

January 2020



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN

What's Up At First Pres?

We would like to try a new feature in our newsletter next month tentatively called "What's up at FPCC?"

If you have a question about Session, church finances, the budget, building and grounds, worship services, the socks Pastor Matt wore last Sunday, or anything at all about the church, send them along to info@firstpres.church with "What's up" in the subject line by January 24.

The answers will be in the February newsletter.

God's Strange Economy of Small Things

BY MATT MATTHEWS
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A light in the darkness, John calls it. It's not difficult to imagine; a single candle brightens a dark place. We've seen it before; a little baby's smile can melt the hearts of everybody in the room. God's love is like that. A bit of heat and light kindle in people a great, great hope. Odd that such a small thing can be imbued with such power.

Bethlehem was a backwater town claimed by a tenacious but small nation of Jews. By way of contrast, the City of Rome had 13-times more people (650,000) than Jerusalem (50,000), and the Roman Empire was vast, touching nearly every part of the known world. It might be the difference between a whole crop of wheat and a single mustard seed.

Herod was a Roman official. His job in Palestine was to occupy this small Jewish nation, claim it for Rome, keep the people paying taxes to Caesar, and to keep his subjects from squirming too loudly under his oppressive thumb. Herod probably hoped for something better, and was bucking for a raise. He had ambition. He had political savvy, and was a slippery, political opportunist—a minor public official, far, far away from the seat of real power.

If Herod was a small cog in the wheel of the far-reaching Roman Empire, his ego was anything but small. He had a plan that if he should die an untimely death, his troops were to take 70 of the most prominent Jewish leaders and slay them. His reasoning? When he died, there was to be weeping throughout the land: in Jerusalem city, in the travel centers, even in Bethlehem.

Bethlehem bathed by star-shine, shone on the plains like a flickering light illumining a very dark night. The sovereign God of the entire cosmos had chosen this small place to do his Big Thing. And this is how it happened:

It happened with a shattering earthquake. Angels swooped down armed with steel and brimstone. The whole world heard it at once. And Jesus came robed in white silk studded with gold and silver, cracking whips on the backs of his other-worldly Arabian stallions which drew his chariot of wind and flame.

Alas, this is how some of us think it should have happened. It makes sense to our cowboy way of thinking, that God would come in, guns blazing, to rid the

world of evil.

Instead, God chose a silent night. Angels sang, they sang. A group of lowly shepherds were the very first to be told. And Jesus was born as a baby, to a young woman, flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone, born in a stall ordinarily reserved for donkeys and cows. He was laid in a feeding trough of hay.

Matthew tells the story of how wise men would come. Herod, seething with jealousy and afraid to face his boss in Rome if he lost his grip, would order all Jewish boys slaughtered. Mary, Joseph, and baby would flee as refugees into a land in which they had no green card, no welcome, no references, no invitation, no connections, no home.

This is how God became incarnate. This is how God chose to begin this chapter of the world's redemption. With a cast of hodge-podge players, this is how God did it. With a teenage girl. And with her baby.

John likens this whole beginning to a single light in darkness.

A light that darkness will not overcome.

Thanks be to God.

Employee Highlights

BY DAVE WHITFORD, HUMAN RESOURCES

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The Human Resource team strives to keep the congregation informed about our wonderful staff, who keep our church and its programs functioning smoothly. This month we are featuring **Patty Farthing** and **Jason Pope**.

Patty Farthing
Receptionist

If you have visited or phoned the church office, chances are the first friendly voice you heard was Patty's. She and her husband, Bruce, have been active in the church since they joined in 1978. In 2001,

Patty became the Director of the Nursery. Over time, changes in the operational structure and staffing of the church have resulted in her accepting the position she now has as church receptionist.

Patty was born in Greensburg, which she describes as a wonderful "Norman Rockwell" small town in southern Indiana. In high school, she caught the eye of a handsome athlete named Bruce Farthing, and they became high school sweethearts. Patty and Bruce eventually married and they have been blessed with three sons and a daughter. The Farthings have three grandsons and six granddaughters plus lots of grand pets!

