

August 2021



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN

Allergic Reaction: A Story About Church

BY MATT MATTHEWS
MATT@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

Friends,

Here's a bit of late summer fiction reading for you...

As Thomas cinched his tie, he leaned into the medicine cabinet mirror and examined the zit on his nose. It was large enough to have its own moon. He had cut grass for two hours in full sun and had come indoors to get ready, sneezing non-stop. Earlier, at noon, he had taken the tiny pill, his first dose, from his brand-new allergy prescription, and now, showered and shaved, his eyes still watered, ropes of snot twisted down the back of his burning throat, and that terrible pimple blinked like a traffic light. He reached into the cabinet for the eyedrops and one more of those fast-acting, not to exceed one-a-day allergy pills. On any other evening, he would have surrendered and pulled on his pajamas for BBC World News. But this was Holy Thursday. He had practiced his sermon on the riding mower. Now the time was nigh for the actual preaching of it. No calling in sick. The service started in an hour, and he wanted it to go well. Rev. Thomas Maxwell usually looked fit and trim in a black suit and purple tie. Tonight, not so much. His swollen head had taken the shape of a pale gourd, allergens commanding a beachhead on his puffy face, ears aflame with sunburn.

continued on the next page

Fun in the Sun! Family Carnival and Pool Party

Sunday August 15 (rain date August 22)

Centennial Park Pavilion

7 PM for Carnival

8 PM Sholem Aquatic Center for pool fun

Church will provide popcorn, cotton candy,
lemonade and water

Bring a lawn chair if you have one.

Don't forget your swimsuit and beach towel!

Pool admission is free.

For more information, visit our website at

www.firstpres.church

or call 217.356.7238

or email us at info@firstpres.church

"Come on," he called out to wife. "We'll be late."

"No," she said from the nearby kitchen. "We've got time to get a burger on the way. You look good," she said as he grabbed his keys from the hook near the microwave.

"I look horrible," Thomas said. "Horripi-lated. Bad. And look at my nose. And my poor eyes. My head is swelling. My face is shrinking. My brain is being crushed. I might not survive."

"Yes, you will," she said. "And I was talking about the suit."

There were only a few cars in the church lot when they arrived with their greasy sack of food. She dabbed a broiled chicken tender into honey-mustard. He wolfed down a double swiss burger with bacon and extra onions, fries, and a giant Dr. Pepper. The sun cast the last rays of burnt orange into branches loaded with spring buds. This night deserved scallops, risotto, sorbet, and leisure. The westerly brick wall of the old church glowed. He shoveled in his last bite.

They liked their new hometown, but they missed their four daughters, all grown. Their youngest would graduate from library school five states away in Virginia. Funding for libraries, though, like churches, was waning. And this daughter, Thomas had openly joked, was their last hope that one of his offspring would fund his early and comfortable retirement.

Never mind. All the girls had landed on their feet, teaching and guiding non-profits and, otherwise, paying off college loans and making rent. Lam-bourghini would be in no one's future, and his retirement, early or late, would be adequate but not lavish.

"What are you thinking," she asked. He looked blankly at her, a wad of fries composting in his mouth.

"Me too," she said. "I miss them, too." She could practically read his mind. He dabbed at his mouth and weepy eyes with a napkin. "Damn allergies," he muttered. Holy Week was a big deal. He wanted the service to go right. "Of all nights."

"You'll need this," she said, handing him a single peppermint. The gift seemed anemic, but as with all things, she gave him all she had. He didn't deserve this devoted partnership, but who ever deserved one good thing? "And this." She gave him a name scrawled on a scrap of paper. For such a prim, ordered woman, she wrote like a Viking. "Don't lose it," she cautioned. "Mrs. Pool called and asked that you include her grown son in your prayer tonight. Erectile dysfunction."

"Is that his name?" he asked, "or his condition?"

"Neither," she laughed. "Gallbladder problems," she said, "which'll wreck one's libido, all the same." She patted his hand. "Got your sermon?" He reached into his jacket like Napoleon. "If somebody shot me in the chest, all this folded paper would stop the bullet."

The entire front of the sanctuary was covered in potted Easter lilies in full bloom. He had never seen so many in one place. The pulpit bobbed above the flowers like furniture from a shipwreck floating in a green sea foamy with white caps. He had forgotten to warn the church flower guild that he was allergic to that very flower, but he figured now that his allergies tonight couldn't possibly get worse, and his medicine would kick in eventually. Be-

sides, this service was a briefer-than-usual service. They'd be out with some twilight to spare, in 45-minutes, tops.

When the steeple bell rang the hour, he wove through the flowers like Peter walking on water and stood at the pulpit taking the expectant congregation in. They were flowers, too, of another sort, and to these souls he was not allergic but glad, glad to see their up-turned faces catching the muted light from century-old stained glass. He knew nothing in the world as beautiful as a congregation at worship.

