaulding, Pastor



The time is fast approaching for graduation. If you have a child, or a grandchild that 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.



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.

Presidents' Day Camp

On February 19, 2018 First Presbyterian Church Dixon, IL in conjunction with Stronghold Camp will be hosting **Presidents' Day Camp** for students in 1st grade through 6th grade. Cost for the day camp is FREE. Lunch and snacks will be served. The day will include activities, crafts and Bible study. Contact the church office at 815-284-7741 to register. Then complete a registration form for each child attending. Registration forms can be picked up at the church office or can be found on our church website **fpcdixon.com**. Completed forms can be dropped off in the church office or emailed to firstpresoffice@grics.net Space is limited so register soon.

Thank You

Thank you, everyone, for your kindness and compassion. Life sometimes is very hard but friends and family always make it easier. So do not be sad, Don is fine now.

Love, Darlene Montague

Update on Lorri

We didn't travel east after Christmas—the weather forecasts didn't look good and Lorri was still recovering from the side effect issues. But Anne and Christine were here for several days, so we had a good family Christmas here in Dixon. The new year has begun on a good note. After the transfusions in December and withdrawal of the targeted therapy medication, Lorri was able to resume the medication at a lower dosage early in January. So far the bloodwork results have been good. Treatment moves forward. She has a follow-up with her oncologist at the end of January. Thank you, as always, for your prayers, concern, and encouragement.

Prayer Guide for February 2018

Ask Jesus to show us our sins and ask for forgiveness from people you've hurt and from Jesus.

Praise and thank God for the ordinary things He gives us every day.

Pray for people in the military or have been in the military, some without limbs, brain injuries, PTSD, the homeless, and those who are depressed. Help them get medical, financial, work and psychological help. Pray that they connect with whoever is needed.

Pray for all—that God would help those with the flu or other illnesses this winter. That God would help keep us from the serious illnesses. Pray for nurses and doctors during this time as they try their best to help.

Ask God, in faith, to bring more people to our church. Also, help us share with others the love of Christ, and what a difference He makes in our lives. Lord, help lead us to people who need you and give us boldness to share or invite them to church.

Pray for those struggling to make it. Those who feel trapped in financial trouble, abuse, or are depressed or insecure. Help us help someone if we are able or direct them toward someone who can.

Notes from the Session - January 2018

The session met on January 20 for its first meeting of 2018.

Session members are: David Badger, Priscilla Brickley, Tom Cartwright, Carolyn McBride, Lori McNally, Millie Saathoff, Lance Schaefer, Susie Smith, Toni Vella.

Pastor Spaulding led the members in worship including a reading from Luke 9:51-62, the sharing of joys and concerns, and prayers for the church family.

Session:

- approved the use of church facilities for the wedding of Craig Ritchie and Mary Garcia on June 16, 2018; Rev. Spaulding will officiate.
- approved a request from the Hage family to have Christian's Eagle Scout ceremony on a date to be finalized.
- noted the deaths of David Katner (January 5) and Donald Montague (January 11)

Annual Appointments for 2018:

- Trustees – David Badger, Carolyn McBride, Lance Schaefer
- Treasurer – Toni Vella
- Clerk of Session – Cathy Anderson
- Presbytery Commissioner – Priscilla Brickley

Committee Assignments

- Buildings and Grounds – Schaefer (chair), Cartwright
- Christian Education – Saathoff (committee member Phil Vella will continue to serve as chair)
- Finance & Personnel – Badger (chair)

- Innermission – McNally (chair), Smith
- Mission and Witness – T. Vella (chair)
- Worship – McBride (chair), Brickley
- Nominating Committee – session representatives are McNally (chair) and Smith

Observances of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper were approved for the year.

Regular meetings of the session will be at 6:30 p.m. on the third Tuesday of the month, unless announced otherwise.

The committees reported.

- *Buildings and Grounds* reported that the carpets on the lower level have been cleaned. The upper level will be deferred until spring. The committee discussed working on upgrading the sanctuary lighting in 2018.
- *Christian Education* – the confirmation mentoring program has begun with Dani Topping and Noah Hage. David and Amy Badger as serving as their mentors. Presidents' Day Camp will be on February 19.
- *Finance* reported that the operating deficit going into December was covered by December giving. The proposed 2018 budget, including the recommended terms of call for the pastor, was approved to be presented at the annual meeting.
- *Innermission* cares regularly for our church family. Part of this is sharing bereavement resources with families that have experienced a death.
- *Mission and Witness* shared its proposals for final expenditures from the 2017 budget for local mission. In addition to \$500 given to Dixon Habitat for Humanity early in the year, \$2,000 was approved in December for PADS' building renovation project. The final grants were \$500 to Dixon Emergency Needs, \$250 to CASA, and \$250 to Sinnissippi.
- *Worship* reported that the new recording unit for the organ will be installed in January. Clea Arbogast is helping as an accompanist while Crystal Green is on a maternity break.

