

April 2021



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN

Take Nothing For Granted

BY MATT MATTHEWS

MATT@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

Dear Friends,

A year ago I wrote (and shared with you) this reflection written upon the death of my hometown minister's wife, Mrs. Andrews. We all loved both her and Dr. Andrews. Now they are both gone, and my old "youth" group still misses them. Memories of them bring joy and laughter.

As I read this remembrance from one year ago, adding a few tweaks now, I see a theme that I didn't at first intend: Thank the people around you. Tell them you love them. Take nothing for granted.

I read this reflection now as sermon-to-self.

Our Minister's Wife, Mrs. Andrews, Laughs with Angels/by Matt Matthews

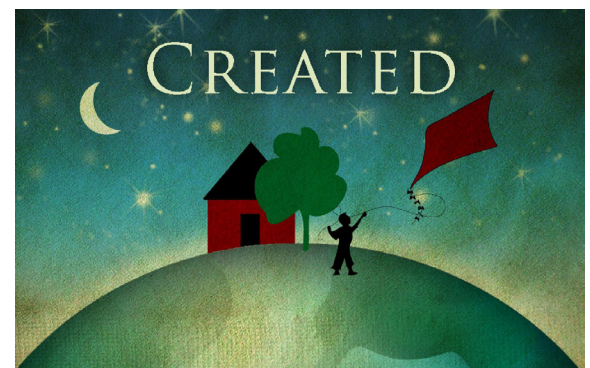
You brought us such joy.

Talking with you made us kids in the church youth group feel important. You asked questions. You were interested. You listened.

You were quick to smile. Sometimes you laughed hard, waving your hand like you were swatting lightly at a sugar fly. You were mostly composed and steady. But I've seen you cut a sideways glance at my mom from across the room and the two of you—well into your dignified sixties—would giggle.

I'm sure you weren't always serene on the inside, but you were on the outside, which suggests I didn't know you well. This is true. I didn't know you well. But like many others, I admired and loved you. Most of the time you seemed delighted, contented, curious, and sometimes—and this was wonderful—mischievous. For us kids, you and your husband were always there. Steadily present. Proximate, attentive, available.

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April is the month we celebrate the gift of God's great Earth

Saturday, April 17, 8 AM join others for a cleanup of litter along State Street.

Thursday, April 22, is the 51st Earth Day. The evening zoom gathering on **Wednesday, April 21, at 7 PM** will focus on this.

Saturday, April 24, Styrofoam Collection from **9 to 11**.

Sunday, April 25, the worship service will celebrate Earth Day with words and song.

Monday, April 26, register for the Clean Energy Advocacy Day.

Wednesday, April 28, register for the Green Transportation webinar. Registration can be done on the *Faith in Place* website, www.faithinplace.org

Sunday, May 2, at 8 AM Grand Prairie Friends online Plant Sale. You can access their plant catalog at <https://www.grandprairiefriends.org> First year plants in 4" pots are \$4 each. Buy 18, and receive 3 free (get \$72 value for \$60).

One year when I was in the church youth Christmas play, you cross-stitched all of us teenaged-actors small Christmas ornaments. Because my mother sewed, I knew your gift took planning and many hours to make. Even as a kid I was impressed. You could have made cupcakes or gotten us something plastic in bulk from the dime store. We would have been just as glad then.

But we would not have rediscovered your gift every subsequent Christmas from the trunk of ornaments under the stairs in our basement, unwrapped the tissue paper, and held it lightly in our hands remembering our friends in that tight group so freckled and young, the play we did (Martin the Cobbler), and your smile when we sat in a circle on the floor at your house at the cast party when you said we worked so hard, and the play was so delightful, and you loved us so much. I remember being touched, albeit distracted by the dining room table filled with your diabetic husband's homemade candy. I was touched. I heard and believed you. You loved us. We loved you, too, of course. I hope the more thoughtful ones of us assured you that we loved you, too. I probably said thanks, or nothing, and bolted for the table for dibs on the food. It's not that I was thoughtless, it's that I so often didn't think.

Every year, time stops when I find that little ornament. I remember those kids from forty years ago, forever young, and I remember you. It's all so fragile, so yellowed with age, so beautiful, so holy. Those smiles in that circle—yours particularly—still bear sacred light.