The body often rises to the occasion, doing what you need it to do when you need it done. He didn't feel strong or good, but capable. He greeted his flock with a few sentences of scripture. About a quarter of the membership came out. Most had a member of the family in the large choir, which sang "Let Us Break Bread Together" with great feeling, even as each verse lagged slower and slower than the first. This happened from time to time when the organist had an unexpected drop in blood sugar, which is why the music director kept a candy dish of wintergreen mints in the choir loft, ostensibly to stem choral halitosis, but really to keep his classically trained organist alive. What better time, Thomas thought appreciatively, to fall out of tempo than during Holy Week.

Thomas stood up to preach as one comfortable and in command. It didn't come naturally, but with preparation: three-quarters of a day in his study writing, an hour drawing circles in the lawn with the John Deere, and pacing around the house, manuscript in hand, talking to the empty recliners. He noticed the raspy gurgle in his voice, proof his allergy medicine was a dud. He rested his voice by pausing in the right places, asking his listeners to imagine that night in that upper room 2

where Jesus washed the feet of his astonished disciples.

The propeller of his voice sputtered, then locked. He had four paragraphs to go, plus the whole second half of the service. It was those lilies, the final straw, his Waterloo. He should have warned the guild. There was no way he could get through the service with just one lily, much less 121 of them—one for each year the church had served this sleepy, college town. He didn't stand a chance.

"Preach often," Saint Francis of Assisi was alleged to have said. "If necessary, use words." Thomas knew God didn't need his voice or his earnest words from that double-spaced sermon manuscript. God didn't need Thomas. But the flock waited for his next word.

Thomas salvaged his sermon—which was by now filled with so much silence as to constitute an intermission—by croaking out his summary of the whole faith: "As He loved us, let us love others." His voice was now completely gone. After another pause, and like Lincoln at Gettysburg, he sat tiredly down. What he needed to do was walk out for fresh air, but he sat down instead, and the choir rose up like a forest for their next anthem featuring a swoony solo by an elderly soprano. The rest of the singers oohed and aahed along like the sound of pipes groaning in an old house. The sounds fit together though not, necessarily, in a strict musical sense.

Lilies were everywhere. He had never seen such an assemblage of them, perhaps worth a half-year of car payments. Their drained faces dusted in yellow pollen looked at Thomas with the indifferent gaze of perfumed corpses. From the ashes we have

come, of course, and to the ashes we shall return.

As the choir sang, both the music and the odor of lilies enveloped him like the cloud of transfiguration. He went clammy. The burger knotted in his stomach, turned over all elbows and knees, and yawned. He should not have drunk that whole 64-ounce soda, which now seemed intent on not staying down. He relieved the pressure in his gut with a discreet belch. The fragrance of onion, sugar, flowers, and the slightest hint of peppermint bubbled up invisibly, he hoped, towards the high ceiling. The smell of flowers filled his head like warm soup.

Beyond the pulpit, the flock sat contentedly. The choir in the loft behind him finished their lovely amen and rattled down into their chairs with a creaky plop and the rustle of purple, Lenten robes.

Thomas didn't stand right away, though it was his turn. In normal services of worship this pause created dramatic tension. Tonight, it bought him time. But time for what? His plan required a voice. Without one of those, he had no Plan B. He could think of no next step. He knew that no amount of preparation covers every scenario. But this?

Your body sometimes lets you down. His sneezing, hours ago, was the warning he could not heed. Now the skin on top of his sunburned ears and neck and shoulders began to curl and fleck off. Everything itched. His swollen face burned with the sickly coating of lily dust. A sharp pain stabbed his left breast, unguarded by his folded sermon manuscript. It could have been a sniper's lone bullet, a panic attack, a heart attack, a double-bacon cheeseburger. He allowed the pain to

dart through him and pass. It mercifully did not rebound.

When he stood and approached the Communion table to administer the Sacrament, ash filled his throat. Now what?

In what many in that congregation would later say was the most meaningful enactment of the Lord's Last Supper since the real thing, Thomas simply took the bread and lifted it up before them like Mufasa lifted Simba. He lowered the loaf, broke it, then lifted the chalice in his left hand and tipped in a stream of juice from the pitcher lifted, higher, in his right; it was a bartender's trick for Presbyterian preachers. Not a drop splashed out of that silver cup onto the new carpet. He set the elements down, beheld the table like some manger, and pointed to the elders who, after a pause, gathered around and took the trays of cubed bread and tiny cups of juice to the awaiting congregation, mesmerized in their pews.

