

May 2021



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN

Transfigurative Ecclesiology and Other Thoughts On Being Church

BY MATT MATTHEWS

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Your Session has begun a sixth month series of conversations about our vision. We began our conversation with a short prayer. Then we spent the next 85-minutes looking at some demographics. What might our budget look like in five years? In ten? Many churches in the West are gradually losing members. Fewer people affiliate with any house of worship. What are we to do?

This was not the best place to begin a six-month conversation about our church's vision. And the reason we began there is because our leader is not some high-powered consultant. Our leader in these talks is...me. I started us out on the wrong foot.

A better place to begin would have been to ask, What is the church of Jesus Christ? Who is the church called to be? What is the church called to do?

This sermon is an attempt to make up for that rocky start.

So, what is the church of Jesus Christ?

Who is the church called to be?

What is the church called to do?

As we ponder questions like these, I think it is wise for us to turn first to scripture. What does scripture lead you to believe about the church's identity and purpose?

Allow me to jog through the scriptures that help me pull those questions into proper focus. (Your homework today is to ask yourself, "What passages of scripture are essential for YOU as you think about what the church is?" "What bible stories do you turn to in order to give you purpose and meaning?")

Here are some of the scriptures that come to my mind.

* * *

First, we Christians are followers of Jesus, who we believe to be the God's anointed Messiah (Hebrew), the Christ (Greek). So, I begin with Mary and Joseph. We read in the gospels of Matthew and Luke how they were faithful to welcome the birth of Jesus.

Jesus is the reason for the season, and Jesus is the reason for the church. Angels sang. Shepherds investigated. Wise-men sought him out. The political and religious powers were threatened.

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My understanding of the church of Jesus Christ begins with Jesus Christ, with incarnation. God came to us. God, in Christ, was one of us. My understanding of the church follows Jesus closely.

- He was born in humble beginnings.
- We look to his genealogy and see that Jesus comes from ordinary and extraordinary people, from Gentiles and famous Jews, from patriarchs and a prostitute.

- He was immediately a refugee running for his life.

- He was a 12-year-old in the temple teaching his elders (which suggests he had good religious education).

- He was baptized.

- In his ministry he often sought those the rest of us would leave out: the lepers, women, children, the powerless, the mentally ill, the outcast. (What does this say about the church's mission?)

- Jesus welcomed others.

- Jesus served others.

- He preached about love. (Consider the sermon on the mount.)

- He lived love. (He washed his friends' feet)

- Jesus called ordinary people to be his 12 disciples (fishermen, a tax collector)

- He talked about giving our whole selves (consider the story of the widow's coin).

- He was faithful to God even to the point of dying on a cross.

- He rose again.

If we, the church, want to know who we are called to be, we need to pay close attention to who we are called to follow. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.

Central to the church is a "theology of abundance."

The way I began our Session's discus-

sion about our vision was from the standpoint of a theology of scarcity. How are we going to be able to pay for ministry in the next generation if our growth rate doesn't match or excel our rate of attrition?

This may be an appropriate line of inquiry for a financial planner. It is not appropriate for a minister of the Gospel. Why, because the church understands the "theology of abundance." The psalmist doesn't say his cup is half empty, or half full. No, the Psalmist says "My cup runneth over." (*Psalm 23*).

We look at how God in Scripture has always helped, delivered, redeemed, and sustained God's people. This is how we arrive at a theology of abundance.

Central to the church is an understanding that God is with us. A name for Jesus is "Emmanuel," which, in Hebrew, means God-with-us. Our theologians would say that God is omniscient and omnipresent.

Jesus says, "I will not leave you orphaned." (*John 14*)

Jesus says, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." (*Matthew 18:20*)

Jesus says, "I am with you always, even to the close of the age." (*Matthew 28*)

The psalmist asks, where can I hide or flee from God's presence? No where. (*Psalm 139*)

God loves us. Martin Luther said the Gospel in miniature is John 3:16: God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.

This is pure grace. We don't deserve

it. We can't earn it.

Our response to this grace is worship and praise:

Psalm 150

Praise the Lord! Praise God in the sanctuary;

praise God in God's mighty firmament

² Praise God for God's mighty deeds; praise God according to God's surpassing greatness!

³ Praise God with trumpet sound; praise God with lute and harp!

⁴ Praise God with tambourine and dance;

praise God with strings and pipe!

⁵ Praise God with clanging cymbals; praise God with loud clashing cymbals!

⁶ Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord!

Our response to God's grace is service.

After Jesus healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law, she got up and served others.