Patty loves to read, watch classic movies and go on long walks with Bruce. Her two favorite books are *Where Is God When It Hurts* and *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, both by Phillip Yancy.

At work, each day presents her with a happy serendipity-like surprise. She especially appreciates the opportunity to support our church's legacy of mission and outreach both locally and beyond.

Patty is not shy about her favorite food. It is chocolate, chocolate and more chocolate! So the next time you visit the church office, swing by Patty's desk and say hello, and if you want a friend for life, slip her something chocolate!

Jason Pope
Contemporary Worship Director

Jason has been leading the Contemporary Service for the last eighteen months. He is responsible for selecting the Service's music and leading the Praise Band.

He is originally from St. Louis. Jason and his wife, Andrea, met at Millikin University. They have three children, Jacob (19), Alle (16) and Jack (13). The Papes have lived in Champaign since 2014.

When he is not putting together our Contemporary Service, Jason's "day job" focuses on education. He has been an

educator and school administrator in Kansas City, Decatur, and Champaign for over a decade. Currently he is the Principal of Bottenfield Elementary School.

You may have seen Jason's picture in the News-Gazette a few months ago. Do you recall seeing an administrator dressed in a bumblebee costume on the roof of Bottenfield? That was Jason! He promised his students if they exceeded their Walk-a-Thon fundraising goal, he would don a bee costume and climb up on the school's roof. They raised a record amount (\$9,000), and the rest is history.

Because he is pursuing a Ph.D., Jason's hobbies are on hold; however, he enjoys attending movies with his family. If you are at Mahomet's Project 47 Smokehouse restaurant, you might spy Jason enjoying a delicious brisket sandwich. In Jason's words, a love of barbecue "rubs off" on anyone who has spent time in Kansas City.

Jason's musical tastes are eclectic, depending on his mood. However, back in the day, he had really long hair and was a BIG heavy metal rock fan. If the 2020 Bottenfield Walk-a-Thon exceeds the 2019 goal, do not be surprised to see Jason on the school roof dressed as a member of Metallica playing one of the group's hits. Rock on, Jason!

Ein Stern
A Star

The Holocaust:

*Remembering the Past as We Stand
Together for a Brighter Future*

WHEN & WHERE

**Wednesday
January 22
6:30-7:45 p.m.**

Countryside School
4301 W. Kirby Ave.
Champaign

**EVERYONE
WELCOME**

A MOVING, POWERFUL EVENING

- **Documentary** - created by Max Libman containing an interview of his great-grandmother Ann Gershuny describing the loss of her family in the Holocaust
- **Short film** - "A Star", an original screenplay by Max that debuted at CU Film Society's Pens to Lens gala, inspired by Ann's life
- **Community Panel** - local leaders standing united against hatred
- **Discussion and Gallery** - Holocaust-inspired artwork and poetry by Countryside's 7th and 8th graders

PRESENTER

Max Libman - Countryside 8th grader

Presentation is appropriate for
Middle School-aged children and older



Congregational Life

Nurture

BY GARY PETERSON, NURTURE
AMER_SWEDE@YAHOO.COM

It has been my pleasure heading the Nurture Committee this past year. I couldn't have done it without great help. Committee members included **Bob Kirby, Betty Hollister, Beth Hutchens, Ginny Waaler, Tom Gilmore, Linda Peterson, Lola Ruthmansdorfer** and **Pastor Eric Corbin**. Thank You all.

Over the past year our Hospitality and Fellowship committee has planned and organized 7, 8 or 9 dinners, International Taste of First Pres, Sholem Fest, Taste of C-U Booth, provided a continental breakfast and ice cream social for the John Williams Event, an evening meal for Young Lives, greeters at the doors on Sunday morning, coffee and donuts in between services and host at the Welcome Center.

Membership has tracked church attendance, collected friendship pad information, contacted those who were visiting and followed up on those that have not attended church over a certain period of time.

Sabrina Hwu will be leading Nurture beginning this year. We wish her all the best and we wish all a very blessed and Happy New Year!!!!