What did they make of their mute pastor, he wondered from his chair, as Jesus mingled through the congregation row by row? Did they think, This new pastor has new-fangled ideas. Did they think that he didn't say a word at the table because they already knew the words by heart? Did they worry he was a lunatic and they had made a mistake inviting him to follow in the footsteps of previous esteemed pastors? On a good day, he didn't measure up, but he had learned to fake it until you make it. There was no faking this. Everything had been stripped away. A preacher without words was—well, he didn't know. He had never been forced to find out.

But now—now he was finding out. The allergy medicine seemed to have

kicked in, or his adrenalin had drained away, or both, because, when he stood, his body felt suddenly heavy. His extremities had started to go numb. The itching became a tingling, which ignited flame that covered his flesh like oil.

As the elders returned to the Communion table with the trays, he served them in silence. After a settled moment of repose, he dismissed them with a wave of his hand. They paused before returning to their families in their seats, standing like curious children gathered around a flattened frog on a neighborhood street, their first real blush with death. They seemed to be waiting for something, a bus, a paycheck. A blessing? They lingered, breathing in, for them, what may have been the pleasant perfume of the flower that represents the One with whom they so sincerely sought such holy communion. Not knowing what the moment required, Thomas embraced each of them, but since his arms didn't work, the hug was awkward or subtle, depending on one's perspective. He simply leaned his head lightly into the shoulder of each, arms hanging like Judas, the great betrayer. One by one they rejoined their families.

Thomas now stood alone. His face felt like it had been stung by a thousand mosquitos. Skin chaffed beneath his clothing, puckered in hive upon hive. Lifeless limbs were slathered in Novacane. He could do nothing but stand there—stand there and ponder what ought to happen next but couldn't. He couldn't offer a spoken prayer for Mrs. Pool's grown son, for the healing of erectile dysfunction, gallbladder stones, broken hearts, human tangles and estrangements. Nor could he utter a word about the awe and gratitude he always felt when people bowed for prayer. The ache of all the world's

woe, the searing headlines, our allergic reaction to the gospel, the sad absence of those we love, the anticipation of what lies ahead and who, our heart's restlessness calmed only by the One who says, peace, peace, would all go unmentioned. Thomas had offered no spoken Great Prayer of Thanksgiving, could pronounce no benediction.

By now, many in the congregation were attending to their own watering eyes and sniffles. The choir sat like an army awaiting the bugle to sound the charge. Children had stopped their fidgeting and stood up to get a better look at what was happening in the roar of all this silence. Thomas felt their stares. The tingling itch of lily-toxins seeped into the microscopic apertures of his flesh.

One word. Just one word. If he could muster one word, what should it be? A Rolodex of possible religious words flashed upon the windscreen of his mind. Grace, peace, potluck.

Even the best words fall short. Every preacher confronts the limits of language each week, aspiring to capture the essence of God in a well-crafted three-point sermon and a stolen poem. Nothing shall be added, Kohelet wrote two-and-a-half millennia ago. Or taken away. Trying otherwise is wasted effort, hot air, vanity. And yet.

Thomas stepped to the center aisle and looked to the choir, then into the faces of his congregation. They had called him earlier this year from a congregation in the South. They had welcomed him with immediate friendship, helping them unpack, pounding them with gifts, flowers, heart-felt notes. He looked at each face. He found his wife's at the back of the sanctuary. She would meet him at the

door and together they would make their escape. She beamed support and love and something steely and strong, a sheer will, some determined transcendence. He saw this look in her eyes when she bore each of their children, when they miscarried the twins, the night his father died, when she led the way, a child in each hand, into the gates of Disney World that summer when all of them were young. She exuded an all-knowing.

She knew her husband's allergies had gone haywire, or that he was having a small stroke, something. She knew. A space alien had crash-landed in his brain. Food poisoning, which, really, describes all fast food. The sobering realization that he dared declare anything at all about the Almighty God—her very own Zechariah coming out of the holy of holies unable to say a word because of what he saw, because of what he dismissed with a laugh, with unbelief. He knew she knew.

He left her gaze for theirs. He looked at their faces. It was a shame to make it almost to the end of the service and not be able to cross the finish line. They never once talked about this possibility in his training decades ago at the seminary.

For his mute benediction, he was able to raise one arm. This motion riveted everyone's attention. He hoisted his arm like the stoic Statue of Liberty except he had nothing in his hand, only fingers he could not feel. With love in his allergic eyes, he lifted his arm like Moses, with a great reach, for he was, indeed, reaching, reaching with his remaining might for something, for some gift just barely out of reach, his final act of faith, reaching.

He tried to speak. He mouthed a word. People doubled forward to hear, listen-

ing. And, from somewhere, somehow, he managed not one word, but four. "Love," he whispered. "Love, love, love."