When we pay attention to Jesus, we see that he identified himself to be of the lineage of prophets. Jesus stands up for justice and love. Paul reads Jesus' life and is led to say this about Jesus' work and our calling: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (*Romans 12*)

It is from Micah that Jesus got his walk: "What does the Lord require of you, but to seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God." (*Micah 6:8*)

It is from Moses that Jesus got his focus: "You shall love the lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise." (*Deut 6:4*)

Love with Justice. This is what Jesus taught and lived. Love God. Love neighbor as self.

Paul would say that there are many spiritual gifts, and all spiritual gifts are to be used for the good of the community. The greatest gift is Love. (*1 Cor 13*)

* * *

We look to scripture to see what the church is called to be and to do.

- The story of the Good Samaritan teaches about loving the stranger.
- The story of the prodigal son teaches about welcoming the lost home.
- The Joseph cycle of stories demonstrates how God is always working God's purposes out.
- The story of creation reminds us creation is good, we are called to be good stewards, and we are created in God's image.
- The book of Revelation reminds us that God wins!
- The book of Ruth reminds us that God's kingdom include outsiders to the inner circle.

What stories am I forgetting? What would you add?

* * *

Do you remember today's sermon title? "Transfigurative Ecclesiology and Other Thoughts On Being Church." Ecclesiology has to do with the body of knowledge and the words

we use to talk about the "congregation" or the "church." We get our best ideas of "church" from scripture.

The story from Mark's gospel today is the story of "Transfiguration." If the disciples didn't think Jesus was special before this trek up the mountain, they sure did when they got to the top. Jesus becomes transfigured right before their eyes. Moses and Elijah show up. Jesus, these disciples learn, is one of the heavy-hitters of the bible.

But we learn something very important about the church in this scene. Remember, Peter suggests they put up tents and live on that mountain. Why come down? Let's bask in the glory here.

Jesus said no. They had work to do. They had to come down that mountain and keep sharing the good news. Their place wasn't on retreat, their place was on the job.

And so, we are called from the glory of worship, to the ministry of service. We are called out from the sanctuary into the world. We are called to take our friendship to our neighbors down in the valley.

* * *

What is the church?
Who are we called to be?
Where are we called to go?

The church is the body of Jesus Christ. We believe God calls and equips all people. God multiplies our efforts as he did the loaves and fishes. We espouse a mustard seed theology—where God can transform small efforts into big things. We believe we aren't alone. We believe we're called to love with justice. We believe God helps us. We believe God cares about faithfulness (and being "faithful" is often very, very different than what the world often calls "successful.")

* * *

We, the church, would do well to hold tightly to scripture. Janice Harrington, a poet here in Champaign, suggests we hold scripture tightly, like the mother in her poem "Revival" who holds the bible tightly, like an ax handle. She also suggests that being faithful always leads us home; I never feel closer to home than when I'm with you, the church. Alleluia. Let me end with a poem by Janice N. Harrington.

REVIVAL

*Through the cooling dark,
they walk, Lillian, Webster, Riley,
Anna,
MacArthur and Eurel, returning
from Heavenly Father and Yes, Jesus!,
from paper fans with little brown
girls in Sunday bonnets "M-hmmmm"
from the communion of sour juice and
crackers,
ah weh-ill, from church mothers in
nurses'
uniforms and rills of sweat spilling from
black brows.
Have mercy on us, Father.
Look down upon us, Father, and give
us
your blessing, in Jesus' name . . .
Above a darkened bough, a wing
beats, and in the pitchy shadows
crickets
shrill, and a frog repeats, repeats,
repeats. Maybe Anna holds her fa-
ther's
hand. Maybe the boys tussle and pitch
stones into darkness while their
mother
watches, humming and holding
her Bible more firmly than an ax
handle,
or maybe they go weary on and quiet.
It is only their steps you hear, only
shifting sand.*

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*On a rural route, a family walks
while the night begins its long sermon,
and the miles go by, and the miles go
by.*

*If an owl calls from that darkness,
then someone will die. If a hound
keens*

*one long, longing vowel, they will
shudder.*

*If a star plummets, that too will have
meaning.*

*This is faith, the road that takes them
home.*

Let us pray:

God, you print the name of Christ
upon the spirit.

You lead the walk through hills and
ocean sand

You will each one of us a heritage of
riches

You hold all life inside a healing hand.

Help us to BE your church.

Equip us to follow,

to live into our high calling.

Guide our earnest steps and

catch us in our falling,

AMEN.

Consider helping your church by becoming certified as a Food Service Sanitation (FSS) supervisor/ CFPM (Certified Food Protection Management.) When our church kitchen invites the public to attend church dinners, we'll need somebody in the kitchen who holds such a certification. We are training as many volunteers as possible. The training is on-line and will take one day; students must take and pass a test. The church will pay for the first group of volunteers (about \$ 150/ student).

Please help. Interested? Call Matt Matthews.