Adult Ed

BY BETTY HOLLISTER, CHAIR SPIRITUAL
FORMATION
B.HOLL@MCHSI.COM

Epiphany may have passed, but we know our First Pres family still seeks to grow in faith. Please join us Sunday mornings at 10:15 to continue our quest for lots of laughter and fellowship at the same time.

In January you have the chance to dig deeper in the day's chosen scripture and to discuss the message given to us in the sermon. No prior reading or study needed. Just come ready to participate or just listen and ponder.

February brings the return of our Faith in the Real World Series. Join us in the sanctuary to hear how faith and vocation mesh to reflect the light of Jesus outside the four walls of a church. Even though we may still be vacuuming real or fake pine needles, your adult education team is focusing on plans for Lent and Easter.

March will bring opportunities for a devotional study recommended by PCUSA and written by Jill Duffield. Pastor Matt will be offering a grief seminar called *In Lieu of Flowers* on Wednesday afternoons from 3 – 4:30 pm. So, mark your calendars for March 10, 17, and 24 and stay tuned for details.

What are you most grateful for at First Pres? Here are some of the responses...

- Most people are so friendly. Feel welcomed each Sunday
- Friendliness of parishioners, diversity in congregation culturally
- The many friends I have here
- Exemplary of the welcoming tradition of Presbyterians
- The people to love and to share my faith journey
- Friendships
- The friendships I've made over the years
- We stand firm in a toxic political environment and refuse to let polarizing politicians to divide us
- Friendship
- People
- The opportunity for wonderful fellowship
- The people
- Fellowship of this caring church
- The history my family has here – We joined in 1966. Our three kids were raised here and confirmed. Our daughter was married here and Jim is buried in the columbarium, etc
- Fellowship of church members
- Acceptance of all – liberal theology
- What we inherit from all the saints in this church who went before us
- Great people
- Visiting with fellow church members
- Friendships
- I am happy to come here because of friendships, its good for this church
- Being a member for over 50 years
- Our congregation

Children, Youth & Family

Children, Youth & Family Update

BY MINDY WATTS-ELLIS, DIRECTOR OF CYF
 mindy@firstpres.church

Mentors are asked to be present at the worship service when the confirmands who have decided to join the church are received as members in May. We have 6 female and 1 male student currently in the class. Contact **Mindy Watts-Ellis** for more details and to volunteer.

Youth Group

LIZZ PIPPIN, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
 LIZZ@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

In the daze after Christmas, it's nice to reflect on the year that has been.

We had a blast this past month! We had a Christmas Party where we played Advent bingo, did a Christmas scavenger hunt and enjoyed good food together. Fridays during the advent season the high schoolers gathered at **Sabrina Hwu's** home for a special Advent Fridays. We did a word study on hope, peace, joy, and love. It was a wonderful way to fellowship together as we prepared for Christmas.

We also baked Christmas Cookies for you all. We want to thank everyone who bought cookies. The money you gave will go towards our Go and Serve trip to Memphis, TN in July.

Looking ahead to the start of the new year, I am excited for what is in store for the youth group. This month we will have our annual Martin Luther King Jr. Weekend Winter Retreat.

Starting this month youth group will be open to both middle and high school students; rather than having a separate night for each group.

I look forward to what the new year holds in store for our youth and the activities we have planned this coming year!



The children's Christmas Pageant was presented during the 9 AM service on Sunday, December 22.

Mindy Watts-Ellis will be attending the national conference for the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators January 29-February 1 in Little Rock, Arkansas. The theme is "Getting Outside the Box: Discipleship through Retreat, Mission, & Justice Ministries."

Sunday School

Sunday School resumed on January 5. January will bring the unit 'I Grow' for the preschool and Kindergarten class. The elementary kids will study the story of Jesus calling his disciples. The Middle school will explore the questions "Why is the term holy catholic church in the apostle's creed if we aren't Catholic?" The confirmation class will study the word of God and our

response to it. The high school will be studying the wisdom writings of the Bible.