It's all gone so soon.

Or, eternal.

[Palm Sunday 2020]

Many thanks to Itch and Sue Jones who have taken on projects at the church throughout COVID. Below Itch is replacing the entry floor into the nursery with vinyl planks before new carpet is installed.

Sue did a fantastic job on restraining the outdoor memorial bench just outside the north entry to the church. We appreciate their hardwork and dedication to the church.



Children, Youth & Family

Children, Youth, Family

BY MINDY WATTS-ELLIS, DIRECTOR
MINDY@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

An invitation to serve

In the vows of baptism the congregation promises to guide and nurture the children entrusted to its care by word and deed and with love and prayer. We vow to encourage them to know and follow Christ and be faithful members of his church.

Our children and their families come from Indonesia, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Korea, Scotland, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, China, as well as the United States. They all speak English, and many speak French and other languages. Families celebrate rich cultural traditions. We are thrilled to welcome, nurture, teach, and learn from these children and their families. First Presbyterian has long been devoted to doing ministry alongside of all people.

While our children speak English, many of their parents, primarily French speakers from the Congo, struggle with conversational English. They often work two jobs, have younger children at home, and don't have the support of a wider local family network and therefore they are not able to help with their children's Sunday School education as they'd like. We endeavor to stand in the breach for and with them.

We want the best teachers and Christian leaders to join us in this vibrant ministry to the children of our community to serve as partners in the building of faith foundations for future generations. Please prayerfully consider how God might be calling you to be a part

of this ministry. We will be reaching out to many of you in the coming months with an invitation to serve our youngest disciples. How might you be a part of creating a better future?

Sunday School Update Help Us Celebrate Earth Day!

BY SAMANTHA NICHOLS, SUNDAY SCHOOL COORDINATOR
SAMANTHA@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

Sunday School Online continues with weekly Zoom gatherings. Our elementary school students meet at 10:15 AM and our junior high and high school students meet at 1 PM for Bible study, conversation, activities, and sometimes even music!

This month, our elementary school class will read stories about "Doubting Thomas," Peter's new job, and the importance of inclusion. Meanwhile, the junior high and high school students will begin a new unit on caring for creation.



Pending approval by the Covid Response Team, we will be offering in-person, outdoor activities to celebrate Earth Day on April 25th. Students and their families are invited to paint rocks, create plant identification signs, and fill out a postcard that will be sent to one

of our elected officials asking them to support eco-friendly legislation.

This is an opportunity to work with the Environmental Stewardship Committee to support our church gardens and get some experience in advocating for creation. These activities will be accompanied by ongoing conversations in the youth Sunday School class about faith, scripture, care for creation, and eco-justice.

Students of all ages and their families can sign up for a volunteer slot by contacting **Samantha** by phone (773-354-8013) or email (samantha@firstpres.church). Volunteering will take place between 1 and 6 PM with volunteer slots scheduled for every 20 minutes.

We will wear masks, social distance, and wipe down the work spaces and tools in between households. Again, this is pending approval by the Covid Response Team. Stay tuned for confirmation and more information!

Thanks be to God for our wonderful students and the opportunity to learn together about God's love and our call to be disciples.

