

# First Presbyterian Church

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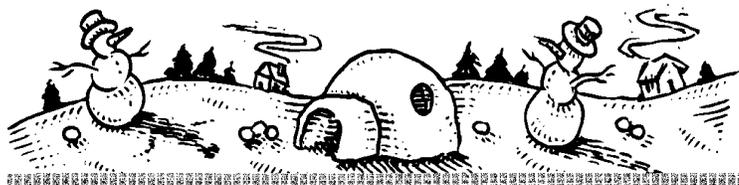
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*January 2018*

## JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

01/01 Wendell Ebbens  
01/04 Gladys Burnell  
01/08 Susie Smith  
01/12 Roger Hartman  
01/13 Bob Dimmig

01/13 Donald Hill  
01/15 Bonnie Cumberland  
01/15 Grace Dempsey  
01/16 Landon Dempsey  
01/20 Cheryl Mills  
01/20 Dani Topping  
01/23 Fred Bantrup

01/24 Alan Hopp  
01/27 Betty Mayfield  
01/29 Glenna Beckman  
01/29 Nancy Wadsworth  
01/30 Missy Shurson  
01/30 Stephanie Longtin  
01/31 Staci Beckman

## JANUARY ANNIVERSARIES

01/01 Gordon & Faye Nicklaus

01/19 Phil & Toni Vella

# The Belltower

A Monthly Publication of

**First Presbyterian Church  
Dixon, IL 61021**



As followers of Jesus Christ,  
we will, by our intentional actions ,  
seek a closer 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.

When we adopted this as the purpose statement for First Presbyterian Church a little over two years ago, it was a major milestone for the GPS Team that led the way in creating it and for the session which then adopted it as our guiding principle for serving Christ together in this particular community of faith. At the time we were all a bit anxious that after a long process of team meetings, session retreats and congregational listening sessions, we didn't come back down off the mountain, so to speak, with a more definite and concrete plan. And in the years that followed there have been no major new programs, no redesign of the worship service, no new staffing models or building projects. So what came out of all that time and effort? Has it made any difference two years down the road?

In hindsight I see a few very significant things. They may not be highly structured or formal, but are still foundational for our life as a church in the years ahead. This list is not comprehensive I'm sure, but touches the main themes:

1. When the GPS Team met for the first time, the conversation centered around the theme of *survival*. The big questions were about our ability to keep our doors open. The conversation has shifted to the theme of *faithfulness* – not how we can hold on to the way things have been, but how can we be the most faithful group of Christ-followers possible in this particular time and place.
2. Through the GPS process a core group of members of our church family and leadership devoted themselves to the deepest, most prayerful, most intentional, and most sustained quest to understand God's purpose for a congregation that I have ever experienced in my 26 years in pastoral ministry and 40-plus years in the church. It's common for those who were in that conversation to recall specific themes and learnings in other conversations today. It continues to focus us and fuel us.
3. We grew to a conviction that we share a certain ethos that defines and sustains us. It's important that this church is present among all the options there are to worship Christ in Dixon—that our forms of worship, while rooted in a definite tradition, are not just a matter of habit. We choose the music we sing, the forms we follow, and the way the Word is proclaimed intentionally as a reflection of the living values of our community. We have realized that our way of loving God with both our hearts and minds makes a valuable contribution to the Church's witness in Dixon.
4. That mission matters more than ever. Our call from God is to make a difference in the community and world—that doing things in ways that are hands-on and relational is essential to being faithful to that call.

I could go on. By making the purpose statement the major product of the GPS process, we are challenged to consider how the Lord is calling each one of us to embody what God has called First Presbyterian Church to be and do. How will each of us *intentionally* seek a deeper relationship with God this year? How will you *intentionally* listen to—and follow—Jesus' call to do his work in this community? How will we *intentionally and prayerfully* help the people in our circles discover the joy of God's love and the abundant life that comes as we live according to God's purposes?