Confirmation Mentors Needed

CYF is seeking faith-filled adults to pair with our confirmands to serve as mentors. Confirmation mentors walk along side their student as a friend and gentle guide as the student defines what he/she believes and begins to write his/her statement of faith.

You don't need to have all the answers, on the contrary, you are to share your struggles as an ordinary person trying to live a life of faith. Mentors are encouraged to be in contact with their student once a week to share news and do something fun together occasionally.



As we begin a New Year, let us read and reflect on the 23rd Psalm.

May we pray that every Christian organization, church and family will be revived and renewed as we ponder the Shepherd of Heaven who delivers on his promise of streams in the desert and of His abiding care.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who cares for wandering sheep, promises His perfect provision, guidance and protection. Thanks be to God.

2020 Martin Luther King Celebrations

There are several events throughout the county to commemorate the life and legacy of **Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** The countywide celebration is at 4 PM on Friday, January 17, at The Vineyard Church. This year's keynote speaker will be **Dr. Sampson Davis**. Dr. Davis will respond to the theme of Building a Healthy Community by Investing in the Dream. On Sunday, January 19, at 5 PM, Krannert will host the 35th Annual MLK Service of Celebration. There is also a Unity Breakfast, a day of service, and more. Check details at <https://www.oae.illinois.edu/MLK/calendar.html>. Hope to see you at one or more of these events!

Share Our Photos and Information!



Photos from some of the Christmas services are now available on our Facebook page at <http://fb.com/firstpreschampaign/photos>. We'll be adding more photos soon. When you arrive at that page, you'll first see Albums listed. Click an album to see photos. "Like," comment, and share your favorites! Sharing photos and information about your church is a great way to tell your friends about how God is working at First Pres! If you do not have a Facebook account, it is easy and free to sign up. However, you do not have to have a Facebook account to view the photos. As you scroll down the page, a large box will pop up, asking you to log in or create an account. Just click "Not now" and you can continue to view the photos. Enjoy!

Jays & Concerns

We express our sympathy to the family and friends of...

- **Gordon Johnson** who died January 6, 2020. Mr. Johnson has been a member of the church since November 1957.

Thank you...

- **\$2,562** was collected for the Advent offering and will be sent on to Restoration Urban Ministry;
- You generously gave **\$2,777** to the Christmas Joy offering. This money will be sent on to the PCUSA for assistance to current and retired church workers in their time of need and developing our future leaders at Presbyterian-related racial ethnic schools and colleges.

Mission Updates

Mission News

BY RACHEL MATTHEWS,
 TEMPORARY MISSION COORDINATOR
 RACHEL@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

Angel Tree Thank You



The Community Mission Deacons want to thank everyone for participating in the Angel Tree for our community agencies this year. Some of the agencies we helped were Salt and Light, Safe House, CU at Home, Restoration Urban Ministry, Jesus is the Way Prison Ministry (toys for children of prisoners), Canteen Run, Crisis Nursery, Courage Connection, DREAM, The

Refugee Center, Faith in Action and *empty tomb* (layettes). We filled up the mission closet and delivered all the gifts by Christmas. Everyone was very grateful. On our Mission Kiosk in Westminster Hall several end of the year Thank You's are posted from our local and global mission agencies. Take a look!



Looking Ahead for 2020

One Winter Night

You may be hearing in the news about one of our mission partners – C-U at Home. C-U at Home One Winter Night will take place on Friday, February 7, 2020, in downtown Champaign. This is the eighth time C-U at Home has held this signature community event to raise awareness and funds to help the homeless in our community!

Box dwellers commit to spending 12 hours outside in a cardboard box, along Neil Street in downtown Champaign and raise at least \$1,000 to help C-U at Home continue doing all we do to help our community in 2020.

