

# THIS LENT PRAY AS YOU GO

Greetings Friends in Christ,

On February 14<sup>th</sup>, Ash Wednesday, we move into the liturgical season of Lent which will take us through to Easter Sunday. Lent comes from an Old English word, *lencten*.... to *lengten* spring. Lent literally means the lengthening of daylight hours or the coming of spring.

**On Ash Wednesday, February 14, between 11am and 1pm**, you are invited to come to the sanctuary to receive ashes on your forehead or on your hand to usher in this season. Yes, this date also falls on Valentines Day, but this allows us to reflect on the connection between God's love, special love for one another, our humanity, and our need for reconciliation and connection.

Ash Wednesday is a time where we are reminded of our mortality and connect our dying with the death of Jesus. The ashes symbolize this and also parts of our lives that we've had to let go of due to illness, the death of others, and even paths we've left untraveled. They symbolize our regrets, repentance, our sorrows, and the need for reconciliation with God and with others. So please consider joining others and making this part of your spiritual practice.

Around us, Lent takes place as we eagerly await more sunshine, warmer weather, and the budding and blossoming of Spring—new birth! Yet it is within these gray days in the season of Lent, that we are called to recognize our humanity, our brokenness, and our need and yearning for a deeper relationship with something bigger than ourselves: the divine spirit of God.

Traditionally, Lent is built around 40 days of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (financial or volunteering). Often times, people give something up for Lent; this is meant to be a spiritual practice, something that will require prayer to fulfill this sacrifice. And sometimes, people take something on for Lent, like daily devotions, volunteering, even exercise—this too is a spiritual practice. However, Sundays are not counted as the 40 days; rather, they are considered “little Easters,” and one's “fast” can be broken on the Sabbath.

Know that 40 is a special number in the Bible—it means a very long time. After 40 days and 40 nights of rain, God made a covenant with Noah to always be with us. After 40 days and 40 nights,

Moses received the 10 Commandments on Mount Sinai and his face shown for 40 more days. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years eating manna and quail from heaven. Jesus fasted and was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights.

Lent is an introspective journey and it is about transformation and renewal—it is about allowing God to mold us into something more, something new, as we seek to follow the path of Jesus Christ. It is meant to be a journey toward the cross with Jesus and with other believers. We practice Lent so that we too might rise again on Easter morning as transformed people.

**I'd like to encourage all of us to take on a devotional practice during Lent** and also allow for a time of prayer and even journaling our thoughts and prayers to God. Here are three good options.

**d365.org is a daily devotion that will lead one through scripture and prayer.** You can download the application on your smartphone or computer. The devotion follows a five-step format – Pause, Listen, Think, Pray, Go. You can run through it quite quickly, or take more time to ponder. The d365 daily devotional site is produced by Passport, Inc., a national student ministry organization and is a joint effort of the PCUSA, the Episcopal Church, and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The devotional began in response to 9-11-2001. The primary goal was and is to provide inspirational and relevant reflections on scripture for young people—youth and young adults. But don't let the emphasis on youth stop you, it's a very relevant devotional that I, and many other adults, routinely use. Click on <https://d365.org/> to find on your computer or download the app on your smartphone.

**Pray As You Go** is another wonderful devotion resource! It comes from our Jesuit brothers in Christ and an Ignatian spirituality, a practice of prayer based on the spiritual exercises created by St Ignatius of Loyola in the 1500s. The site provides a daily prayer session produced every day of the working week and one session for the weekend. It is not a 'Thought for the Day', a sermon or a bible-study, but rather a framework for your own prayer. Lasting between ten and thirteen minutes, it combines music, scripture and some questions for reflection. The site also offers additional tools for prayer which are excellent. You can download the application on your smartphone or computer at: <https://pray-as-you-go.org/>

**Lectio 365** is another excellent devotion that I just started using. You can only get the daily devotions on your smart phone by down loading the application. But it is well worth it! It offers both a morning and evening prayer session in the practice of *Lectio Divina*, which means praying the scriptures. Lectio 365 is a ministry of *24-7 Prayer*, an international, interdenominational prayer movement, with a vision to revive the church and rewire the culture through non-stop night and day prayer. You can look at the website 24-7, but again the devotions are only accessible on a smart phone. During Lent I plan to use this app for morning and evening prayers.