Finance

Financial Update

BY MARK SCHOEFFMANN, CHAIR FINANCE
MSCHOEFFMANN@MCHSI.COM

Contributions

Contributions in April to the Operating Fund were \$46.5K less than in 2020 and \$23.9K below the budget at \$47.2K. The Year to Date total is below last year by \$0.9K but above the budgeted amount by \$16.3K. 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 33.3% through the year we have received 50.1% of the expected year's revenue.

Expenses

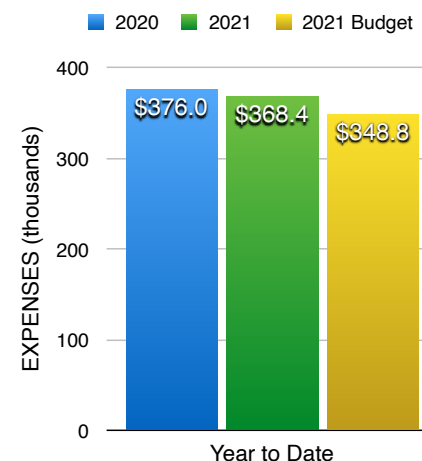
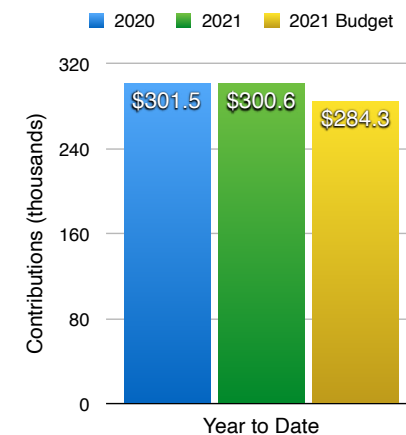
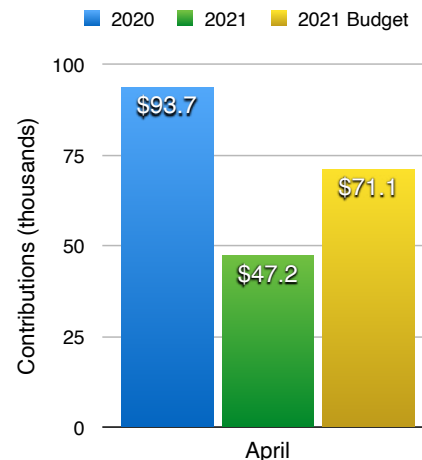
Year to Date expenses are \$19.6K above the budget at \$368.4K but less than in 2020 by \$7.6K. At 33.3% through the year we have experienced 35.2% of the expected year's expenses.

Balance

Considering all sources, revenue exceeds expenses by \$177.5K which is \$24.2K less than at the end of April in 2020.

Restricted Funds

In addition to contributions to the operating fund there was \$4,874 donated last month to special offerings and funds restricted to specific purposes such as missions supported by our church.



Children, Youth & Family

Children, Youth, Family

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

Graduation recognitions

If you have a child or close relative graduating with a degree this Spring, please share the information with Mindy at mindy@firstpres.church by May 23 so the church can recognize their accomplishment.

We would like to congratulate our graduates in an online worship service at the end of May.

Pentecost Celebration

Children, Youth, and Family Ministries will be putting together a gift bag for families to celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit. We look forward to greeting many of you in person at West Side Park on May 23 at 11:15 AM for fellowship and distribution of the bags.

Child's Bible Class

CYF will resume the third-fourth grade Bible class for students in May. Class will be held at 10:15 AM Sunday mornings on the church patio near the alley in fair weather. Dates are tentatively set for May 9, 16, and 23.

Summer DREAAAM Program

As part of this summer's DREAAAM program, Children's ministries is supporting the creation of a comfort room that will be called "Soul Space." This room is set aside as safe space for any student to utilize when they feel the need to self regulate away from the larger group and reset until they feel able to return to the group again in a better frame of mind. To support the creation of the room, we are asking for donations of items from the list or monetary donations to cover the purchase of the following items on the wish list. Thank you for your support and prayers for this endeavour.

Soul Space Donation List

Creative Corner:

Paper- ream of multipurpose white \$6
Dry Erase Markers- small set \$5
Play doh- 4 pk \$3
Pencils- 24 ct \$5

Energy Release:

Fitness exercise ball- \$16
Exercise bands (lightweight)- \$10
Small fidgets- spinners, putty \$20 set

Cozy Corner:

Fleece Blankets- \$20 each
Weighted blankets- \$25 each

Book Nook:

Books about emotion regulation- ~\$15 each
Affirmational books- ~\$10 each
CD player and headphones (for audio books)- \$25

Self Care: (at sink)

Sugar or salt scrubs- \$7 each
Scented lotions- \$8 each
Scented oil with droplet dispenser- \$7
Washcloths- \$4
Cooling neck wrap- \$10

Meditation Station:

Poster with step by step exercise- \$20
Foam floor mat- \$35

Whole Room Items:

Music player with speaker for soft music- \$40
Sand timers (5 minute)- \$16
Posters with emotion regulation tips, affirmations- \$25

Sunday School Update

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

Online Sunday School continues to meet this month at 10:15 AM for elementary school students and 1pm for junior high and high school students. Our elementary school students will explore stories about loving God and neighbor while our older students learn about community organizing as an act of discipleship. Week after week, I learn so much from our students about what it means to have faith in and follow Jesus. I can't wait to keep learning together as we journey through these final units.