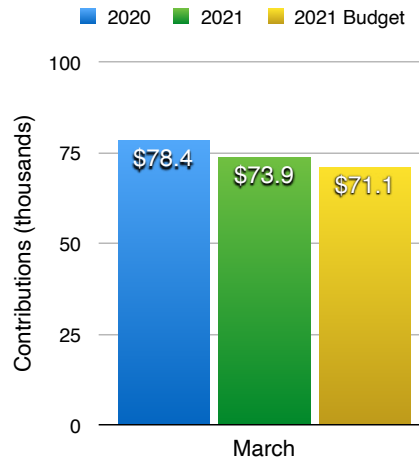
Finance

Financial Update

BY MARK SCHOEFFMANN, CHAIR FINANCE
MSCHOEFFMANN@MCHSI.COM

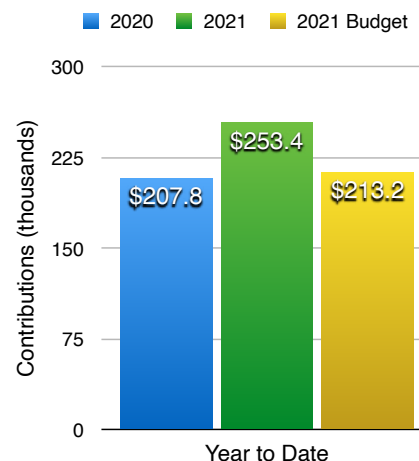
Contributions

Contributions in March to the Operating Fund were \$4.5K less than in 2020 but \$2.8K above the budget at \$73.9K. The Year to Date total is above last year by \$45.6K and above the budgeted amount by \$40.2K. These figures include prepaid pledges (those paid in the year prior to the budget year) that are prorated over the year with 1/12 added to each month's contributions. Including all revenue sources at 25% through the year we have received 44.6% of the expected year's revenue.



Expenses

Year to Date expenses are \$12.9K above the budget at \$274.5K but less than in 2020 by \$19.2K. At 25% through the year we have experienced 26.2% of the expected year's expenses.

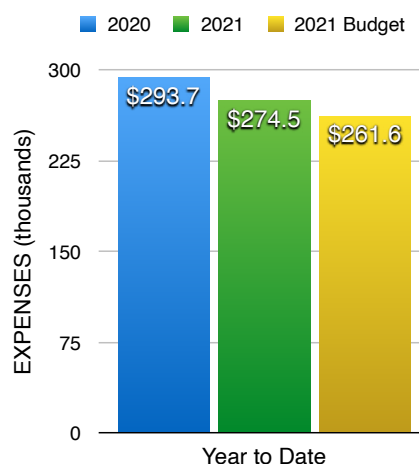


Balance

Considering all sources, revenue exceeds expenses by \$211.4K which is \$143.6K more than at the end of March in 2020.

Restricted Funds

In addition to contributions to the operating fund there was \$20,685 donated last month to special offerings and funds restricted to specific purposes such as missions supported by our church. One Great Hour of Sharing received \$2,715 and Cuba Partners \$14,320 in March.



Session Motions Approved at March Meeting

Buildings & Grounds presented three motions for approval:

- Holland Heating & Plumbing be hired to install a Mop Sink in the new kitchen at a cost of \$3715.00. Funds will come from the proceeds from the sale of the property in southwest Champaign.
- County Asphalt be hired to do repair work on the parking lot at a cost of \$8075.00. Funds will come from the Berger Fund.
- FASTSIGNS be hired to install a letterboard beside the front doors on State Street at a cost of \$1200.50. Funds will come from the B&G operating fund.

Additional motions included...

- approval of the February Minutes as corrected by consensus. Correction: The HR motion should read as follows: *HR moves that the 2021 budget be amended as follows: include a bonus for all staff members who worked all during 2020 (excluding the band, the section leaders, and the child care workers), each of which will amount to 2% of the salary of each staff member, and \$1.00/hr raises be approved for the child care workers. It is recommended that the bonuses be distributed by the end of March.*
- approval of the Revised Budget dated March, 2021.
- approval for Pastor Matt to be out of town on March 19, 20, 21, and 22, 2021 to attend the funeral of Mark Warren.



Acts 10:36 ... You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord over all.

Acts 10:38 ... How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how He went about doing good....

Acts 10:39 ... We are witnesses of everything He did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed Him by hanging him on a tree, :40 but God raised Him from the dead on the third day and caused Him to be seen.

Acts 10:43...All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.

Hebrews 4:16 ... So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

They're Back!

While not as famous as the Memphis Peabody ducks, the First Pres ducks have returned. They come each Spring and nest near the patio off Centennial Hall. Sometimes we have eggs, but sadly we have not seen ducklings...

With all the changes due to COVID this past year, we welcome the return of the First Pres ducks this Spring.



Joys & Concerns

We extend our sympathy to...

- to the family and friends of **Paul Rector** who died March 24, 2021. Paul has been a member of the church since March 1951 and just recently celebrated his 100th birthday.
- to the family and friends of **Mary Jane Kelley** whose husband, **Paul**, died April 3, 2021.

Congratulations to...

- our own **Kena Jo Chapman** for receiving the Outstanding Staff Gold Award at Parkland College!