When he closed his hand and lowered his arm, the organist intoned the choral benediction, and Thomas began the trek down the center aisle towards the doors. He didn't think he'd make it this far. He still had a bit to go. A dozen or so steps. Nothing in life is certain. One can't prepare for every vicissitude. He wasn't finished yet. In the distance from the pulpit to the doors, perhaps in the space of twenty paces, a preacher is swept up with relief that the service is less than a musical measure away from being over. Sometimes her ego confuses relief with success. She feels tall and satisfied and necessary, in league with Old Testament prophets and sainted martyrs. The service unfolded more or less by the book thanks to her masterful planning and professional execution, or, even better, things took a turn, usually accidentally, for the sublime or glorious. And sometimes the preacher is sure her beloved congregation was confused, even injured, by her ruinous preaching and now all of Christendom totters on some brink. This, too, is a malfunction of the ego.

It is impossible for the minister to sort this out right away—or ever—certainly not in the span of steps from the front of the church to the back. It is best just to walk to the doors, one foot after the other, as the postlude erupts behind you and the crowd stirs to its feet, and the choir streams single-file towards the side door, and old friends consort about gardens and grand kids and how the Cubbies did at Saturday's double-header. Old men brush away tears. Some saints sit back down in another world, heads cocked at strange angles, or bowed, listening to

the music. Ancient couples squeeze each other's hand, helping the other up, then out of the pew, straightening spines curved by the weight of life, testing unreliable joints. Nowadays, attending to church and traipsing off to doctor appointments comprise their only outings. And the children are told not to walk on the pews, but they dart around, anyway, like they own the place, like it's theirs, as if church were home, a field of play, a place to be glad and rambunctious and happy. Thank God for the little children. Suffer little children, Jesus said, and forbid them not to come unto me: sliding around in sock-feet bringeth spasms and spasms of joy. For of such is the kingdom of heaven.

Thank God for the children. Thank God for everybody. Gracias, Señor. Te deum laudamus. That's what a good preacher carries with her. Gratitude. Always gratitude.

As the congregation joined the choral amen in sigh-like reverie, Rev. Thomas Maxwell strode down the center aisle like a man fortified with purpose, looking sharp in a black suit with a purple necktie, their new pastor, an emotional man of few words, who, as it turned out, had a flair for the dramatic.

In fact, he was a man infested by stinging ants and peeling skin, resisting the compulsion to hop and skip and swat and claw at his itching body, steadied and willed by his wife's tractor-beam blue eyes, making a beeline from that sanctuary to his bathtub at home, to soak up to his chin in oatmeal and cool water, with bags of frozen peas nested upon his allergic eyes that smoldered like stars.

—Finis—

Mark Your Calendar!

John McCutcheon in Concert

Sunday afternoon

February 20, 2022

Invite your friends!

Imagine this.

What if our church hosted top-notch music Sundays, afternoon and evening concerts, art festivals, storytelling gatherings, and courageous conversations? What if our church offered meals, potlucks, Halloween soup dinners, picnics, and primo cups of justice-friendly coffee and doughnut holes? What if our church devised all sorts of 'low-threshold' events to which to invite neighbors, colleagues, and friends?

We already do (or have done) several of these things. Our music and jazz Sundays have enthralled our guests. Our Christmas Eve pageants, made blurry by our tears, have told the great, great story. Our Trunk-or-Treat dinner is well-known and appreciated in our community.

Hosting John McCutcheon in concert is another, single offering in that energizing vein. We hope our flock will attend in high numbers; we hope our people will invite neighbors, extended family, and friends; we hope local folk music aficionados will help us spread the word to the wider musical community; we hope area students, poets, and writers might come to be schooled.

The Outreach Committee will coordinate Elders and others (committees, teams, and small groups) to help host this event; food may be involved. Dancing could break out. Stories will be shared. Music will awaken hearts. God, we pray, will be delighted as God's children share in fellowship.

* * *

From John's webpage: *No one remembers when the neighbors started calling the McCutcheons to complain about the loud singing from young John's bedroom. It didn't seem to do much good, though. For, after a shaky, lopsided battle between piano lessons and baseball (he was a mediocre pianist and an all-star catcher), he had "found his voice" thanks to a cheap mail-order guitar and a used book of chords.*

From such inauspicious beginnings, John McCutcheon has emerged as one of our most respected and loved folksingers. As an instrumentalist, he is a master of a dozen different traditional instruments, most notably the rare and beautiful hammer dulcimer. His songwriting has been hailed by critics and singers around the globe. His thirty recordings have garnered every imaginable honor including seven Grammy nominations. He has produced over twenty albums of other artists, from traditional fiddlers to contemporary singer-songwriters to educational and documentary works. His books and instructional materials have introduced budding players to the joys of their own musicality. And his commitment to grassroots political organizations has put him on the front lines of many of the issues important to communities and workers.

