

January 2021



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN

A Memory of Christmas Eve 2020

BY MATT MATTHEWS

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Our live, in-person Christmas Eve service was perfectly pitiful and oddly beautiful in a Charlie Brown Christmas kind of way.

Our neighboring Methodist Church graciously invited us to join them across Church Street at West Side Park. They took the lead in the simple service. A rag-tag two-dozen gathered with only one masked family that I could identify from First Pres. Residents at The Edens looked down upon us from their high rise, westerly windows. Temps sunk into the low teens, and a wind churned cold to bitter. I was tasked to read the nativity in Luke and could barely see the page because my mask so steamed-up my glasses. The service was punctuated by single verses of hymns played from the Methodist church's carillon. Bells, it turns out, are the perfect cold weather instrument.

When it was time to do so, we could not light our candles from the Christ candle because of the wind, then the Christ candle blew out. Somebody said the light of God's love never goes out, which it doesn't, but our source of light for the service had, decidedly, abandoned us. Others pulled out industrial-sized fire-starters and began passing around flickers of light in a hodgepodge fashion. Some had battery power candles they clicked on. Soon that hooded and huddled people stood shivering in their pods protecting the fragile glow from lit candles. Part of what made it lovely was that wind, foggy glasses, and cold could not ruin this unscripted bloom of light and companionship. The scene would have made for bad television, but it worked well in real life.

This is about the time snow showers began, which made it—and I hesitate to use this adjective, but I will—magical. The most enormous St. Bernard dog was part of the congregation, adding the barest hint of surrealism. This docile creature seemed accustomed to Christmas snow, but this southerner had never once even come close to a white Christmas. The dog, the candles, the steely bells crashing above the treetops, and snow approached the sublime.

We took up an offering for a family with four children in the Methodist flock who had gotten burned out of their home early that morning. Picturing them bivouacked at a local hotel with their physical possessions and Christmas plans in ashes got my mind off the cold and compelled me to consider the manger from a different, uninvited angle. This was sobering.

The crowd dispersed quickly after the benediction. On another night in a time unrestrained by pandemic, we would have shared hot cider and chocolate, and warm, glazed buns. Rachel and I chatted briefly with John Hecker and his wife and son, Methodists all; seeing that family brings me a lot of joy because John laughs at all my jokes, which is my way of saying he's brilliant. He loves affirming our Christian and neighborly kinship while poking fun at our denominational differences. We would like to have lingered, but dark and cold pried us apart.

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Rachel and I trudged heads-down and alone to the church to meet Nancy Martin who drove the two large boxes of candles around the block to the alley for us to carry up to the dark Westminster Hall. I broke Covid protocols and gave Nancy a bear hug—possibly the first non-family hug I've given in ten months. Life is hollow without human touch, and I feel nearly hollowed out. Rachel and I waved goodbye, and Nancy's car made no sound rolling away on the snow-padded alley to State Street and home. We loaded the boxes of candles into the church and made sure all were extinguished. Imagine our inadvertently burning down the church. We trudged through the empty parking lot for our car.

Snow brings uncanny silence and plays tricks with sound. I put my arm absently around my wife and she said she loved me. It was the loneliest of walks I've ever made on Christmas Eve, but beautiful in its own way, and I felt glad to be loved both by Rachel and the God we had invoked moments earlier in clumsy, heart-felt worship in the snowy park.

I was missing my sons. John Mark, home from college for a week, had burned with fever for six days that broke only on Christmas Eve morning. Our other sons, Benjamin and Joseph, opted to stay put in the Carolinas to avoid the possibility of catching whatever their youngest brother had. It was a wise move, given we didn't know how long John Mark would be sick, what he had (it wasn't Covid), and whether he'd pass it along. So, our boys weren't all at home together. And I sorely felt their absence.

Poet Edna St. Vincent Millay says something universal about how we feel when we recall people we miss.

I felt rather like what she described, "Where you used to be, there is a hole in the world, which I find myself constantly walking around in the daytime, and falling in at night."