Our last Zoom meeting is Sunday, May 16. We'll close out this year of Sunday School by celebrating Pentecost together at West Side Park! Rather than meeting virtually on Sunday, May 23, all Sunday School families are invited to gather at West Side Park at 10:15 AM for activities. Each family will receive a Pentecost gift bag with more activities to do together at home. As always, we want this event to be both fun and safe. Participants are required to wear masks and we will continue to maintain social distancing.

Please join us on Pentecost as we celebrate a great year of Sunday School and the gift of the Holy Spirit!

On Sunday, April 25, in celebration of Earth Day, students and their families painted rocks, created plant identification signs, and filled out a postcard that will be sent to one of our elected officials asking them to support eco-friendly legislation.





Colossians 4:2-6

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God May open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders, make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Colossians 4:12

Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

Motions from the April Session Meeting...

- That First Pres Champaign host DREAM House’s summer camp beginning June 7th, running for 8-weeks (training begins on May 31) from 8 AM to NOON Monday-Friday, and that we do our best to have the new kitchen certified by the CUPHD.



Sundays in the Park

On a Sunday in April, we had 22 people enjoy the sunshine and conversation in West Side Park. We will NOT gather this Sunday, May 9. It’s Mother’s Day!!! Join us again Sunday, May 23, 11 am to noon.

Joys & Concerns

We extend our sympathy to...

- to the family and friends of **Marsha Nichols** who died Saturday, May 1, 2021. Marsha had been a member of the church since April 1982. Private services will be held at the church on Friday, May 7.

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

Men’s Prayer Group

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

Mission Updates

News from Cuba...

BY DANIEL IZQUIERDO

The Good Shepherd.

Psalm 23, John 10: 11-18

When the young David proposed to fight against that Philistine giant who defied the armies of Israel, the argument used to reject his offer was his young age and his inexperience in the art of war, something that Goliath obviously boasted of having. But David's response to the king was that in his life as a shepherd he had to defend his flock from the beasts and risked his life for them (1 Sam 17: 33-35).

The sacrificial and loving image of a shepherd for his sheep is also indicated in Isa 40:11: He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs on his arms, and carries close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young (NIV). Thus, Psalm 23 describes with very expressive words that care of the shepherd towards his sheep, from the experience that a man of such office can express.

This is a song of confidence describing God's care for his people, which each person can make his own; it uses not only the image of a shepherd (verses 1-4) but also that of a good family man who behaves like the ideal host (verse 5). The trust in God who is our shepherd is declared from the first verse by affirming that we lack nothing under his care. This does not indicate the absence of dangers or that life is easy and smooth, the psalmist suggests serious difficulties when he refers to the valley of the shadow of death, and later mentions his enemies. The image of the shepherd suggests on the one hand tender care regarding provision, restoration; but it also implies libera-

tion and protection. The descriptions the psalm makes are not simply to be read but to be experienced. Imagine when we are on a picnic and we lie down on the fresh grass, what a feeling of relaxation and comforting rest, add to this the sound of a stream, the murmur of a brook invites you to nap and calm. It is equally comforting to know that in the search for abundant pastures and suitable regions for grazing, sometimes you have to cross in the middle of the most tortuous and frightening trails, but the shepherd is the one who leads the way, he is the one who does not leave any sheep to get lost, he is the one who directs with his rod and rescues with his staff. If the Lord is the shepherd, then we shall not want. These ideas are complemented by the final image of the host who welcomes us at his table and gives us a luxurious welcome by anointing our heads with oils and serving our glasses until they overflow.

It is not surprising then that Jesus, illustrating his own actions in the midst of Israel with vivid images, said: "I am the good shepherd" (*John 10: 11, 14*), for many interpreters it is a kind of declaration that refers to his divinity, by the multiple references to God as the shepherd of Israel. In this specific text, the evangelist refers to the giving of the life of Jesus as something that he has chosen, in obedience to the Father, but more than anything in love for his own. He is the shepherd who would lay down his life for the sheep so that we have the certainty of life, and of a life in abundance (*John 10:10*). Therefore we must have the same experience of the psalmist in *Psalm 23*, one that reaffirms over and over again that in God we are com-

plete, secure and confident, that we lack nothing, that nothing frightens us or can take away the certainty of his perennial care. Despite any adverse circumstances, the psalmist's conviction and his trust in God make him anticipate his return to the temple after his deliverance, make him long to stay in the temple to bear witness to his experience and worship the God who rescues him and holds. There he will celebrate the goodness of God.