Men's Prayer Group

The men of the church pray Fridays at 8:30 AM. For a zoom link contact our church office.

Mission Updates



A Time for Celebration

United, United in Him, United Unidos, Unidos en Su Nombre, Unidos
Cuba Weekend, May 1 & 2

May the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace in faith so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

Come celebrate! Celebrate our hope for a new era, pandemic free with open travel, a bustling economy for both of our countries and standing more strongly united than ever in our lives in Jesus Christ.

Annual Cuba Forum

Preconference

Watch an informative talk by **Professor Emeritus Nils Jacobsen** from the Department of History at the U of I. He reviews the contemporary history, the state of life in Cuba today and forecasts what we might expect in US-Cuba relations in the future. Watch it here <https://youtu.be/YcDbRkioSok>. Come on Saturday with your questions for Professor Jacobsen.

Saturday, May 1 10 AM (via Zoom)

Come for music, prayer, testimonies and photo shares during our Eighth Annual Cuba Forum. Professor Nils Jacobsen will address your questions from his video presentation.

Shared Worship

Sunday, May 2 9 AM (online)

Come back Sunday at 9 AM as we share worship with our congregation on the island at FirstPres.live. We will share messages and prayers from our siblings in Havana and feature music of the island.

Cuba Two-Step

Sunday, May 2 1 PM (via Zoom)

Continue to celebrate Sunday afternoon at 1 PM via Zoom with a virtual salsa lesson, more photo shares and more music. **Karin Vermillion** will teach us to sing a Cuban song you will love.

For more information and to register for a zoom link for the Forum and Two-Step contact the Church office 217- 356-7238 or zoom@firstpres.church.

First Pres Cuba Partners

Thank You!

Thank you for standing in solidarity with our fellow Presbyterians in Cuba through your prayers and financial giving as they suffer the deepening collapse of their economy. Although we cannot travel to visit our sisters and brothers in Cuba in person due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, we are able to send financial gifts at this time.

Funds designated from the First Pres Advent Offering were sent the end of March along with additional gifts from the congregation. Your support has been in accord with your deep faith and your love of sisters and brothers in real need.

We can still send additional financial gifts to Cuba. You may give through First Pres for future transmittals to the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Cuba (write "Synod" in the memo line) or to our sister congregation at Luyanó, Havana, Cuba (write "Luyanó" in the memo line).

If you have questions, contact the Church Office at info@firstpres.church, 217- 356-7238, or **Bob Kirby** 217-621-5915.

Environmental Update

BY PAT PHILLIPS

P.PHILLIPS42@SBCGLOBAL.NET



This certificate was recently awarded to First Presbyterian Church Champaign which has been an Earth Care Congregation since 2012. We are one of 276 other PC(USA) congregations that meet the requirements for this designation.

Ways to recycle continue at church: Styrofoam Collection on April 24 from 9 to 11. Used batteries with both ends covered with clear tape, and used plastic medicine containers which can be used for veterinary meds can be dropped off at church—just call the office at 217-356-7238.

Salt & Light not only makes gently used clothing, furniture and household items available to the community, they also recycle any clothing that cannot be re-used. In 2020, they kept 1,400,000 pounds of textiles out of the landfill, and income received from that helps stock their grocery shelves. So, as you're planning to make donations, remember you can bag any clean worn out clothes or bedding, towels or area rugs for this recycling program.

Saturday, April 17, at 8 AM join others for a cleanup of litter along State

Street. **Liz Miley** at ebmiley@aol.com has all the details about obtaining the necessary individual permission forms..

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Compassion, Peace and Justice

Our Compassion Peace and Justice Ministry Team puts the Bible's call to act for peace and justice into action in our community. We stay informed.

We connect with our PC-USA Compassion, Peace and Justice Mission Agency, the Presbyterian Intercultural Network and our Matthew 25 initiative and to local groups to make a difference in the lives of our neighbors. You are invited to join us. For more information please contact **Bob Kirby** at rwk3213@gmail.com or 217-621-5915.

From the April 6 Heart of Missions

Through Mission contributions we support Lifeline Pilots which was founded by church member **Wanda Whitsitt**. Here is this recent testimony about their work...