The pastor reported:

- Session designated the pastor's housing allowance for 2018 and renewed the Health Reimbursement Authorization Plan.
- He shared his annual report.
- He suggested that the session meet for a Saturday retreat in February or March; a suitable date is being explored.
- At the pastor's request the February session meeting will be on Tuesday, February 27.

What I've Been Reading

Pastor David Spaulding

Aurora by Kim Stanley Robinson (Hachette Book Group, 2015)

Almost eight years ago I began writing this column as a way for you to get to know me, the new pastor. I thought that by sharing what I've been reading you might get some insight into who I am, what I find interesting, and the sorts of things I think about. But with the exception of the books I've shared that have a direct connection to Christian faith, I haven't made much of an effort to draw biblical or theological connections explicitly, especially fiction.

In my doctoral work I studied how narrative literature “works.” Along the way I came across a dictum, which I’ve always attributed to the philosopher Paul Ricoeur, although I’ve never been able to find the exact quote. It says, in essence, that nonfiction writing connects the reader to what is possible, while fiction writing connects the reader to what is real. In other words, good fiction gives us a space to discover and explore deeper understandings and truths. I think of reading fiction as a journey in which we leave the ordinary world we inhabit, travel in our imaginations to a world created by an author, and come back with new perspectives on the world we live in.

Science fiction and fantasy writing do this the most intentionally since the worlds these genres create are so far removed from ours. In a sense they’re the equivalent of the mythologies of ancient peoples. We approach them knowing that they aren’t literal representations of the world or its history, but intended to connect us, as Ricoeur says, to what is real.

My interest in science fiction goes back to elementary school, and has been an on-and-off thing ever since. It began with classic authors including Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, and Arthur C. Clark. A more recent discovery has been Kim Stanley Robinson. It began with his Mars trilogy *Red Mars*, *Green Mars*, and *Blue Mars*. Unlike the worlds created in films like the Star Wars and Star Trek franchises, Robinson’s novels take technological possibilities seriously—there’s no traveling faster than the speed of light, or people “beaming” from one place to another, or encounters with intelligent races from other planets. Robinson is also interested in how human societies might develop under new conditions, which allows for some insight into the “real.”

Aurora begins on the closing leg of a multi-generational journey from earth to colonize a distant planet. The ship is a massive Noah’s ark, containing a set of biomes, mimicking different earth ecologies and supplying a sustainable environment and food supply for the approximately 1,000 members of the crew. Everything is recycled, of course, and supplies of basic chemicals carried from earth are used to synthesize materials that are needed—printed with sophisticated 3-D printers. The whole process is managed through a massive computer system (and its human overseers, for the most part), which also becomes the narrator of the story.

The human element is carried by Freya, who begins the story as a child and is an older woman when it ends. In a society driven by technology she becomes the relational and emotional center that holds the community together through its struggles, which are many.

Without giving away too much, the crew arrives at its destination, a planet which they name Aurora. Robinson sets it up with realistic complications—gravity that isn’t quite the same of earth’s gravity, a climate that presents major challenges, a sun and planetary orbit that don’t replicate days or seasons identical to those on earth. Efforts to settle on Aurora fail disastrously and the project has to be abandoned. This generates a crisis—what is the next step for these explorers, a 160-plus year journey from home where even radio signals take a dozen years to travel each way, in a ship that is deteriorating from its long journey? The crisis also reveals the human shortcomings of this experiment of long distance travel, made more severe by violent disagreements about how to proceed—struggles over what it means to live in a democracy, constrained by technological and environmental crises. The crisis doesn’t lead to a simple, happy ending for all, while Freya and increasingly the ship’s computer take the leadership to preserve the community’s life.

It’s a big novel, actually more successful in portraying the human element than the Mars trilogy, which eventually ran off the rails in that respect. While painting a believable picture of the science, it is also good fiction that leads the reader to explore our humanity. As with most science fiction there is no religious or even vaguely spiritual life in this community—few writers are willing to speculate about what Christianity or any form of faith might look like a few hundred years from now. One has to wonder how people of faith would live in that environment, and how the experience and language of faith might reach to the stars.