We have lived, and are still living, unprecedented times due to the presence of an epidemic that has affected some 150 million people in practically the entire world, and that has claimed the lives of more than three million inhabitants on the planet. Although the vaccination processes have begun, there are still moments of tension and anguish, in many places closures and quarantines remain to prevent further spread of the virus, even the appearance of new strains puts immunization efforts at risk. The pandemic has left a trail of economic collapses, shortages and hardships, of which in Cuba we have been hit with greater visibility. Even so, we continue to proclaim hope, we continue to cling to the psalmist's conviction that God is our shepherd, the one who guides us, the one who cares for us and therefore we declare: we shall not want. In that faith we encourage ourselves to live the present life, and to bear witness to each action where we see that divine hand working in our midst. In that faith we continue to celebrate our faith and encourage others to do so. It does not matter if we are in Luyanó or in Champaign, we are all sheep of the good shepherd. May God abundantly shower his grace on each one of us. Amen.

El buen pastor.

Salmo 23, Juan 10: 11-18

Cuando el joven David propuso luchar contra aquel gigante filisteo que desafiaba a los ejércitos de Israel, el argumento esgrimido para desestimar su oferta era su joven edad y su inexperiencia en el arte de la guerra, cosa que obviamente Goliat se ufanaba de poseer. Pero la respuesta de David al rey fue que en su vida de pastor de ovejas él tenía que defender su rebaño de las bestias y arriesgaba su vida por ellas (I Sam 17:33-35). La imagen sacrificial y amorosa de un pastor por sus ovejas queda también indicada en Isa 40:11: Como pastor apacentará su rebaño. En su brazo llevará los corderos, junto a su pecho los llevará; y pastoreará con ternura a las recién paridas.

Así pues, el Salmo 23 describe con palabras muy expresivas ese cuidado del pastor hacia sus ovejas, desde lo vivencial que un hombre de tal oficio puede expresar. Este es un canto de confianza describiendo el cuidado de Dios por su pueblo, que cada persona puede hacer suyo, utiliza no solo la imagen de un pastor (vers. 1-4) sino también la de un buen padre de familia que se comporta como el anfitrión ideal (vers. 5).

La confianza en Dios que es nuestro pastor queda declarada desde el primer versículo al afirmar que nada nos falta bajo su cuidado. Ello no indica la ausencia de peligros o que la vida se presenta fácil y sin tropiezos, el salmista sugiere serias dificultades cuando hace referencia al valle de sombra de muerte, y más adelante menciona a sus enemigos.

La imagen del pastor sugiere por un lado tierno cuidado en cuanto a provisión, restauración; pero también implica liberación y protección. Las

descripciones que hace el salmo no son simplemente para ser leídas sino experimentadas. Imaginemos cuando estamos de picnic y nos tumbamos sobre el césped fresco, qué sensación de relajamiento y descanso tan reconfortante, añadamos a ello el rumor de una corriente de agua, el murmullo de un arroyo invita a la siesta y al sosiego. Es igualmente reconfortante conocer que en la búsqueda de pastos abundantes y regiones apropiadas para el pastoreo, a veces haya que atravesar en medio de los senderos más tortuosos y atemorizantes, pero el pastor es el que va delante guiando, es quien no deja ninguna oveja que se pierda, es el que dirige con su vara y rescata con su cayado. Si el Señor es el pastor, entonces nada nos falta. Estas ideas son complementadas por la imagen final del anfitrión que nos recibe en su mesa y nos da una bienvenida de lujo al ungir con aceites nuestras cabezas y servir nuestras copas hasta que rebosen.

No sorprende entonces que Jesús, ilustrando con imágenes vívidas su propio actuar en medio de Israel, haya dicho: "Yo soy el buen pastor" (*Juan 10:11,14*), para muchos intérpretes es una especie de declaración que refiere su divinidad, por las múltiples referencias a Dios como el pastor de Israel. En este texto específico, el evangelista hace referencia a la entrega de la vida de Jesús como algo que él ha escogido, en obediencia al Padre, pero más que nada en amor a los suyos. Él es el pastor que daría su vida por las ovejas de modo que nosotros tengamos la certeza de vida, y de una vida en abundancia (*Juan 10:10*). Por lo cual debemos tener la misma experiencia del salmista en el *Salmo 23*, una que reafirma una y otra vez que en Dios estamos completos, seguros y confiados, que nada nos falta, que nada nos atemoriza ni

puede quitar la certeza de su cuidado perenne.