You can get involved by donating or signing up to be a box dweller, business sponsor, or volunteer! See the C-U at Home event page <https://secure.qgiv.com/event/onewinternight-2020/>

Green Team Update



Styrofoam Sunday

Thank you to everyone who supported our first Styrofoam Sunday! The ESC Green Team took five large bags of styrofoam to the Dart Recycling Drop-off shed! If you forgot to bring your styro-

foam to the event, you can take it over to the Dart Recycling shed yourself and place it in one of the available bags. The facility/shed is at: 1505 East Main Street, Urbana

Take Main Street east of Vine in Urbana, about 10 blocks or eight tenths of a mile. You'll see the Dart Container building on your right (south side of Main Street). Go past the building and turn right onto Lierman Avenue. (Follow the signs for the Employee Parking lot.) The blue Recycling shed is in the Employee Parking lot on your right. You can open either door to get into the shed and leave your styrofoam. Please just be sure that it has the #6 chasing arrow, is clean and dry or is block styrofoam. (No packing materials)

What happens to the styrofoam after the recycling shed?

From their website, Dart explains that they have an agreement with several companies in the U.S. where styrofoam is recycled into plastic that is then used for picture frames, lumber and many other uses. The MCS Industries, Inc. website, under "The Lifecycle of our Products" section, has a short video that shows how old styrofoam becomes new materials and products. Their web site is: <https://www.mcsindustries.com> Dart Container, Inc. <https://www.dart-container.com/sustainability/resources/>

Thank you again for your support!

The Environmental Stewardship Committee (Green Team)

ESL Program Update

BY JEANETTE PYNE, ESL COORDINATOR
 JEANETTE@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

The Purple Class

Because God has blessed the ESL Program with a few more tutors, we were able to start offering a new class in December 2019. We called it the Purple class. It is more advanced than the Blue class, which was our highest level. I re-tested all the Green (intermediate level) and Blue (high-intermediate/advanced) students, so they could be more accurately placed into the three levels: Green, Blue, and Purple. Due to the new class, we have been able to add new students to all our levels; thus, serving more immigrants and international visitors. In December, we averaged about 40 students every day!



The Purple Class. From top left to bottom right: Matt (Brazil), Mike Havey (tutor), George (Brazil), Yudisley (Colombia), Pamela (Brazil), Patricia (China), and Irjin (Korea).

Gingerbread Houses

When I was a child, I remember decorating gingerbread houses with my sister. It was a fun way to celebrate the Christmas season. Many of our students have never participated in decorating gingerbread houses. To expose the students to this

cultural experience, I bought a dozen gingerbread house decorating kits and, we had a gingerbread house decorating contest during the Christmas party.

We concluded the party with our tradition of singing “Silent Night” led by Mike Havey.



Students were put into teams of 4 people—3 students and one tutor. The teams were comprised of students from different languages and proficiency levels. This forced them to communicate in English. They needed to collaborate together to create a beautifully decorated house.

After 45 minutes of decorating, the teams brought their iced and candied houses and trees to the front of the Café behind their team number. Then, we all voted on the best decorated house. Team 4 won and were given the coveted prizes.



The winners of the gingerbread house decorating contest. From left to right: Ron Baker (tutor), Julia (Korea), Yingying (China), and Roza (Kyrgyzstan).

Snippets from Matt's Cuba Journal/Winter 2019

As winter sets in, I invite you to think about the warmer climes of Cuba.

For the next few months I thought I'd share with you passages from the journal I kept while in Havana last year while visiting our Sister Church, the Iglesia Presbiteriana-Reformada en Luyano. The church is located at the edge of downtown Havana. Our delegation from First Presbyterian Church Champaign (**Rachel Matthews, Robert Ferrer, Judi Geistliner**, and I) stayed on the Luyano campus and were treated like beloved family. We were verily treasured. This brotherhood/sisterhood, what our Cuban hosts call a "hermanamiento," is a special bond that is difficult to describe. I want you to know this by taking a trip to Cuba with another team from First Pres.

In the meantime, here are snippets from my journal. These abbreviated notes come without explanation; I think you'll be able to follow.

Come with me!

Matt

Our First Breakfast:

Pastor Daniel is somber. Some days, he said, "I feel like I'm running with twenty pounds of rocks in my pocket." He was talking about modernity in Cuba. The internet wasn't working that morning and there was, we were told later, a shortage of salt.