Even before graduating summa cum laude from Minnesota's St. John's University, this Wisconsin native literally "headed for the hills," forgoing a college lecture hall for the classroom of the eastern Kentucky coal camps, union halls, country churches, and square dance halls. His apprenticeship to many of the legendary figures of Appalachian music imbedded a love of not only home-made music, but a sense of community and rootedness. The result is music...whether

traditional or from his huge catalog of original songs...with the profound mark of place, family, and strength. It also created a storytelling style that has been compared to Will Rogers and Garrison Keillor.

The Washington Post described John as folk music's "Rustic Renaissance Man," a moniker flawed only by its understatement. "Calling John McCutcheon a 'folksinger' is like saying Deion Sanders is just a football player..." (Dallas Morning News). Besides his usual circuit of major concert halls and theaters, John is equally at home in an elementary school auditorium, a festival stage or at a farm rally. He is a whirlwind of energy packing five lifetimes into one. In the past few years alone he has headlined over a dozen different festivals in North America (including repeated performances at the National Storytelling Festival), recorded an original composition for Virginia Public Television involving over 500 musicians, toured Australia for the sixth time, toured Chile in support of a women's health initiative, appeared in a Woody Guthrie tribute concert in New York City, gave a featured concert at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, taught performance art skills at a North Carolina college, given symphony pops concerts across America, served as President of the fastest-growing Local in the Musicians Union and performed a special concert at the National Baseball Hall of Fame. This is all in his "spare time." His "real job," he's quick to point out, is father to two grown sons.

But it is in live performance that John feels most at home. It is what has brought his music into the lives and homes of one of the broadest audiences any folk musician has ever enjoyed. People of every generation and background seem to feel at home in a concert hall when John McCutcheon takes

the stage, with what critics describe as "little feats of magic," "breathtaking in their ease and grace..." and "like a conversation with an illuminating old friend."

Whether in print, on record, or on stage, few people communicate with the versatility, charm, wit or pure talent of John McCutcheon.

Worship Schedule

9 AM **Worship/Sanctuary**
or join us online at firstpres.live

11:15 AM **The Gathering/Chapel**
Contemporary Service
begins Sunday, July 25

Unvaccinated people must wear a mask indoors for their safety and the safety of other unvaccinated people. Vaccinated people do not need to wear a mask for safety, but may if they wish. Our Covid-19 Response Team strongly encourages all people to be vaccinated.

Finance

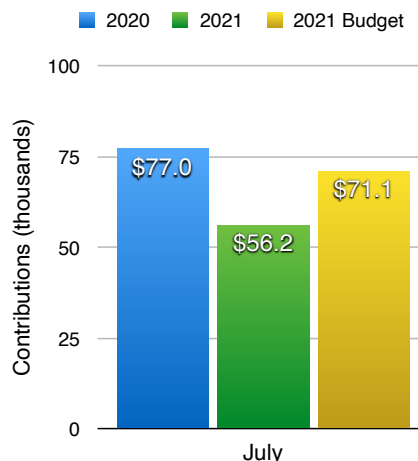
Financial Update

BY MARK SCHOEFFMANN, CHAIR FINANCE

MSCHOEFFMANN@MCHSI.COM

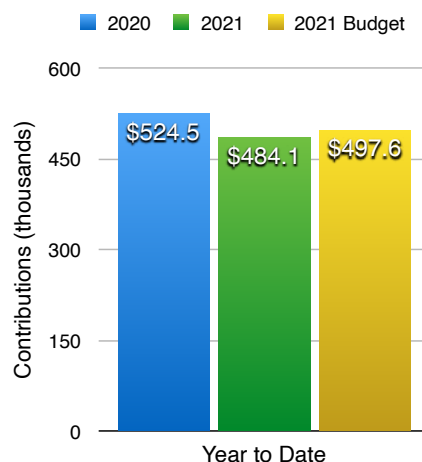
Contributions

Contributions in July to the Operating Fund were \$20.8K less than in 2020 and \$14.9K less than the budget at \$56.2K. The Year to Date total is below last year by \$40.4K and below the budgeted amount by \$13.5K. 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 58.3% through the year we have received 67.4% of the expected year's revenue.



Expenses

Year to Date expenses are \$47.4K above the budget at \$657.8K and more than in 2020 by \$49.0K. At 58.3% through the year we have experienced 62.9% of the expected year's expenses.