A pesar de cualquier circunstancia adversa, la convicción del salmista y su confianza en Dios le hacen anticipar su regreso al templo después de su liberación, le hacen anhelar la estancia en el templo para dar testimonio de su experiencia y adorar al Dios que le rescata y sostiene. Allí celebrará la bondad de Dios.

Hemos vivido, y aún se viven, tiempos inéditos debido a la presencia de una epidemia que ha afectado a unos ciento cincuenta millones de personas en prácticamente todo el mundo, y que ha cobrado la vida de más de tres millones de habitantes en el planeta. Aunque los procesos de vacunación han comenzado, aún se viven momentos de tensión y angustia, en muchos lugares permanecen los cierres y las cuarentenas para evitar mayor expansión del virus, incluso la aparición de nuevas cepas pone en riesgo los esfuerzos de inmunización. La pandemia ha dejado una estela de derrumbes económicos, carencias y penurias, de las que en Cuba hemos sido golpeados con mayor visibilidad. Aun así, seguimos proclamando la esperanza, seguimos aferrados a la convicción del salmista d que Dios es nuestro pastor, el que nos guía, el que tiene cuidado de nosotros y por ello declaramos: nada nos faltará. En esa fe nos animamos a vivir la vida presente, y a dar testimonio de cada acción donde vemos esa mano divina obrando en medio nuestro. En esa fe seguimos celebrando nuestra fe y animando a otros a que lo hagan. No importa si estamos en Luyanó o en Champaign, todos somos ovejas del buen pastor.

Que Dios derrame abundantemente su gracia sobre cada uno de nosotros. Amén.

Environmental Update

BY PAT PHILLIPS

P.PHILLIPS42@SBCGLOBAL.NET

The Green Team was busy during Earth Week/month—not surprisingly. On April 18, 12 people picked up litter along State Street and downtown parking lots. At the April 21 Vespers, we delighted in once again seeing and hearing the indefatigable **Sir David Attenborough**, still an articulate explorer and nature champion in his 90s in a trailer for his film *A Life on Our Planet*. The highly rated film, itself, is available on Netflix. And on YouTube, another good one is a documentary, *Kiss the Ground*.

April 24 was the day to collect 5 ginormous bags of Styrofoam for recycling,



as well as digging dandelions around the church. And the wonderful culmination of the week was the April 25 service, at which **Samantha Nichols** preached, with hymns celebrating Creation.

Here's a way to landscape/garden with Native Plants. www.GrandPrairieFriends.org is the website for online ordering from May 2 to the 14, pickup at Country Arbors to be the week of May 17. First year plants in 4" pots are \$4 each. Buy 18, and receive 3 free (a \$72 value for \$60). Check it out!

Transition can be tough. So many neighborhoods and workers will be affected as interest in renewable energy gathers momentum. What happens to communities when coal mines close or industries with histories of pollution locate in low income areas? The Clean Energy Jobs Act (CEJA) addresses so many issues: among them, support for displaced employees, environmental justice, elimination of lead in pipes, renewable energy jobs, carbon-free power and green transportation. The bill has been developed by listening to those affected and coming up with very specific plans, including funding, and 16 Workforce Hubs which partner with businesses for job training in a clean energy economy.

Three members of the Environmental Committee participated in the Environmental Justice Advocacy Day, speaking with state senators and representatives, one of whom connected from the cab of his pickup as he prepared for planting on his farm. Anyone for whom these issues are important is asked to contact your legislators at www.ilga.gov. To learn more about the bills, <https://ilcleanjobs.org/>.

Cooking Classes to Benefit PEB

The Pakistani group is gathering on Sundays, May 16, 23, and 30 at 3 PM in Westminster Hall to view the PEB/ *Bunyaad Rug Cooking Benefit Classes* as a group. Anyone is welcome to join us, but you must sign up with us. We are taking donations for PEB because we would not be using individual registrations and this is a benefit for PEB scholarships.

People are welcome to register on their own for their own private viewing, of course. If so, you need to register by May 8. To register for private viewing, go to <https://donorbox.org/pakistani-dinner-three-class-series>.

Contact **Sallie Hutton** (sallie.hutton@gmail.com) if you wish to join the Pakistan group in person in Westminster Hall. (We are social distancing and using safety protocols.)

ESL Program

BY JEANETTE PYNE, ESL DIRECTOR
 JEANETTE@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

impact in an immigrant's life from the comfort of your own home, email Jeanette at jeanette@firstpres.church. You will be supported and trained. All classes are on Zoom.

