



Living Faith

Preparing The Way For The Lord In Our Own Lives

You are invited to join our Bible Study every Sunday at 9:15am in the library at First Presbyterian Church of Paw Paw. At the recent October 8 meeting we discussed preparing the way for the Lord and we sincerely hope these highlights encourage you to visit our friendly family. "See you there!"

Tom Shoemaker: How do we prepare the way and make straight the path for the Lord in our own lives? It's called on in scripture that we prepare a way to make straight a path to hear the message of the Lord and that applies to all of us. So I would throw that question out for us to open up our conversation this morning. What are we doing in our own lives to prepare the way for the Lord? It's important that we take time to focus ourselves around what spiritually nourishes us so we can receive the word of the Lord. There are many signs out there that validate our beliefs and we must be open to hearing them.

Royal Haefner: I was concerned that when I quit teaching I would drift away from faith and I did not want that to happen so I make it a point to stay in the Bible. I have favorite parts in the Bible that I read and reread. I like Romans chapter 8 because that kind of sums things up for me and I get a lot out of that one. That's what I need. I'm not good at memorizing things but I find that memorizing scripture is helpful. Once in a while I get rusty and it starts slipping away from me and I go back to the Bible and "How is that worded now?" The Bible is the root of our beliefs. It is the most important thing to me because it is God's word. There are so many inspirational books that you can read but if you really want the truth it's in the Bible.

Dave Nielsen: The Gospel of Mark starts out with the story of John the Baptist and Mark's saying that this is a fulfillment of the Old Testament: Prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. How does that apply to us? There was a point in each of our faith journeys where we decided we had to get on the road and that road had to be made straight. Who (or what) was your mentor when you decided to take that step? In college, for example, I wanted to know Jesus but I did not want to be a hypocrite and so my pastor set me in the right direction. The Bible is the root but sometimes you need someone else to explain Bible passages in such a way that you get a better understanding of it. They, then, prepare a path forward. They are preparing a path for God to find us. Isn't that kind of a two-way street?

Tom Shoemaker: We need to be open to that avenue. There comes a time where we will be open to receiving that Word. We look to scriptures for a way to straighten that path. We look to mentors and guides for a way to straighten that path. We look for examples in the world around us for people who are walking that path.

Dave Nielsen: The person that helps the most with that finding or that reconciliation is Jesus.

Tom Shoemaker: How do you make straight the path in your life?

New in the Library Kiosk



Please browse our Library Kiosk for the dozen or so new books we rotate into it each month.

A book that caught our attention in November's Kiosk is "Let Us Pray" because, honestly, it's hard coming up with engaging opening and closing prayers every time, isn't it? The small book is

also called "A minister's prayer book" and, while at the Kiosk, you can immediately check it out of the library.

Look at page 39: "Father, I ain't what I want to be, I ain't what I ought to be, I ain't what I'm going to be, But thank you, Father, I ain't what I used to be."

Support West Michigan Mentoring

KPEP residential facility, formerly known as the Red Arrow Motel, is a residential facility for people who need more structure than probation after they leave our local jails. In reality these are men and an occasional woman who have literally nowhere to go while they serve their probation.

When they are released from jail they usually only have the clothes they were wearing when they were arrested. The West Michigan Mentoring group meets there once a week to offer Christian support in the way of rides to appointments and help with jobs and access to services. Tom Shoemaker and Sue Zygadlo are members of this group. Their needs are often brought to our congregation and your help is much appreciated.

Our Mission Committee provides backpacks filled with personal products. Once in a while the congregation will be asked to donate some of these products that are needed by the people. There is always a need for mentors and prayers.

Mission Committee



At the recent World Communion Sunday

Living Faith

Decatur Presbyterian: An Earth Care Congregation

Will you take the Earth Care Pledge? It's a Presbyterian thing but that's OK. First Presbyterian Church of Decatur is a certified "Earth Care Congregation" and project leader Judy Kish reports in



Decatur's Good News Newsletter their 2024 spring project is taking shape and she's looking for eager teens and young adult volunteers because her over-60 crew is still aching from last spring. Leave her a message at 269-423-4981.

In their last project they filled multiple garbage bags during their clean-up of M-51 from 75th Avenue to Paw Paw Road. No returnable bottles and cans were found meaning Michigan's deposit law is working and they saw a decrease in fast food and litter too. "But a regular trail of mini-liquor bottles was definitely evident," they report, unfortunately.

So just what is the Earth Care Pledge that 1st Pres Decatur is certified in? Do an internet search for **pcusa certified earth care congregation** and learn all about this exciting project.

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Editor Chuck Williams aroundvanburen@gmail.com



a new direction for our newsletter

With the outset of email and social media, churches have found these various tools to be vital pieces of communication for congregations. Here we've been utilizing a *Weekly Update* via email for over a year, along with Facebook postings, and we're finding these venues help keep people better informed on congregation life than a traditional monthly newsletter. In fact many churches have done away with the monthly newsletter in favor of other creative communication avenues.

