

First Presbyterian Church News

17 Royal Road South, Portage la Prairie, MB



John Zondag, Minister

December 2020

Raymond Reichelt, Clerk of Session
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Sunday Worship at 10:30 a.m.

We acknowledge that we are in Treaty 1 territory, and that the land is the traditional lands of the Anishinabe and Dakota Nations, and the homeland of the Métis Nation.

FROM THE MINISTER

It's hard to believe that the COVID-19 pandemic that hit us in Canada in March is still with us eight months later, with no end yet in sight! In the early days of the pandemic, we were reminded of the SARS epidemic of 2002-03, and I remember thinking that, like SARS, the current pandemic would probably fizzle out within a few months. That hasn't happened, of course; and with daily numbers of infections and deaths higher than ever, it looks like we'll be having a decidedly subdued Christmas holiday.

The impact of the pandemic has been far reaching. It has shaken our assumptions about our ability to combat disease, which probably accounts for the fact there are some who refuse to believe that it is a serious threat, and who resist taking the preventive measures that public health officials advise us to take. We're not used to the idea that a serious - and potentially deadly - disease can be spread so easily, so quickly, and so widely. We've been told that there will be no end to this pandemic until effective vaccines have been produced and made widely available; and so, in the meantime, we feel vulnerable and anxious. The pandemic is disrupting all sectors of our society, and we wonder how much longer it will go on. Since the only way that the pandemic can be brought under control is by effective vaccines, all we can do for now is to continue taking the necessary preventive measures, and to wait.

Waiting is also a major theme of the season of Advent. We recall how the people of Israel waited for God to send a special king, whom they came to refer to as the "Messiah" - which means the Anointed One - an expectation that was eventually fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. We recall also how the followers of the adult Jesus, after his death, resurrection, and ascension, waited for him to come back from heaven to establish the kingdom of God fully on the earth. We remember as well that we ourselves still wait for Jesus to return from heaven, to defeat the powers of evil, and to inaugurate a new age in which God's authority is fully recognized and accepted by his entire creation. We wait, we hope, we look forward, we anticipate, realizing that the world's problems are too great and too deeply rooted for us human beings to resolve by ourselves; realizing that they need the direct intervention of God.

Waiting is not easy. It requires patience and self-discipline - especially when we don't know how long we have to wait.



We've had some promising news on the vaccine front in recent weeks, and we have reason to believe that effective protection from the COVID-19 virus will at last be available sometime next year. But as for the second coming of Jesus, and his establishing the kingdom of God fully in the world, we have no idea how long we will need to continue to wait for that. This is a question that Christians have struggled with for over 19 centuries. And so we continue waiting, hoping, looking forward, and anticipating.

Unfortunately, the pandemic is disrupting even our worship routines. It's pretty much certain now that we won't be able to have our usual December Communion service. Whether we will be able to have our annual Hanging-of-the-Greens and Christmas Eve services is very much up in the air. In any case, recorded services will continue to be made available on YouTube (including Christmas Eve, if necessary), along with the full script for each one, for those who would like to print them for someone who doesn't have access to the internet. Printed service scripts also can be mailed from the church office, although not until after the service has been held. If you would like to receive a printed copy each week, please let me know.

From the Minister (cont'd)

Many thanks to all of you who have continued to support the congregation with your givings through these turbulent times, including your support of our "Virtual Fundraiser" and our take-out Fall Supper!

Although it will be a decidedly "different" Christmas this year, I wish you all as "merry" a Christmas as possible under the circumstances! Let's keep in mind the fact that, for us Christians, the focus of Christmas is the celebration of Jesus' birth - his first coming into the world - in fulfillment of God's promise. And like you, I look forward to a much better year in 2021!

COMMUNION

We would normally have a Communion service on the Third Sunday of Advent (13 December), but that's probably *not* going to happen, on account of the pandemic. Our next regular Communion service is scheduled for the 5th Sunday in Lent (21 March).

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

Unfortunately, most of our congregational activities and events remain suspended indefinitely, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some meetings continue, however.

a) Regularly scheduled events/meetings:

- Bible study - Tuesday evenings, at 7:00, by Zoom
- Finance & Maintenance Committee - 2nd Wednesday of the month, at 6:30 p.m.
- Session meetings - 4th Thursday of the month, at 7:00 p.m. (except December)

b) One-time events:

- Sunday, 29 Nov. - FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
- Sunday, 6 Dec., 10:30 a.m. - Hanging-of-the-Greens service (tentative)
- Thursday, 24 Dec., 7:00 p.m. - Christmas Eve service
- Sunday, 7 Feb. - PWS&D SUNDAY
- Sunday, 21 Feb. - FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT
- Sunday, 21 Feb. - Annual Meeting, following the service and a potluck lunch
- Sunday, 28 Feb. - Deadline for submissions for the March issue of the Newsletter
- Sunday, 14 Mar. - Daylight Saving Time begins
- Sunday, 21 Mar. - COMMUNION SUNDAY
- Sunday, 4 Apr. - EASTER SUNDAY

THANK YOU!

Many thanks to **Allan McLean** for mowing the church lawn this past spring, summer, and fall!