ESL Program Library

In November, I decided to undertake creating a library for the ESL Program. We had a lot of resources that were at our disposal, but it was not cataloged or organized in any way. In order to continue with curriculum development, I needed to see what resources, textbooks and materials were already available to use.

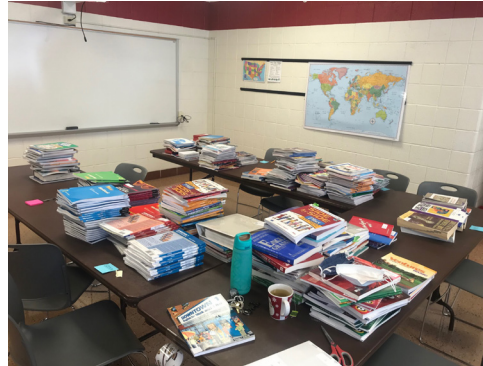
I set about researching how to create a library and what online cataloging tools were best for our situation. I landed on a website called libib.com and started cataloging the ESL books in November 2020. I soon realized that we needed a call system--like the Dewey Decimal Classification but specifically for English as a second language--to easily find the books and return them. Consequently, I created a unique library call system for the ESL Program Library. We had almost 500 unique books, and over 800 individual items to label. When I placed the last book in its proper place on the shelf, I felt this incredible sense of accomplishment.

Now, the tutors and students can search on libib.com for what is available to use and find it. Just like Champaign Public Library, tutors and students can checkout items to take home. They also get notifications about when an item is due. Teaching resources and tech equipment are in my office, but textbooks that the students can use are in the green and orange classrooms, which will be readily accessible for them to browse. When we open back up to in-person classes, I encourage you to come and explore our ESL Program Library.

Tutors Needed

We are in need of tutors for the summer. If you're interested in making an

Before



After



There are nearly 500 unique items in our library and multiple copies of some books for classroom use, which totals over 880 individual items!



These books are available for the students and tutors to use. They are four skills textbooks, this means they focus on listening, speaking, reading and writing. These textbooks focus on every day English.



These textbooks are right next to the cabinet on the left. They include grammar, reading, and writing textbooks.



This is a picture of the part of the ESL Library that is in my office. The books on the shelf are only for tutors. They are teacher resources, like tips on how to teach grammar, teacher editions of textbooks and books about second language pedagogy.

First Pres members are welcome and invited to join our ESL tutors and students at a Zoom Café Time on the second Thursday of every month at 10 AM.

The next one is on May 13 at 10 AM.

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

Drivers Needed and Maybe a Change of Focus

BY RACHEL MATTHEWS, MISSION COORDINATOR
RACHEL@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

It seems as though several mission agencies that we have worked with over the years need help that we are less and less able to provide: drivers to deliver meals. But, it is not just drivers. Our agencies seem to need volunteer coordinators as well. It is quite a lot of work to coordinate drivers to help with food delivery ministries. Several of you have suffered silently over the years trying to get volunteers to fill deliveries for promised days and weeks and filling in for people that had to back out. You have done this for Canteen Run, *empty tomb*, and Meals on Wheels. Thank you for your ministry.

Recently the Mission Team, Presbyterian Women, and the Community Mission Deacons have had separate discussions about the need for volunteers for coordinating and delivering food and meals in these agencies. If you have missed being asked and this type of work is heavy on your heart, please step up and we can help you lead in such a ministry! Otherwise, it is clear to many of us that the type of mission work we are doing here at First Presbyterian is changing focus away from delivery ministries.

The winds of the Spirit of God do change from time to time. Salt and Light now has curbside pickup. In fact, so do our big box stores like Walmart. People whose mobility is impaired are learning how to use delivery apps and other mail order deliveries. It seems that when we don't have the calling for one ministry, other people do or God provides for some other way for it to be done. Aren't we glad for the

freedom to change focus? The many talents in the body of Christ allow some to be gifted for some things and others gifted for different things.

There are churches who have food pantries. There are churches who do have able drivers. There are churches who make sandwiches. We will find what ours will be. Where is God leading us in our ministry of hospitality? Is it to develop and share the wonderful kitchen that is emerging in our very own Centennial Hall? Will our kitchen be a place for senior ministry? Will it be a warm coffee stop for neighborhood bus riders? Will it be a place for budding entrepreneurs who need a "microfinance" boost to their careers in a state of the art kitchen? Will it be a garden fresh kitchen? Whatever our next food ministry is, God is leading us.

Let us keep the ministry of hospitality in our prayers. Let the Spirit come in.

Update from United Way

FROM SUE GREY, PRESIDENT/CEO UNITED WAY

We want to take a moment to share with you the changes which have been made to the grants process at United Way of Champaign County. This is a significant change, and we want to be as transparent about this as possible. Champaign County is now a big community – our metro area is the 202nd largest in America. We are the second fastest growing community in the state. The future success of our community will be determined by our ability to improve the lives of the people who live here today.