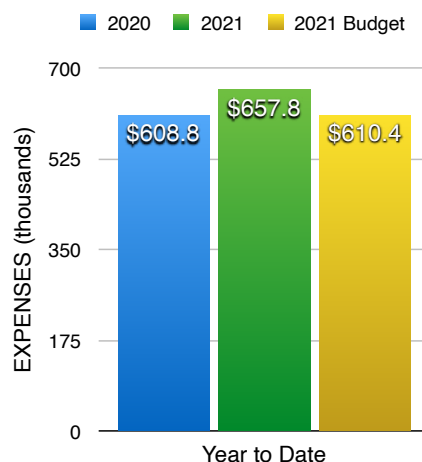


Balance

Considering all sources, revenue exceeds expenses by \$76.5K which is \$109.3K less than at the end of July in 2020.

Restricted Funds

In addition to contributions to the operating fund there was \$6,994 donated last month to special offerings and funds restricted to specific purposes such as missions supported by our church. The largest amount of contributions was \$4,080 to the Raindrop Project.



Nurture

Sholem Fest/Fun in the Sun August 15

Let's come together for our annual Sholem Fest event, Fun In The Sun, Sunday, August 15 at 7 PM. We will meet near the pavilion just north of Sholem Aquatic Center in Champaign for a carnival. Popcorn, cotton candy and lemonade will be available with exciting games for the young.

For the less young, bring a lawn chair if you have one, enjoy the laughter and energy and catch up with friends. We are partnering this year with the DREAM kindergarten students and their families.

The aquatic center will be open at 8 PM exclusively to First Pres guests. Bring a towel and pool apparel. Everything is free. Rain date is August 22.

If you want to help out during the event contact a planning group member: **Ritchie Drennen, Cornicha Henderson, Bob Kirby, Samantha Nichols, Gary and Linda Peterson, Mindy Watts-Ellis.**

International Taste Cancelled

International Taste planned for September has been cancelled due to COVID risks. We will reschedule this popular fellowship event in the life of our congregation when it is safe to do so.

Children, Youth & Family

Children, Youth, Family

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

Many thanks to the Nurture committee, especially **Gary Peterson** for organizing the box lunches for our successful *Sowing Spiritual Seeds* events in Hessel Park! A good time was had by all as we learned the parable of the sower.

Be sure to join us for Fun in the Sun! August 15th at 7 PM at Centennial Park in the north pavilion area for carnival games, popcorn, cotton candy, and Kona Ice. Pool time in Sholem pool starts at 8 PM for our church group party.

Volunteer training for Sunday School teaching teams begins August 22 at 10:15 AM in the Parlor. Zoom will be an option for joining the training. A second training will be offered August 29 at 10:15 also in the Parlor with a Zoom option.

Sunday School resumes September 12. The form it will take is being shaped by the CYF committee and staff as we evaluate the changing circumstances with the Delta Variant of COVID-19. We will plan to hold classes outside in West Side Park as long as the weather cooperates and offer an online Bible study time that can be done with family at home.

Awesome God

BY LINDA PETERSON

*Awesome God, Living
Word and Holy Spirit we praise you.
Look at your wonderful deeds!*

*Look at the warm day star, watch its
rising and setting in beautiful colors*

*Look at the evening heavenly body,
watch its shape change from a sliver
to a robust orb.*

*Look upward to the twinkling lights in
the black sky, watch the patterns and
let their clusters guide your travels.*

*Come and see all the wonders of the
vault of heaven above and the separation
of the waters below.*

*Look at the oceans of sweet water,
watch the playful fish jumping and
splashing.*

*Look at the dry land risen from beneath
the waters, watch the growth
of lush grasses and trees bearing
luscious fruit.*

*Look at the goliath ridges capped
with white hats, watch the snow melt
into fields of wild flowers.*

*Look at the wondrous varieties of animals,
watch part of the eco-system
work, enjoy God's gifts.*

*Come and see the handiwork of the
one true God, look and see the Earth
provided as humankind's home.*

*Look at the image of God made flesh,
watch as he disregards the gift of
Utopia.*

*Look at man and sin, watch as the
Heavenly Father dispenses Grace,
over and over again and again.*

*Look at the Word, watch as the ultimate
gift teaches a new way.*

*Look at the cross, watch as the blood
shed pours out in the Spirit of living
water*

*Look at new life, watch and thank the
Savior for everlasting life.*

*Come and see the new you, a loving
child of God.*

*Awesome God,
Living Word and Holy Spirit,
we praise and thank you
for the love and grace
you have bestowed on us.*



Ephesians 4:15 Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Psalm 25:4,5 Show me your ways, oh Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are my God, my Savior, and my hope is in You all day long.

Psalm 33:4 For the word of the Lord is right and true; He is faithful in all He does.

Psalm 145:18 The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth.