If we seek and do these things—not just pay lip service to them—but pray about them and ponder them, let them become the subject matter of committee meetings and classes and session meetings, let them become our personal goals—the future of our church is bright regardless of how circumstances might change. Because we will be in the place and doing the work God has called us together to do.

A Blessed 2018 to All,  
David



Remember Newsletter information to be turned into the office by the 15<sup>th</sup> 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.

### ***Kenya Corner***

Kenya is a country of over 48 million people in East Africa. It is on the equator and surrounded by Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Tanzania. Although 69 different languages are spoken in Kenya, British English and Swahili are the principle languages.

### ***Buddy Bags***

The Mission Witness Committee is asking your support to help provide weekend meals for needy children in Dixon through the Buddy Bags program. We are collecting the same items as we did last year: applesauce cups, pasta cups, individual cereal boxes, chicken noodle soup, and fruit snack, (or any other item from the main list). We so appreciate your past generosity, and thank you for your continued support for this important local mission.

### ***Meals on Wheels***

A sign up sheet for volunteers to serve **Meals on Wheels** on January 8-19, 2018, is in the narthex. We encourage you to sign up for 1 or 2 times or more if you can. We have 4 routes from Monday through Friday. We meet by Door 7 in the KSB Hospital Parking Garage on Crawford Ave at 11:10 am. It will take just about an hour depending on how many meals you have to deliver.

**Meals on Wheels** is one of the local missions of **Presbyterian Women**. The meals are prepared by KSB Hospital and delivered by church volunteers. Your assistance and support for this program is appreciated.

## *January Prayer Guide*

Pray for our country and its leaders- that they and we would be guided by God's Holy Spirit.

Pray for the poor. Pray for ways we as a church and individuals can be led to help the poor and those in need.

Pray that new people, young and old, would come to our church. Help us reach out, invite, and include new people.

Help us be accepting of the change we as a church need to make. Help us all to listen to you, Lord, and to listen to each other with your love. Help us to be more effective witnesses of Jesus' love and grace.

Pray for the lonely, those in pain, and those with chronic diseases. Praise God for a new year, the seasons, and be grateful for little things each day.

### **Update on Lorri**

December so far has been a mixed month. It began on a high note. Our insurance approved Lorri for the new targeted therapy drug and she began taking it at the end of November. We're thankful, given how new and expensive it is, that it was approved with no out-of-pocket cost for us. However, after about two weeks blood tests showed that Lorri's platelet counts had dropped dramatically, and to date she has had two transfusions to counter this. In the meantime she's had to discontinue the treatment until her counts improve. This is a common side-effect and we're hopeful that she will be able to resume treatment with an adjustment to the dosage. Anne and Christine will be here for Christmas, and if all goes well we will drive back to western NY to visit our extended families after Christmas. Knowing how many challenges so many of you face in your own lives, we're thankful beyond words for your encouragement and prayers.

### **Notes from the Session - December 2017**

The session met on December 19 for its monthly meeting.

Pastor Spaulding led the members in worship including the Advent litany, the "O Antiphons," a reading from Isaiah 61, the sharing of joys and concerns, and prayers for the church family.

Session:

- received Arnold and Eleanor Waring as members of the congregation by transfer from United Presbyterian Church, Washington, IA.
- approved a request from Cub Scout Pack 196 to use the church building for a Holiday Party and sleepover, December 29-30.
- discussed several proposed amendments to the church by-laws and recommended that they be presented to the congregation for approval at the annual meeting in January.
- noted the death of Alvin Moine on December 8.

The committees reported.