The Van:

The church van is a carousel of squeaky springs, grinding gears, and uneven engine roar. Carlos swerves ably and often to avoid the larger of the multitudinous pot holes, the seismically faulted road plates, and rough railroad tracks. The van objects every time Carlos yanks the steering wheel or stomps the clutch. A 22-passenger Toyota that isn't sold in the States, she lets out a fantastic array of groans, screams, pops, sizzles, and clanks, walking tenderly like an old, arthritic woman over red, hot coals.

The grinding, crashing gears are particularly cringeworthy; she doesn't go into second easily, and sometimes first is impossible, despite Carlos' fierce yanking at the gear shift. His rocking in the driver's seat doesn't help, either, but twisting his face up does work some kind of alchemy and she shifts easily into gear, and we lurch onward. The shift changes are accompanied by a terrifying sound akin to the slamming of sheet metal against stone.

Every time Carlos coaxes this machine into first gear, I fear the transmission will simply fall out onto the road with a final crash of pipes and automotive guts. Even on a smooth road, which I have yet to discover in Havana, the van bounces and yaws protesting with woeful yelps.

Hanging from the rearview mirror is a bud-ded cross, which swings in astonishingly graceful circles as from the hand of a transcendent dervish.

Calamity-on-wheels delivered us windblown, jiggled, and shaken but safely to each destination. I should never have doubted Toyota or faithful Carlos.

Carlos:

Carlos, our intrepid driver, weaves through traffic tapping the horn, beep, beep, beeping his way through traffic and around slower vehicles, leaving flatbeds carrying workers and pipe, anemic vans and scooters, and slow Buick taxis behind. Carlos is an honors graduate of the Dale Earnhardt School of Offensive Driving.

We're in good hands.

Buses:

Yutong buses sit high above the road, glassed sides sealed against the smoggy exhaust of traffic. These Chinese buses are new and freshly washed, full, I suppose, of air-conditioned foreign tourists being shuttled from resort to resort. These silent buses glide by our van.

Daniel said there are always at least two Cubans on board: the driver and the tour guide.

The Road to Matanzas:

I. Most of the buildings look abandoned. In the States, buildings as neglected and decrepit as these are ready for the wrecking ball. Paint is peeled and faded and curled by the wind and sun. Gated compounds are overgrown.

A shining exception was a fire station we passed on the highway to Matanzas. The tile shone clean in the morning sun. The opened garage doors revealed polished trucks and gleaming floors. The surrounding yard was landscaped with yucca and flowering bushes.

Spit shine must be in the DNA of all firefighters.

II. A refinery on the coast mars a gorgeous view. Oily, black smoke belches from a tall smoke stack. A low band of black smoke hugs the coast—a cruel gash severing the turquoise ocean and the cerulean sky. Even on the open highway along this lovely coast, the sunny air steaming into our open windows is heavy with the fumes of diesel exhaust.

After the oil refinery, we could smell flowers—a momentary but sweet aroma that transported me to honey suckled memories of summers growing up in tidewater Virginia.

To be continued...

“Infant Holy, Infant Lowly” 10 AM Christmas Eve Meditation by Eric Corbin

A couple of weeks ago, the church staff held our Christmas party at the home of Matt and Rachel Matthews. As many of sat and fellowshiped, our ESL Coordinator, Jeanette Pyne, entered with her six-month-old son, Judah. She was carrying a bag, filled with the accoutrement of parenthood, especially of an infant. Our beloved choir director, Joe Grant, well-trained in the ways of grandparenthood, offered to hold Judah while Jeanette put the bag down and got situated. I watched as Jeanette hesitated just a brief second, and then responded, cheerfully, that she'd be happy for Joe to hold her son, after, that is, Joe washed his hands. To be clear, I'm not criticizing Jeanette. I remember saying the same thing to people when our eldest was an infant. And it is flu season, after all. Joe washed up, and then masterfully entertained Judah, and all was well.