Watch for other opportunities during Lent and sermon information in the *Weekly Update* on your phone, computer, or in hard copy at church.

I'm eager to begin another Lenten Journey with you as we discern how God is calling us into a deeper relationship with him, and one another, as we follow the path of Jesus the Christ.

In Christ's love, light, and hope,  
Gail

Rev. Gail E. Monsma, Interim Pastor

# ShareNet Committed to Caring

During Advent members of ShareNet spread the warmth of the season to those who are limited in getting out and about. Home visits were made bringing poinsettias and home baked goodies, communion shared with some, and carolers along with Chris Gray made a Sunday afternoon merry and bright to many.

ShareNet is in prayer for those with immediate needs, long term needs, and for our church as a whole. If you have a prayer request you may contact Gail, Elder Pat Peters, or Joan Pohl. ShareNet is a committee of 16 but truly everyone who is connected to First Presbyterian Church of Paw Paw is part of the ministry of caring for one another as described in the gospel of John where Jesus said in Chapter 13: 34-35 *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

Photos: Joan visits with  
Donna and Jack in Battle Creek



Joan Pohl, ShareNet Co-Chair

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## Mission

# Magnify the Light

Thank you to our church family who helped with the Christmas, 2023, Magnify the Light project. We had 5 happy and grateful families this year who benefited from our generosity!

Thanks to Steve, Kathy and Nathaniel McClosky, Kathy Weiser, Barbara Bryant, Bill and Les Buhl, Eleda Zygodlo, Freida Durringer, Mary Ellen and Tom Smith, Pat Conner, Pat Peters, Jan Wilder, Nancy Turk, and Randy and Andy Thorburn for their participation.

This is a great project to promote the Christmas Spirit. It is very fulfilling for those who participate, especially if you help deliver the gifts to the family you helped. The joy and relief that they will have presents for their kids shows in their faces. If you missed the

opportunity to participate this year, Magnify the Light will return next year.

Nancy Turk, Mission

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# Thank You

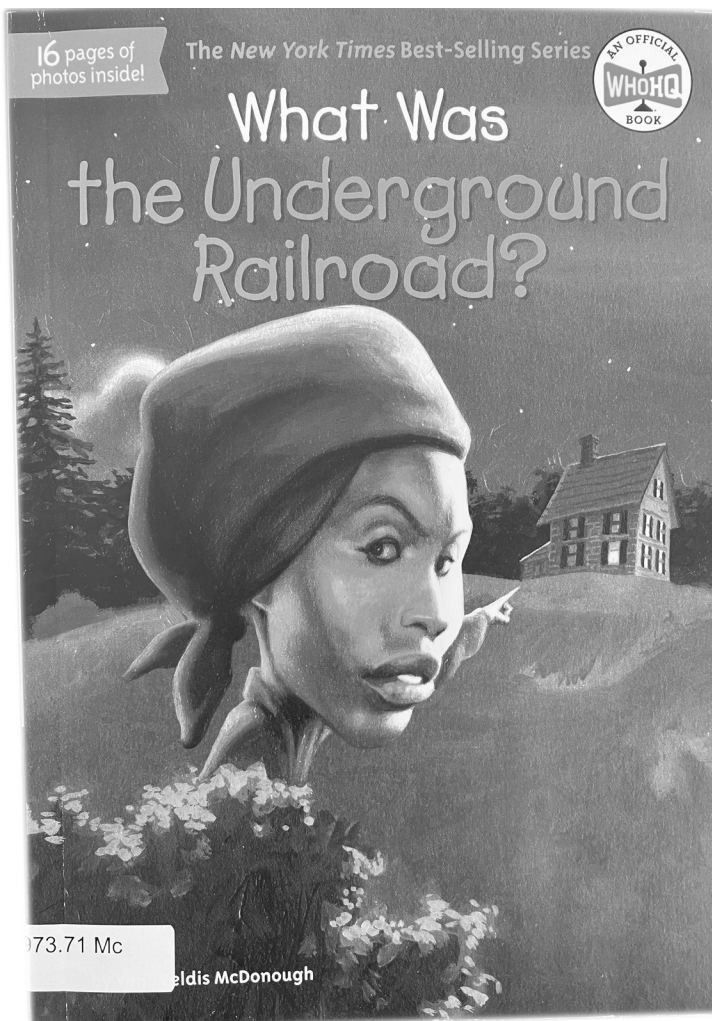
Our 2024 Stewardship campaign is coming to a close. Thank you to those who responded with their pledges of finances, time, and talents. Your active and faithful participation in our journey as believers is vital and greatly appreciated. Our ministry as First Presbyterian depends on the giving hearts of our church family.