To the family of faith known as First Presbyterian Church of Champaign,

I wish to extend to you my deepest gratitude for the wonderful send-off you provided for my family and me. The gathering was a wonderful way to celebrate the last several years of serving God together. The beard masks were hilarious, the food was delicious, the expressions of love and appreciation were touching, and the mementos of photos and cards are a treasure. I also cannot thank you enough for the monetary gifts that you shared with our family. They have already been a huge blessing to us as we navigate the transition into new ministry in Woodstock, Illinois. Thank you so much! As Paul wrote to the church at Phillip, "I thank my God every time I remember you," (Phil 4:13)

At the end of any pastoral ministry with a congregation in the Presbytery of Southeastern Illinois, the departing minister is required to let the congregation know about the Presbytery's Covenant of Closure. It states that I will not be involved in any way in the activities of FPCC, including not giving opinions about church decisions publicly, privately, through social media, etc. not officiate any special events, including funerals, weddings, baptisms, worship, church anniversaries, unless explicitly invited by the Moderator of the Session. It is required to consult with the Moderator of the Session and the Presbytery leadership prior to visiting the congregation, attending worship, or attending a special event. There is a note in the Covenant of Closure which states "It is understood that this policy does not affect or require termination of friendships with individuals in the congregation."

Thank you for our years of ministry together. I am grateful for how we have grown together in God's service. I pray for your continued ministry as you worship, connect, and serve.

In Christ's peace,
Eric

Joys & Concerns

Sympathy...

- A Memorial Service for **Patricia Failor** who passed away February 19, 2021 will be held Saturday, August 7, at 11 AM in the church Sanctuary.

Prayers...

- **Michael Hogue's** mother had a brain tumor removed and has radiation ahead of her. Michael is grateful for all your prayers. Continue praying to have a speedy and full recovery.

A **Prayer List** is sent out weekly on Tuesdays. If you know of someone who would like to be included in prayers, contact the church office. If you would like to receive the weekly email of prayer concerns, email marcia@firstpres.church.

Men's Prayer Group

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

Mission Updates

The Heart of Missions Newsletter has been revived. Our local and global mission agencies have made changes due to COVID restrictions, as well as food and medical supply shortages. The newsletter helps summarize some of what has been in the mission news for our mission workers and agencies during the past week in case you missed it. You can access The Heart of Missions on the church website under the SERVE tab at firstpres.church/heartofmissions

Raindrop Project 2021

Thank You!

BY RACHEL MATTHEWS, MISSION COORDINATOR
RACHEL@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

I want to thank you for all your contributions to the Raindrop Offering this year. Raindrop Offering this year was hosted by the Community Mission Deacons and went to assist S.A.F.E. House with computers and life skills material. Over the month of July we raised \$4,095. There will be a few additional dollars added to that from this first week in August. I am almost finished with the Life Skills course that I was teaching. It has been a joy to meet with these men every week. I have been blessed with their life experience and practical wisdom. I look forward to sharing the computers that will be purchased from the Raindrop Offering.

I want to share once again the history of the S.A.F.E. House which I printed in one of the Heart of Mission eNewsletters earlier this Summer. First Presbyterian Church has a long and strong relationship with this ministry.

Canaan S.A.F.E. House History



In 1992, members of Canaan Baptist Church and First Presbyterian Church formed a Community Relations Task Force to address how

the Christian Community could work together in the fight against substance abuse. Plans for a SAFE House (Substance Abuse Free Environment) grew into a community-wide effort embraced by the Champaign and Urbana Police Departments. SAFE House is modeled after the Substance Abuse Ministry implemented by Rev. B. J. Tatum in 1986 at Canaan Baptist Church

On February 7, 1994 the Door of Deliverance opened as a haven for men to overcome their addiction. The Men's Safe House, located at 213 S Central Ave, Urbana, IL attacks the problem of drugs and alcohol abuse through the Word of God, education, prevention and access to rehabilitation.

Throughout its 27 year history, the Program has experienced successful results. To date, the men's Safe House Ministry has served hundreds of men and their families. Also, over 100 men have successfully completed the 12-month residential program. Past graduates are successful community members who contribute to society in a variety of professions.

On October 14, 2012, the 12-month residential Women's Safe House opened its Door of Deliverance at 502 E. Church Street in Champaign, IL to provide hope for women suffering from the ravages of drugs and alcohol. To date, more than fifty women have entered the program and 7 graduates have successfully completed the 12-month residential program.

The SAFE House concept works! Both programs are recognized by the Champaign County Court System as an option for substance abusers.

Past directors of the SAFE house have been Johnny Harris, Rev. Carter. Both of whom had experienced recovery from addiction in the Canaan Baptist ministry. Brother Green had a long leadership even through his wife's battle with cancer. The current director is Brother Raymond McCrary. First Presbyterian Church has had several graduates of SAFE House who have worked on our staff.