Reading Luke's account of the birth of the Son of God brought that scene to mind. Unlike Jeanette's son Judah, Jesus was born amongst animals, and placed in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. Luke records this almost as an afterthought. He describes the situation surrounding the birth of Jesus in stately terms: "Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David." Descended from David, Israel's greatest king? Yes, this is the way it ought to be for the Son of God – a descendent of David. So, Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem (the city of King David, remember), and it just so happens that it was time for Mary to give birth. The King James Version puts it poetically: "the days were accomplished that she should be delivered." Luke says "And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth..." So far, so good, but here's where we get to the afterthought. "...and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." What? As the song by the group 4Him says, "This is such a strange way to save the world." The Son of God

is born in a stable and placed in a feeding trough. I imagine Mary didn't bother to ask the smelly, fresh from the fields, shepherds to wash their hands when they showed up.

Emperor Augustus – whose name means exalted and venerable – sends out a decree, and Joseph and Mary go to the city of David – Israel's greatest King. And there, the Messiah, the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, Emmanuel – God with us – is born. So far, so good. The "exalted" emperor, the city of David, the Mighty God. Then, the twist: the Messiah is placed in a dirty, odorous, manger. *This is such a strange way to save the world.*

That song goes on to say "To think of how it could have been, If Jesus had come as He deserved, There would have been no Bethlehem, No lowly shepherds at His birth."

Sally Lloyd-Jones tells the story like this in her wonderful *Jesus Storybook Bible*: "Everything was ready. The moment God had been waiting for was here at last! God was coming to help His people, just as He had promised in the beginning. But how would he come? What would he be like? What would he do? Mountains would have bowed down. Seas would have roared. Trees would have clapped their hands. But the earth held its breath. As silent as snow falling, He came in. And when no one was looking, in the darkness, He arrived."

When no one was looking, in the darkness, Christ arrived. Yes, Jesus deserved to be born in a palace, to be lauded by everyone immediately as the savior of the world. Think of how royal babies in England are announced, with a framed proclamation on a golden easel in front of the Queen's residence and a town crier ringing a bell and shouting "Oyez, oyez, oyez."

Yet, God chose to steer clear of the royal pomp and circumstance. The Christ child – infant holy, infant lowly – was born in humble circumstances. The town crier is a bit overshadowed by "a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!'" The audience for that proclamation, though, returns to the lowly – shepherds, keeping watch over their flock by night.

The humble birth of the savior of the world points to the kind of savior that Jesus would be. He did not come to live in ornate palaces, to travel with a royal guard, or to associate with the rich and famous. He came to be among, as Isaiah prophesied, "the people who walked in darkness." Because of Jesus, on us, light has shined. We often act as if we believe that God can only be found in the majestic grandeur of cathedrals or the indescribable beauty of nature. God can certainly be found there, but God can even more easily be found in the cattle stall or among foul-smelling shepherds. And God is found in the midst of ordinary people like you and me. God is found in unexpected times and places. God seeks us out while we are going about the ordinariness of our lives.

Infant holy, infant lowly. God sends Jesus into our lives, into all of our messiness. We don't have to clean ourselves up first, because Jesus comes to us, just as we are, bringing light into our darkness. So go out into the world, aware that God is sending Jesus to each of us, making the ordinary holy. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Finance

Financial Update

BY MARK SCHOEFFMANN, CHAIR FINANCE
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Contributions

Contributions in December were \$6K more than in 2018 and \$27K above the budget at \$103K. The Year to Date total is above last year by \$54K but below the budgeted amount by \$19K. 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 the conclusion of the year, we have received 97.3% of the expected 2019 revenue. This results from the receipt of 102.5% of pledge commitments but only 69% of expected non-pledge contributions and 92.8% of other categories.

Expenses

Year to Date expenses are \$40K below the budget at \$1,023K but \$18K above 2018. At the conclusion of the year we have experienced only 96.3% of the expected 2019 expenses.

Balance

Considering all sources, expenses for the year exceed revenue by \$21K. This is not unexpected as the 2019 budget anticipated a \$33K deficit. However, this is an improvement over 2018 when our end of year deficit was \$44K.