In the short walk to the car I was falling, not with terrified screams but falling, nevertheless, like, perhaps, snow. A quiet, floating free-fall. Unstoppably falling. Snow played its trick on sound, muffling the sparse traffic and the whisk of wind. Rough places were being made smooth by its white dusting. I was falling in those slow-motion steps across the parking lot. Snow was making everything seem new. Feeling empty handed, I was letting go of the Christmas plans I had made, the packages that would go unopened, the hugs that wouldn't happen, the games around the dining table, the movie binges in the basement, the cooking, the eating, the brisk volksmarsches through the neighborhood. In all our years of marriage we had never been without our nuclear family on Christmas Day. In the beginning that number included only each other, then a succession of cats, then children and a dog. Our three sons.

So, it was a lonely, heavy walk across an abandoned parking lot to the car on Christmas Eve. We circled the hole in the world then walked right in, falling into a new adventure I was reluctant but had no choice but to enter. Those with children know the feeling of having taught children to walk, who now reside down a worm-hole through time, on the other side of the world, looking small and faraway, standing so well on their very own.

We Have a New Employee

We are very pleased to welcome **Samantha Nichols** to our CYF staff! Samantha will be starting to join us on Zoom Sunday School as our Sunday School Coordinator on January 10.

Samantha is an ordained pastor in the Lutheran church with a passion for children and youth ministries. Samantha and her husband have recently moved to Urbana and look forward to meeting all of you soon.

Nurture Committee

Fellowship, Hospitality and Membership

BY GARY PETERSON

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HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!

The Nurture Committee met monthly and stayed active during the year adjusting to Zoom meetings in April.

Highlights of the year included:

1) Continued letter writing and phone calls to keep in touch with our flock and others in need of contact. Birthday cards or personal phone calls were also mailed to those over 80 years of age.

2) Enjoyed being part of the new kitchen committees; one for planning for the construction and one to dream about what the future might hold for our new digs.

3) We had fun coming up with a photo challenge (younger pics of the flock) in Pastor Matt's Friday mailer and Facebook and developing a challenge to have some portray the miracles performed by Jesus.

4) We hosted a "Sunday in the Park" in the fall where those missing contact with others could meet in Hessel Park keeping social distance and wearing masks.

5) Created a "Virtual Dessert" where we could meet over Zoom and "just chat". In December, we told some of our favorite Christmas memories and it seemed to be enjoyed by all.

6) Membership continued to follow up on those that filled out the connection card on Sunday.

A big thank you to the following for being a part of this great team. **Greg Cozad (L), Bob Kirby, Ginny Waaler, Jane Tock, Tom Gilmore, Gary and Linda Peterson and Pastor Eric.**

Zoom Meetings

Thanks, again, for learning about using Zoom these past several months. A reminder to email zoom@firstpres.church if you need a meeting set up. Also, please make sure you click on the correct link for the meeting. Meeting links will look very similar, but clicking on the wrong link can interfere with other meetings. The meeting name will be displayed when you connect, so if the meeting name isn't correct, check to make sure you have the correct link. If you have any questions about the link, email zoom@firstpres.church.

Children, Youth & Family

Children, Youth, Family

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

A special thank you to all the families that participated in the virtual Christmas pageant! I've had many people from within the congregation comment on how great it was. Some even said it was the best pageant they have seen yet!

Rejoice in knowing you brightened everyone's day in bringing the story of Jesus' birth to us in a new way.

Children, Youth and Family Ministries is pleased to welcome **Samantha Nichols** to our staff team as the Sunday School Coordinator. Samantha began working with us January 3rd. Samantha is an ordained minister within the Lutheran church (ELCA) with a passion for children and youth ministry. She and her husband and two dogs recently moved to Urbana from Nebraska and are eager to meet you all.

Sunday School resumes on January 10 at the usual Zoom times, 10:15-11:15 AM for elementary and 1-2 PM for middle school and high school youth.

The youth will begin a unit about peer pressure and the elementary will continue the Growing in God's Love Story Bible series with an emphasis on people Jesus met.