So, like many other churches, we will be living into a transition of our monthly newsletter from a mainly events-and-dates emphasis into a discipleship-and-faith-story emphasis. Sure, we'll still carry information on events, but you will notice a change in direction.

The newsletter will begin to reflect to the congregation who we are as a people of faith to ourselves and to the community. Moreover, the emphasis will no longer just be on the pastor sharing faith perspectives, but from a myriad of voices amongst ourselves.

Why? Because we grow from other people's stories in our own faith and discipleship!

Then, in a world where younger generations are asking, "What is church?", this transition will help in assisting all of us to be better witnesses of Christ's transforming presence and power. Furthermore, in a world where Christianity desperately needs credibility, this transition will help us live into this.

We invite you to write about your faith journey or reflections for the newsletter

We invite you to share stories, essays, thoughts, devotionals, and poems, etc. Pictures and art can be submitted too!

Your faith story can be up to one page or as simple as one paragraph. Photos should include a short description. If you're under 18, include your parent's permission.

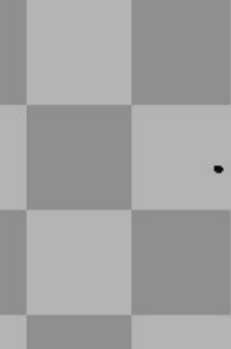
Send your faith story to Chuck Williams at aroundvanburen@gmail.com. He'll get in touch with you to let you know when we're planning to use it. We reserve the right to edit submissions but we'll contact you if there will be any major changes.

Whatever works for you! It may be easier to text/voice Chuck at 269-621-5359 or simply talk to him at church. Or place it in his mailbox at church. "If we can sit down together in a quiet room at church where I can take notes, that would be best," he says.

Please no politics or writing to change other people's minds. We are sharing our faith struggles, joys, and journeys together here. Remember, we are PCUSA.

Sharing your faith journey, your relationship with our church, and your passions in life and mission are what this is all about. So if you're interested in sharing ongoing stories about your own faith journey or your thoughts on faith, this is for you. Have suggestions for people Chuck can interview? Let us know.

Chuck Williams, Newsletter Editor
Rev. Gail Monsma, Interim Pastor



Transition

Pastor Interim/Transition Ministry Update

- In an effort to keep communication open during the Interim process, I will begin offering a monthly pastor's update. Additionally, if you have any questions or concerns, please contact me via my cell phone, text message, or email. You can also contact a member of the Transition Team or an Elder. I can usually respond within an hour or two. (I try to take Fridays and Saturdays off, but will always respond to an emergency!)

- **Transition Team:** This team was formed in March along with First Presbyterian of Decatur to oversee the transitional work of writing a Congregational Mission Study(s) and to "keep taking a pulse" in how we are doing during this interim time. We are now in the process where we can begin the work of a Mission Study of our churches. This is a required step in preparing to form a PNC (Presbytery Nominating Committee), who will conduct the search for a new pastor for our churches.

The Transition Team members are: Paw Paw: Andy Thorburn, Tom Shoemaker, Joan Pohl; Decatur: David Vliek, Marcia Sikkema, Judy Kish.

- **Mission Study:** We are now in the place to begin work on our Congregational Mission Study which needs to be completed before we can form a **PNC (Pastor Nominating Committee)**. In Interim/Transitional Ministry, churches now write a Mission Study to share our history, mission, demographics, and vision for the future. This is an important study because it helps a church form a realistic picture of who they are, where they want to go, along with what type of qualities and leadership skills they seek in an installed pastor. It is also an extremely important tool for any candidate in their discernment process. Churches have found a well-done Mission Study produces a better match in calling an installed pastor. Our goal is to have permission from Presbytery to form a PNC in late spring of 2024.

- **Focus Groups:** We have begun to conduct a series of Focus Group meetings where we will gather specific information to help in writing a Mission Study. Conducting focus groups is a process that has proven successful across various organizations to garner specific information. Usually, they are not over 20 people in order to hear all voices.

Update

Pastor Interim/Transition Ministry Update

The transition team decided to use this process instead of conducting a written survey from the congregation. This way we receive specific information directly from you. During the groups, we will spend time reviewing important aspects of our congregation and spiritual life, and then transition into future hopes and dreams. We hope to have all the information compiled from the Focus Groups before Christmas. We will then move on with other parts of the Mission Study.

I encourage you to attend one of the following times—it's very important:

- **Sunday Oct 29, 11:45AM** (only a few spots left)
 - **Wednesday Nov 1, 10:00AM**
 - **Sunday Nov 5, 11:45AM**
 - **Tues Nov 14, 6:30PM**
- **Congregational Meeting/Coffee Times/Town Hall Meetings:** After the Focus Groups are completed, the Transition Team will try to offer at least one Coffee Time or Town Hall per month until we call a pastor. Our first **Town Hall** meeting will be after a **Congregational Meeting on Sunday, December 3**. The purpose of the Congregation Meeting will be to elect new Elders and make the necessary changes to our by-laws.
- **Partnership with First Presbyterian Church of Decatur.** At the beginning of 2024, we plan on doing some specific work in our Sessions and the congregation to determine how we can move forward in our relationship with Decatur. At this point, both Sessions envision us sharing one pastor between both churches, but more details still need to be worked out.
- **Weekly Update:** The best way to stay on top of church news and upcoming events is the email "Weekly Update" that is sent out each Thursday. There is also a paper copy of the announcements at church each week.