Stewardship

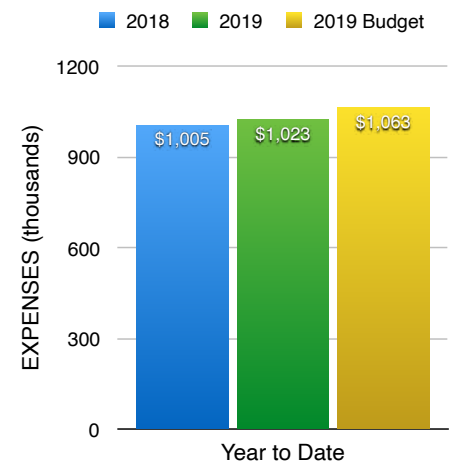
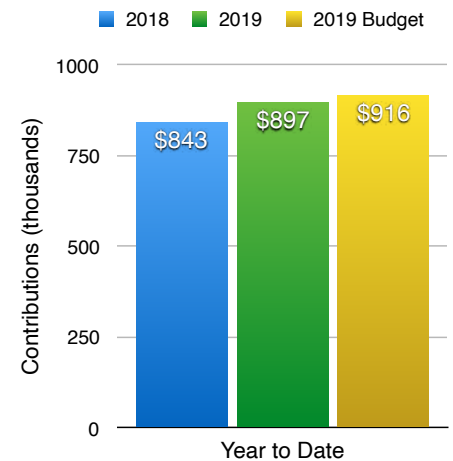
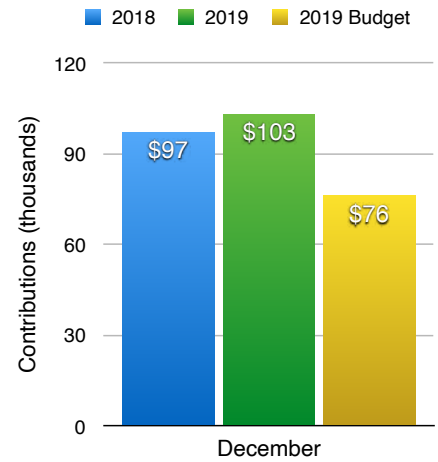
Thank you to all who have pledged toward the 2020 operating budget! As of the end of the year we have received 184 pledge commitments totaling \$794,982. If you have not yet made a commitment for 2020 please notify the office of your plans for this year.

Creative Awareness Fund

The church maintains a variety of accounts that can only be spent on restricted purposes. These accounts contain funds that have been donated to

the church for particular programs or purposes beyond the resources of the operating fund, such as Mission, Music, Youth programs, etc.

A new fund has recently been established through a donation of a member "for projects which can bring awareness to the wider public of the exciting work and worship at First Pres." The Session will determine how these funds are to be spent and it is anticipated that they will be used for new initiatives, beyond what the operating budget can support. If you wish to support this activity please note on your check or other form of donation "Creative Awareness Fund".





**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN**

302 West Church Street
Champaign, IL 61820

Change Service Requested



**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN**

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Sunday:

9 AM Worship

10:15 AM Sunday School and Adult Education

11:15 AM Worship

Pastors:

Matt Matthews..... Senior Pastor/Head of Staff, Ext 213

Eric Corbin..... Associate Pastor, Ext. 214

Staff:

George Almasi Facility Assistant

Ritchie DrennenFacility Manager, Ext. 237

Patty Farthing.....Receptionist, Ext. 211

Robert FerrerAudio-visual Technician

Marcia Franks Administrative Assistant, Ext. 210

Joe Grant..... Director of Music

Rachel Matthews Temporary Missions Coordinator, Ext. 219

Blaise Pascal..... CYF Connections Assistant, Ext. 216

Ann Petry.....Accounting, Ext. 224

Lizz Pippin CYF Associate Director, Ext. 216

Jeanette Pyne..... ESL Coordinator, Ext. 235

Richard Rossi Church Musician

Mindy Watts-Ellis.....Director Children, Youth & Family, Ext. 212

All staff email addresses are the person's first name followed by
[@firstpres.church](mailto:eric@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.**