Finance

Financial Update

BY MARK SCHOEFFMANN, CHAIR FINANCE
MSCHOEFFMANN@MCHSI.COM

Contributions

Contributions in December to the Operating Fund were \$19.3K less than in 2019 but \$6.0K above the budget at \$83.5K. The Year to Date total is below last year by \$21.3K and below the budgeted amount by \$54.7K. 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 end of 2020 we have received 106.7% of the expected year's revenue.

Expenses

Year to Date expenses are \$60.0K below the budget at \$1,012.4K and less than in 2019 by \$10.7K. At the end of 2020 we have experienced 94.4% of the expected year's expenses.

Balance

Considering all sources, revenue exceeds expenses by \$90.2K which is \$111.6K better than at the end of 2019. This figure includes \$134.2K from the Federal Paycheck Protection Program established by the Federal CARES Act. Without these federal funds the end of year balance would be a \$44.0K deficit, \$5.4K larger than budgeted for 2020.

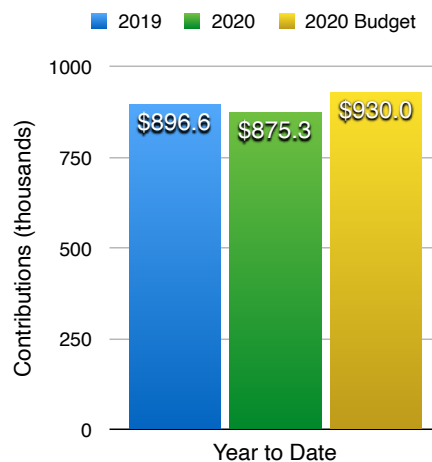
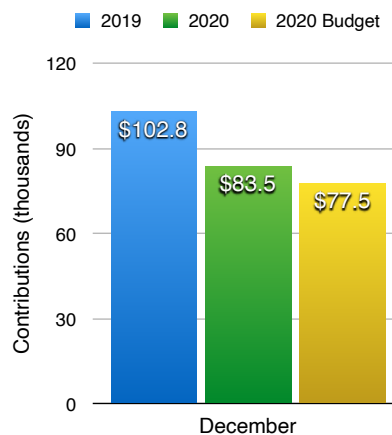
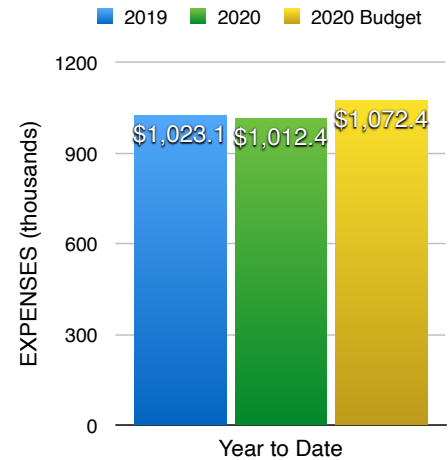
Restricted Funds

In addition to contributions to the operating fund there was \$18,090 donated in December to special offerings and funds restricted to specific purposes such as missions supported by our church.

Stewardship

Thanks to the responses of 170 families we have reached 93% of our projected pledge commitments for 2021. This still leaves the church \$60,000 short of the budgeted income for 2021.

If you have not yet made your commitment please prayerfully consider your ability to support the continuation of our programs and ministry. You may respond by completing and mailing a pledge card to the church or online at: <https://www.firstpres.church/pledge-card>





A deep sense of awe came over them all...And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had...They worshipped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. Acts 2:43-47

In Ezekiel 36:26, we find: I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

From Frederick Buechner: "Be born among us that we ourselves be born. Be born within us that by words and deeds of love we may bear the tidings of thy birth to the world that dies for lack of love. Amen"

Joys & Concerns

A Prayer for Putting on a Face Mask

Creator God, as I prepare to go into the world help me see the sacramental nature of the wearing of this cloth. Let it be a tangible and visible way of living love for my neighbors, as I love myself.

Christ Jesus, since my lips will be covered, uncover my heart, that people would see my smile in the crinkles around my eyes. Since my voice may be muffled, help me to speak clearly, not only with my words but with my action.