On August 27, 2019 Matt Difanis, a supporter of Canaan S.A.F.E.house, wrote on Facebook following their annual Jazz festival in Hessel Park, "The center boasts an incredibly high success rate and such a high level of credibility that the criminal justice system frequently works to place those with addictions there. At the event on Sunday, graduates of the S.A.F.E. house could be heard telling their friends--as they pointed at Judges Ford and Difanis in the crowd--that "he saved my life" by getting them to the S.A.F.E. house.

Sometimes the criminal justice system manages to rehabilitate, and in many of those cases, it's because of Canaan S.A.F.E. house."

Pictures and more about this wonderful ministry can be found at <http://canaansafehouse.org/media/> As Jeannie Snoeyink has said, "God has blessed this program, freed many from drugs and taught them how to lead meaningful lives of service to God and others....We thank God for allowing us to be a part of this program since its inception and the blessings we have received from it."

From the “Green Team”

BY PAT PHILLIPS

P.PHILLIPS42@SBCGLOBAL.NET

Something New in Westminster Hall!

Many of you keep your Styrofoam containers for recycling when the church collects them during the year, and we have good news for you. You do not have to store them at your home for several months. The Environmental Committee has placed a container in Westminster Hall near the Mission corner to collect them.

Each week the collection will be taken to the DART recycle in Urbana! So please bring only cleaned ones with the 6 and a triangle around it at your convenience. We are mainly referring



to take-out boxes or meat “trays”, no packing materials or pellets. As you know, we are all trying to keep the environment as God created it, and he did not plan on styrofoam floating in the lakes and oceans, or in the parks and fields!

We hope you will find this convenient.

ESL Program

BY JEANETTE PYNE, ESL DIRECTOR

JEANETTE@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

Immigrant Back-to-School Resource Fair

According to my emails, the first time **Samantha Nichols**, the Sunday School Coordinator, and I talked with each other about increasing vaccine access among immigrants in the community was on March 24th, 2021. She told me that she could acquire \$1500 in grant money from Interfaith Youth Core. Knowing that immigrants are less likely to be vaccinated, we started brainstorming ideas to address this issue with only \$1500.

Having only started with \$1500, our initial dream was to print out some flyers in multiple languages debunking vaccine myths. These would be distributed to try to increase the number of vaccinated immigrants in our community. We decided to do some research and pull other immigrant service organizations into the planning to see what would be the most effective strategy.

Fast forward only 4 months to July 31st, 2021, the day of the Immigrant Back-to-School Resource Fair. This event was the “Big Dream” event that we had—the one that Samantha and I thought, “oh it would be nice to do this, but I don’t know if we could pull it off.” With funds from the New American Welcome Center, First Presbyterian Church of Champaign, First Pres ESL

Program, and Interfaith Youth Core, and collaboration with several other compassionate organizations—The Refugee Center, Champaign Urbana Public Health Department (CUPHD), Urbana Park District, Immigrant Services of CU, Champaign County Healthcare Consumers, and Pixan Konob’—we indeed accomplished our “Big Dream”.

Over 300 people were served and assisted in some way that day. Over 20 organizations tabled at the resource fair, which attendees got to explore and connect with. 300 meals and 300 backpacks filled with school supplies as well as some additional supply kits were given. A total of 20 people were vaccinated, which—according to Kelly Flannigan of CUPHD—is a really good number for a pop-up vaccine clinic. As Samantha said, “That’s 20 more vaccinated people than yesterday and 20 people who can encourage their friends and family members to get vaccinated.” Even folks who weren’t ready to get vaccinated got to ask questions, learn more about the vaccine, and share their experience of Covid-19 if they were interested in doing so at the vaccine hesitancy table. Overall, the event was a success that could not have happened without the organizations that collaborated in the planning and the volunteers that sacrificed a Saturday and weathered the rain to serve the immigrant community in CU. So, a big thank you to the volunteers and the collaborating organizations!





**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH** OF CHAMPAIGN

302 West Church Street
Champaign, IL 61820

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**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH** OF CHAMPAIGN

302 West Church Street
Champaign, IL 61820

P: 217.356.7238

F: 217.356.7242

E: info@firstpres.church

www.firstpres.church

Sunday:

9 AM Worship/Sanctuary

11:15 AM The Gathering/Chapel

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

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
Sam Haupt Director Contemporary Worship Band
Rachel Matthews Mission Coordinator/Parish Associate, Ext. 219
Samantha Nichols..... Sunday School Coordinator, Ext. 216
Blaise Pascal..... CYF Connections Assistant, Ext. 216
Ann Petry..... Accounting, Ext. 224
Jeanette Pyne..... ESL Director, 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, matt@firstpres.church.

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