In Christ's love, light, and hope,
Rev. Gail Monsma (Gail)
revgailfpcpawpaw@gmail.com

Against such things there is no law

Love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Paul, in Galatians 5:22-23, states, "Against such things there is no law."

At the Oct. 2 Paw Paw and Decatur Review/Preview Bible and Sermon discussion, Rev. Gail and the five attendees discussed this passage and a handful more as they looked for the deeper meaning and context behind Sunday's sermon.

You are always welcome too most Mondays, 2pm, at First Pres Decatur, 119 E Delaware St, Decatur. Consult the Weekly Update email blast first.

Living Faith

World Communion



Rev. Gail Monsma at First Presbyterian Church of Paw Paw, Michigan on World Communion Sunday, Oct 1, 2023

The first Sunday in October is designated as World Communion Sunday which celebrates our

oneness in Christ with all our brothers and sisters around the world. Paul tells us that we are to "discern the body" when we partake of Holy Communion, mindful that we note our relationship to all our brothers and sisters in Christ in the celebration.

Living Faith

How do Presbyterians Interpret the Bible?

Hope you can search this searing question on the internet because, while it may be easy to some, a lot of us would struggle with an answer.

This topic was raised in October meetings of "Christ in Today's Culture" and Rev. Gail will gladly revisit it if you catch up with her at any Bible meeting this winter.

Go to www.pcusa.org and search for this: How Presbyterians Interpret the Bible. Will you be surprised?

Our Rev. Gail and Paw Paw United Methodist Church's Rev. Len Schoenherr are busy this fall leading the discussion, "Christ in Today's Culture", at 120 Pine Street on Wednesdays at 6:30 pm through Nov. 15 and we're all invited.

"I'm having so much fun teaching," Rev. Gail says.

At the October meetings they looked at how we interpret Scripture in light of both when it was written and in today's culture then quickly moved to how scripture guides us in today's world.

Gene Sahr likes it because of its depth. "I enjoy it and I hope you can all make it on Wednesdays at 6:30 pm," Gene said.

Come out Nov. 1, Nov. 8, and Nov. 15. Fear not, it's a warm and friendly group and you'll feel right at home. You already have the study guide and it's your Bible!

Living Faith

**OH JESUS, SAVE THESE WARRING BOYS.
WARRING WITHIN, WARRING WITHOUT.
COME FOLLOW THE VIRTUOUS AND SAVE
THE WAYWARD BY FILLING THE HOLLOW
IN THE HEART WHERE LOVE SHOULD BE.
IN YOUR NAME WE PRAY, AMEN.**

Living Faith

Closing prayer from guest preacher
Rev. Mark Pawlowski at Sunday Service Oct. 22

Presbyterian Women Holiday Tea Time at Kellogg Manor

Presbyterian Women gather Dec. 13 at 12:30 pm in the church parking lot to depart for their 2:00 pm meeting at Kellogg Manor. Contact Pat Peters (269) 352-352-1340 or Marge McKee (269) 341-2949 for information because the ticket deadline is Oct. 30.

Cost is \$35.00 and scholarships are available. Please RSVP by Oct 30 with payment. You may mail it to the office or put it in the Women's Association Box which is located at the West end of the church along the wall.

"Tea Time" is 2:00 - 3:30. Self-guided tours and Holiday shopping will also be available. Carpooling will be available at Presbyterian Church parking lot, **leaving at 12:30** to allow us to participate in all events.

Gail Monsma

Announcing 10 new battery recycling drop-off locations all in Van Buren County

- ✓ Libraries at Antwerp, Bangor, Covert, Hartford, Lawrence, Paw Paw, Decatur.
- ✓ Also South Haven Senior Services Center.
- ✓ And in Paw Paw at Community Thrift Shop and Van Buren Conservation District office.

Questions? Call Van Buren Conservation District 269-633-9314. For fire safety, tape the battery ends before transporting.

Jan Wilder

How Do I ... ?

- ★ To reserve a church meeting room call the office at 269-657-3111.
- ★ For news and upcoming meeting details ask for the Weekly Update email by calling 269-657-3111 or get a printed copy of Weekly Update anytime inside the entrance to the sanctuary.
- ★ Of course we are on the internet at pawpawpres.org, youtube.com/@1stprespawpaw, and facebook.com/1stprespawpaw.
- ★ We would love to mail you free copies of this newsletter! Call the office at 269-657-3111.

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Presbyterian News

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