Holy Spirit, as the elastic touches my ears, remind me to listen carefully and caringly to all those I meet. May this simple piece of cloth be a shield and banner, and may each breath that it holds, be filled with Your love.

In Your name and in that love, I pray. Amen.

Rev Richard Bott, Moderator, Presbyterian Church of Canada

Congratulations to...

- DREAAM on receiving this year's Community Engagement award presented by Buy Black Champaign.

We extend our sympathy to...

- the family and friends of **Fran Haughey** who passed away peacefully in her sleep December 26, 2020. She was under Hospice's care in the home of her youngest son **Jeff Haughey** at the time of her passing. Roger was nearby and is recovering from Covid 19 at Jeff's home in Tulsa, OK as well.

Mission Updates

ESL News

BY JEANETTE PYNE, ESL COORDINATOR
JEANETTE@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

Zoom Café Time

We had our first monthly Zoom Café Time on December 10th at 10 AM. It was a huge success; a total of 40 people came. We could not all fit onto one screen.

We had new students, tutors and members from First Pres joining us, so introductions were important. After introductions, we completed a Christmas trivia quiz in teams, so students, tutors, and First Pres members could work together to select the correct answers. It was a very difficult quiz, but it seemed like the attendees had so much fun.

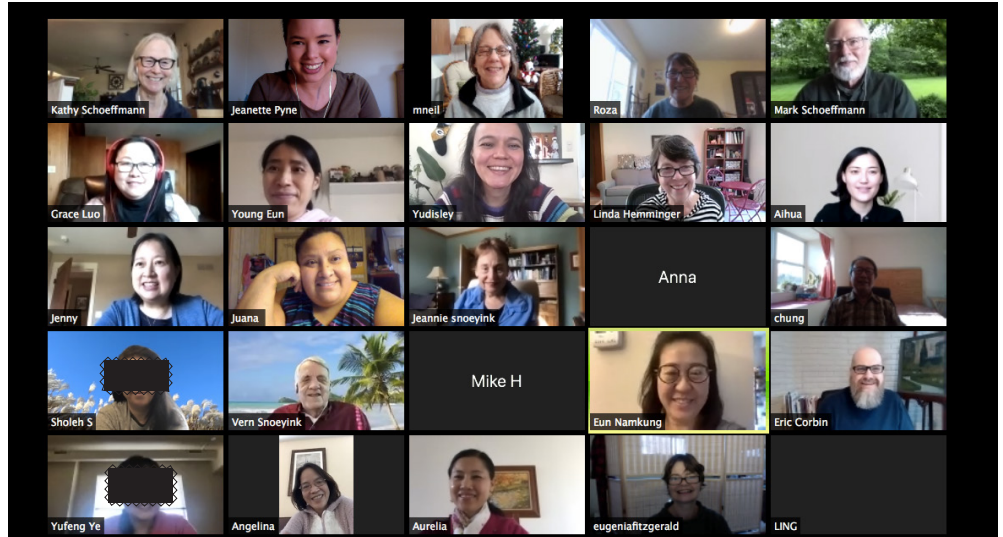
We will continue this Zoom Café Time on the second Thursday of every month at 10 AM. The next ones are on the following dates:

- January 14 at 10 AM
- February 11 at 10 AM
- March 11 at 10 AM
- April 8 at 10 AM
- May 13 at 10 AM

Zoom Information

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

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



These are only half of the people who attended, but from top left to bottom right: Kathy (tutor), Jeanette (ESL Director), Michele (tutor), Roza (Kyrgyzstan), Mark (tutor), Grace (China), Young Eun (Korea), Yudisley (Colombia), Linda (tutor), Aihua (China), Jenny (China), Juana (Mexico), Jeannie (First Pres member), Anna (China), Chung (Korea), Sholeh (Iran), Vern (tutor), Mike (tutor), Eun (Korea), Eric (First Pres pastor), Yufeng (China), Angelina (China), Aurelia (China), Eugenia (tutor), Ling (China).