As we look forward to 2024, may we all be sustained by God's abiding presence and may the gift of the Christ child continue to inspire and guide us.

Wendy Mickle and Tom Shoemaker

**FEBRUARY IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH!**

# What They Sacrificed for Freedom



This February read the book *What Was the Underground Railroad* by Yona Zeldis McDonough featured in our church library kiosk in the hallway leading to the sanctuary. In it you will learn about slaves' close-calls with bounty hunters, exhausting struggles on the road, and what they sacrificed for freedom.

In 1619 a ship brought about 20 people kidnapped from their homes in West Africa to Jamestown, Virginia. These were the very first slaves brought to America. Two hundred and forty years later there were nearly four million slaves in the United States.

Escaping slavery was difficult. The Underground Railroad was not an actual railroad with tracks and passenger cars and it didn't run underground. It was the escape route African American slaves took to reach freedom. For many years the goal was to reach Canada but it was a dangerous journey whichever destination they chose.

The book *What Was the Underground Railroad* includes real stories of escaping slaves and many illustrations and photos that help bring this part of black history alive for us today.

- Chuck Williams

# A Valentine's Surprise

It's time for valentines cards to be sent out to our children and grandchildren who are currently in college or the military and we need your help gathering information. Just before Valentine's Day they will receive an email with a gift certificate from Starbucks for a treat of their choice.

Information that is needed: 1.) Your Name;  
2.) Your child or grandchild's name;  
3.) Whether they are in the service or college;  
4.) Their cell phone number &/or their email.

It is suggested that you contact your child/grandchild to make them aware a gift card is coming so they do not delete and miss their Valentine Surprise.

Please send this information to Pat Peters at 352-1340 by Sunday February 11.

*The Valentine Surprise project lets young people know our church still cares about them in this crazy, crazy world.*

Jan Wilder

**Presbyterian News**  
**Volume 93 Issue 2 - Feb 2024**  
**Editor Chuck Williams**  
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*Your personal faith, discipleship, and mission stories are always welcome here in the church newsletter.*

# Join Us at Souper Bowl

Hope you've got February 11 circled on your calendars. It's time for our annual Soup Sunday and football. Hoping you'll stay after church for some homemade soup and fellowship. We have at least eleven different soups to choose from. Crackers included and a tasty dessert. If you can't stay, take some home. Free will offering accepted.

Marge McKee

## Living into our faith makes a difference in people's lives!

*Thank You ...*

*Just to express my appreciation for all the prayers, cards and coming to visit with my family.*

*This congregation is so caring. I have never experienced all the cards, emails and calls of encouragement that I have with this group.*

*Thanks so much,*  
*Jodi Polet*

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Return Service Requested

## Presbyterian News

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