We must focus on solving ongoing, chronic community issues. United Way has done a lot of listening in the past few years: a community survey,

meetings with our Partners, reviewing countless research reports, and many conversations with community members.

Based on research and conversations, the following concerns rise to the top:

ALICE

24% of households in Champaign County are working hard but continue to earn below the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) Self-Sufficiency Threshold. Additionally, 20% of households earn less than the federal poverty level. Together, nearly half of the households in our community struggle to make ends meet every single month.

While people of all races struggle financially, a disproportionate number of Black and Hispanic families are ALICE families.

19% of children -one in five- live in poverty. Child poverty is an adverse childhood experience. It also disproportionately impacts Black and Hispanic children.

Gun Violence

More than one 'shots fired' incident a week in 2021 alone. Last year was record breaking, and this year is on track to exceed numbers from last year.

Child Abuse

Child abuse and neglect cases are some of the highest across the state. In 2020, Champaign County filed 131 petitions of abuse and neglect versus 90 in a "relatively normal" year. 477 children ages 0-18 are in substitute or foster care. Champaign County is in the top 10 Illinois Counties with an abuse or neglect rate above 30/1000.

Food Insecurity

15% of households in Champaign County are food insecure.

Achievement Gap

Champaign Unit 4 and Urbana Unit 116 schools reported 45% of incoming Kindergarten students did not demonstrate any kindergarten readiness. Unit 4 data shows 93% of African American males in 3rd grade are not meeting standard expectations in Reading/Language Arts; in Math is 90%.

Urbana U116 data shows 88% of African American males in 3rd grade are not meeting standard expectations in Reading/Language Arts; in Math it is 81%. These gaps have lifelong impacts on children.

Champaign, Urbana, and Rantoul have chronic absenteeism rates higher than state average and national averages.

All this, and then a pandemic hit, and put a spotlight on many more challenges and obstacles in our community.

Through our prior grant model, United Way was able to help many and provide significant support. But many in our community have long endured systemic challenges which hinder progress, growth, and better quality of life. We see solutions – but to act requires a change in our grant approach. All of Champaign County deserves to thrive and we will fight for this in our community.

The community has said, loud and clear, that they want United Way to do more to change community conditions. With over 1,300 survey responses, 95% agreed that United Way should do more to address the root causes of chronic community issues. The voices in our community conversations have been equally emphatic.

To better respond to the needs of the community and solve the longstand-

ing issues in our community, United Way of Champaign County has made fundamental changes our Community Impact Grant model.

This new model has two parts: Community Essentials Grants and Community Change Request for Proposals.

Community Essentials Grants

Community Essentials funding from United Way of Champaign County targets services that are designed to meet physical needs (such as food and water, safety, shelter, and health-care) as well as help navigating and accessing complex human service systems (identification and documentation, technology, and resource navigation).

On April 20, 2021, United Way offered Community Essentials contracts to 19 programs. The total funds awarded was \$588,286.

Programs were chosen by community volunteers from our current grantees. This will be a one-year contract. Early in 2022 we will announce the application process for future Community Essentials grants. Long term support of community essentials will be required to lessen or prevent the intensity of a crisis, provide stability, and support people navigating a complex social service system.

Community Change Request for Proposals

We must move beyond annual grant making to changing systems, changing conditions, and moving the needle on complex issues facing Champaign County. We must invest differently. Always working in concert with the community, we will identify a community issue and issue a Request for Proposals (RFP).

On May 1, United Way will open our

first RFP process. The community issue is Early Grade Level Success. \$700,000 will be available. We will seek applications from programs which aim to reduce the achievement gap in kindergarten readiness and 3rd grade reading among students of color. Full details will be available on our website by the end of this week. RFPs will be reviewed by a panel of community subject matter experts, volunteers, and community members. By coordinating work around a specific need, we know we can move the needle and change the statistics. We will have at least two additional RFPs this year. In late summer, we will issue an RFP focused on child well-being, trauma, and violence prevention. A third RFP is still in development with volunteers.

This is a year of transition for United Way and our community. We acknowledge that we may not get everything right the first time – but we are committed to learning, growing, and changing for our community. We and our volunteers welcome your questions.

Our mission says, “United Way of Champaign County will bring people and resources together to create positive change and lasting impact.” We can and must develop effective strategies which deliver results for our neighbors. If we do not change, problems do not change. We must all do our part, working United, to make our community the place that our neighbors need it to be – equitable, safe, and opportunity-filled.



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN

302 West Church Street
Champaign, IL 61820

Change Service Requested



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*

10:15 AM In-Person Worship**

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

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

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

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

Contact the church office for more information.

Pastors:

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

Staff:

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