Cuba Connection

Our Cuba Steering Committee has plans for 2021. A shared worship service with our sister church in Havana on Sunday, May 2, 2021 will be followed by an hour of virtual salsa dance lesson and Latin jazz music.

The Annual Cuba Forum will be Saturday morning May 1. A guest lecture will be followed by the election of Steering Committee members. If you would like to serve on the Cuba committee please contact **Rachel Matthews**, Mission Coordinator.

Our Cuba Connection comes through our sister church in Havana with whom we share a session to session covenant relationship the principal purpose of which is to enhance the spiritual richness of both congregations.

Su Voz

Su Voz means "His voice". It is a daily devotion written by both clergy and lay people of the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Cuba. The short message provided in English and Spanish is a good start to the day for the 207 people who received Su Voz forwarded from our congregation for the past decade. Su Voz is now distributed directly by the Presbyterian Cuba Partners Network. To subscribe or unsubscribe contact the church office.

Environmental Stewardship

BY KATHY SCHOEFFMANN
KSCHOEFFMANN@YAHOO.COM

Welcome to 2021 from your Green Team! (ESC)



As you're cleaning up and packing away all of your Christmas decorations, please help our environment by recycling your "real" Christmas tree. There are many options in our area for recycling trees, but just be sure to do the following first:

- remove all lights, ornaments, garland, tinsel, etc.
- remove the tree stand
- remove the plastic tree bag, if you used one for transporting your tree, and take it back home with you for disposal

NOTE: flocked trees cannot be recycled

Christmas tree recycling options in Champaign County include:

City of Champaign:

The city's Holiday Tree Collection Program is available to all residential properties within the City's corporate limits. City residents must place their tree within four feet of the curb by 6 AM on Monday, January 11, 2021, for collection. Collected trees are chipped and made into garden mulch.

The Heart of Missions Newsletter has been revived during this COVID-19 crisis. Our local and global mission agencies are having to make rapid changes due to shelter in place orders, 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

City of Urbana:

Trees may be taken to the Landscape Recycling Center at 1210 E. University Ave., Urbana, for free recycling during January and February. There is no residency requirement. It is open to everyone.

Curbside Pickup - City of Urbana:

The City of Urbana will provide Christmas tree collection to all residents during the week of January 4-8. Residents must follow these requirements: Place tree along curb (on the parkway) by 6 AM on your regular U-CYCLE collection day; remove all decorations, stands, and all metal from tree before collection; no tinsel or flocked trees; remove any plastic tree bags.

Champaign County Forest Preserve:

Bring your tree to a drop-off site at one of the following forest preserves that are open daily from 7 AM to sunset:

- Lake of the Woods, Mahomet – drop trees off at the west maintenance entrance off Rte. 47. (just north of the cemetery)
- Homer Lake Forest Preserve – drop trees off near the Maple Sugar Grove.
- Middle Fork River Forest Preserve – drop trees off at maintenance building

There are signs directing you to where you can drop off your tree in each preserve. Drop-offs are accepted at the marked sites only between December 26 and January 15. Only undecorated, real Christmas trees can be accepted; no yard waste. Commercial drop-offs are prohibited.

What happens to trees that are dropped off at the Forest Preserves?

Donated trees are chipped and used for trails and landscaping at forest preserves throughout Champaign County. If the lakes freeze over, trees are dragged onto the lake with cinder blocks attached. They will sink into the lake when the ice thaws to provide aquatic habitat.

Artificial Trees:

If you have an artificial tree, please reuse it, reuse it and reuse it for many years. If it's in good shape but you're tired of it, keep it for one more year until October, 2021 and then donate it to the Goodwill store.

Your Green Team and Mother Earth thanks you for Recycling, Reusing, Reducing and Repurposing during the holidays and throughout the year!



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302 West Church Street
Champaign, IL 61820

Change Service Requested



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Sunday:

9 AM Worship*

10:15 AM Sunday School and Adult Education**

11:15 AM Worship*

*Due to COVID, online Worship only is available for viewing at 9 AM on Sunday mornings on 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
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](mailto:info@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.