At the age of one, Aiden McWhorter was diagnosed with stage four Neuroblastoma, a childhood cancer that most commonly affects children age 5 or younger. The rollercoaster of childhood cancer put Aiden into remission, only to rear its ugly head again in the middle of the pandemic.

Hope came in the form of a clinical trial...but it was a 12-hour drive from their Indiana home. This military family didn't know how they would continually get Aiden to Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City.

Sarah, Aiden's Mom said, "We would be drowning in debt having to pay for commercial flights back and forth from Indiana and NYC for his life-saving clinical trial. More importantly, he has been kept safe from the COVID pandemic by flying in a private plane."

Nowruz is celebrated on March 21st and is considered the official start of spring in Persian culture. In Iran, the holiday lasts for 13 days.

Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kurdistan (Iraq and Turkey) and parts of India and Russia celebrate this 3,000 year old holiday. In Iran, there is a very important tradition of decorating a "Haft Seen" Table, which includes 7 symbolic items that start with the letter "S". "S" in Persian is pronounced as "seen". These symbolic items that begin with the letter "s" have very important meanings associated with the new year. For example, green grass is "sabzeh" and it symbolizes rebirth and growth; "senjed", an Iranian olive, represents love.

Like many other cultures that celebrate a new year, presents are exchanged amongst family members, traditional clothing is donned to partake in customary rituals and dances, and the tombs and graves of loved ones are visited to pay honor and respect.

Below you see a screenshot of Sholeh's presentation.

First Pres members are welcome and invited to join us and get to know our tutors and students.

We will continue this Zoom Café Time on the second Thursday of every month at 10 AM. The next one is on May 13 at 10 AM.

Zoom Information:
Please email jeanette@firstpres.church for the Zoom meeting information.

ESL Program

BY JEANETTE PYNE


JEANETTE@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

Nowruz: The Persian New Year

During ESL Cafe Time on March 11th one of our students from Iran--her name is Sholeh--gave a very thorough and illuminating presentation about Nowruz (نوروز).

Here are some highlights from her presentation.

Sizdah be dar (the last day of Nowruz)



In Iran, the Nowruz holidays last thirteen days. On the thirteenth day of the New Year, Iranians leave their houses to enjoy nature and picnic outdoors, as part of the Sizdebedar ceremony. The greenery grown for the Haft-sin setting is thrown away, particularly into a running water. It is also customary for young single people, especially young girls, to tie the leaves of the greenery before discarding it, expressing a wish to find a partner. Another custom associated with Sizdah Bedar is the playing of jokes and pranks, similar to April Fools' Day.



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CHURCH** OF CHAMPAIGN

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Champaign, IL 61820

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www.firstpres.church

Sunday:

9 AM Worship*

10:15 AM In-Person Worship**

10:15 AM Sunday School and Adult Education***

*Online Worship is available for viewing at 9 AM on Sunday mornings on YouTube, Facebook, and our church website. Go to FirstPres.Live.

**In-person Worship is offered for up to 50 people. You must preregister by contacting the church office by noon on Fridays of each week.

***All Sunday School and Adult Education opportunities are through Zoom.

Contact the church office for more information.

Pastors:

Matt Matthews..... Senior Pastor/Head of Staff, Ext. 213
Eric Corbin..... Associate Pastor, Ext. 214

Staff:

George Almasi Facility Assistant
Brendan Barker..... Organist
Ritchie Drennen Facility Manager, Ext. 237
Patty Farthing..... Receptionist, Ext. 211
Robert Ferrer Audio-visual Technician
Marcia Franks Administrative Assistant, Ext. 210
Joe Grant..... Director of Music
Rachel Matthews..... Mission Coordinator, Ext. 219
Samantha Nichols..... Sunday School Coordinator, Ext. 216
Blaise Pascal..... CYF Connections Assistant, Ext. 216
Ann Petry..... Accounting, Ext. 224
Jeanette Pyne..... ESL Coordinator, Ext. 235
Mindy Watts-Ellis..... Director Children, Youth & Family, Ext. 212

All staff email addresses are the person's first name followed by @firstpres.church. For example, eric@firstpres.church.

The newsletter is published monthly. Deadline is the last Monday of the month for the following month's edition. Send submissions to marcia@firstpres.church.