- *Finance* reported that the operating deficit decreased in November, although there are a number of items to be paid by year-end. 2018 pledges returned to date amount to about \$138,000, well ahead of last year's pace. Session approved a recommendation to pay the custodian at a higher rate for duties performed for the church's convenience at unusual hours or that go beyond the ordinary scope of her responsibilities.
- *Innermission* is sending Christmas cards.
- *Mission and Witness* shared its proposals for expenditures from the 2017 budget for local mission. Session approved a recommendation to designate the offering at the Christmas Eve Service for a project in Kiangua Parish in Kenya, the purchase of a van for the school operated by the parish.
- *Worship* reported that the new recording unit for the organ will be installed in early January. The pastor has been working on accompanists to fill in while Crystal Green is taking time off for a maternity leave.
- *Buildings and Grounds* reported that the carpets on the lower level have been cleaned. The upper level will be done after Christmas. The committee discussed working on upgrading the sanctuary lighting in 2018.
- *Christian Education* reported that the confirmation program will begin in January. It will use a mentoring model, supplemented by the confirmands attending the presbytery's confirmation retreat at Stronghold. The President's Day Camp will be on February 19.

The pastor reported:

- The installation of the elders elected at the special congregational meeting in December will be held on January 7.
- He will be on vacation December 26-January 3.

Schedule notes:

- The January committee meetings have been moved to the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>.
- The annual meeting will be on January 28 following the worship service.

## What I've Been Reading - Pastor David Spaulding

*Washington: A Life*, by Ron Chernow (Penguin)

I was drawn to Ron Chernow's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of George Washington by two things. I have a long track record of reading massive biographies of American presidents (I'm still waiting for the next volume of Robert Caro's bio of Lyndon Johnson). Also, my experience with Chernow's *Alexander Hamilton* led to me to believe that writing about this period in American history is probably in Chernow's wheelhouse. On the other hand, at some point in my adult life I had already read a big biography of Washington, so I wondered if there might be much new here to discover.

Chernow doesn't disappoint. Although Hamilton and Washington were two very different personalities, Chernow makes Washington's story just as vivid. Compared to other things I've read, he provides a rich psychological portrait of America's first president. Through his detailed – sometimes *too* detailed—accounts of his private life, ranging from his complicated relationship with his mother, to the financial struggles brought on by decades of public service and fame, to his well-known (but often inaccurately portrayed) dental problems—we get a much more human picture of a person who can often seem no deeper than his portrait on the dollar bill.

Part of this complex picture is Washington's role a slaveholder. As with other founders of the nation, especially his fellow Virginians, it was an issue Washington struggled with. As time went on he recognized the moral evil of slavery, but hesitated to take any action, even with the people he personally held in bondage. The more understandable part of it (perhaps) was political. Given the central role he played in the revolution and as president, he feared that taking a public stand would have jeopardized the stability of a new nation just trying to find his way. He was also concerned, also perhaps justifiably, about the impact the sudden emancipation of so many would have on them and on society. So he gravitated toward a position of supporting the gradual ending of slavery. In his own case he made arrangements in his will to free the persons held by his family. The less excusable part was economic. To emancipate those slaves would have forced to him to forego his own wealth and social standing, something he couldn't bring himself to do. It's interesting to muse over how the course of history might have changed if Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and others had made that sacrifice.

It is also striking how embattled Washington was through his entire time as president. Even his relatively modest ways of trying to establish a presidential residence, first in New York and later in Philadelphia, were met with sharp criticism. There was excessive fear that he would try to become a king by another name. It's also revealing how great a shadow the French Revolution cast over his presidency – how the fears of royalist oppression or bloody revolutionary chaos drove the American politics of the time. He was attacked in the press for being too close to the British, and for being too closely aligned with the French—and the press was even by today's standards extremely partisan.

In this time when ideological polarization seems lead to distorted pictures of our nation's founding, Chernow's *Washington* leads us back to a greater appreciation of how complex those times were. Perhaps more than anyone else George Washington, whose greatness was rooted as much in his character—both public and private, was the glue that held the nation together through those initial tumultuous years. If you're looking for a big book to snuggle up with on a long, cold winter night, *Washington* would be good choice.