MEMBERSHIP

Anyone interested in becoming a **professing member** of the congregation, whether by transfer from another congregation or by profession (or reaffirmation) of faith, is asked to speak to John Zondag.

SESSION NEWS

In addition to a number of routine matters, the Session has in recent months dealt with the following items:

- A request to rent the sanctuary for a wedding on Saturday, 2 January, was approved.
- The elders' districts were adjusted, due to the departures of Gwen Henwood and Pat Mullins. This means that the people who were in Gwen's and Pat's districts have been moved to other districts. A couple of other changes were made at the same time.
- John has been sharing ideas with the Session from a book entitled *Twelve Dynamic Shifts for Transforming Your Church*, which he read when he was on his Inter-Mission last year. The book was written by the Rev. Stanley Ott, who at the time of writing was the minister of Pleasant Hills Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, Pa., in the United States.
- After having conducted a poll of the congregation, the decision was made to resume in-person services, starting the 11th of October. However, after five Sundays, it was decided to suspend services again, after the 8th of November, since our health region's status was going to change from Orange to Red on the 9th. Then, just a few days later, the provincial government announced that all places of worship in the province would have to suspend their in-person services, as of the 12th.

E-MAIL

If you have an e-mail address, and are not currently receiving your newsletter by e-mail, please give John Zondag (jzondag@mymts.net) your e-mail address, and he will add you to the congregational e-mail list. This would reduce the expense to the congregation of printing hard copies - plus, you would receive your newsletter in **color** rather than black-and-white! You will then also receive the weekly Announcements Sheet by e-mail.

CHRISTMAS OFFERING ENVELOPE

The annual **Christmas Offering** envelope is enclosed with this issue of Newsletter, for those who receive a hard copy. For those who receive their Newsletter by e-mail, the envelope will be mailed out separately. **Many thanks** to everyone who contributed to the annual Thanksgiving Offering in October, which totaled \$1,285.00! Thank you also to those who have contributed to our "Virtual Fundraiser" so far this year. Contributions totaled \$2,335 as of the end of October!

NEW BEGINNINGS

John recently received Mark Lewis' **Assessment Report**, which completes **Phase 3** of the New Beginnings process. However, he has been asked not to distribute it until the training session for our Small Group leaders is provided, and until we are ready to proceed with the Small Group meetings.

Also, we have been assigned a Coach to guide us through the rest of the New Beginnings process. He is **Peter Coutts**, the minister of Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church in Calgary. **Phase 4** of the process will be an "Introduction to Transformational Ministry" weekend, which will be led by Peter Coutts, and will include the training session for the Small Group leaders. It remains to be seen how this will be done under the current pandemic conditions! In **Phase 5**, Small Group meetings will be held to discuss the Assessment Report.

We currently have two people who have volunteered to be Small Group leaders, and **we still need one or two more**. If you are interested or have questions, please speak to John.

COLOR-CODED

This is the time of year when the seasonal colors change fairly often, since the seasons in this part of the Christian Year are relatively short. The seasonal colors are **purple**, which signifies a time of preparation and penitence; **white**, which signifies a time of celebration; and **green**, which signifies a period of “ordinary time”.

Purple is used in the seasons of **Advent** and **Lent**, both of which are seasons of preparation for a major festival. White is used in the seasons of **Christmas** and **Easter**, both of which celebrate major events in the life of Jesus. White is also used on Epiphany (January 6) and a few other special Sundays throughout the year. Green is used in the seasons **after Epiphany** and **after Pentecost**, which are seasons of ordinary time.

The sequence of the seasons is: **Advent** (when we prepare for Christmas), **Christmas** (when we celebrate Jesus’ birth), **After Epiphany** (a season of ordinary time), **Lent** (when we prepare for Easter, and commemorate Jesus’ death), **Easter** (when we celebrate Jesus’ resurrection), and **After Pentecost** (a season of ordinary time). There are six seasons in all, and they are of varying length.

In addition to the seasons, there are some special **days** to be aware of:

- **Epiphany** (at the end of the Christmas season), when we commemorate the visit of the Wise Men. The color is **white**.

- **Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday** (in the final week of Lent, which is called **Holy Week**), when we commemorate the events leading up to and including Jesus’ death on the cross. The color for these days is **red**, symbolizing Jesus’ blood, shed for our salvation.

- **Pentecost** (the final day of the Easter season), when we celebrate the giving of the Holy Spirit to Jesus’ disciples. The color is **red**, this time symbolizing the tongues of fire that appeared to the disciples in that event.

ELECTION OF ELDERS

In January and February, we will once again be holding our biennial **election of elders**. Although eldership is for life, elders serve on the Session for six years at a time, at the end of which they are eligible to be re-elected for a further six-year term. The Session is the governing body of the congregation, and it meets ten times per year, normally on the fourth Thursday of the month, in the evening. With the departure of Gwen Henwood and Pat Mullins, it currently has seven members, serving overlapping terms. This year, the terms of two elders are coming an end - Debbi Miles and Brian Yeo.

All professing members of the congregation are eligible to be elected to the eldership (or re-elected to the Session), and only professing members are eligible to vote. A ballot containing the names of all professing members will be prepared and distributed, and members will have an opportunity to vote for the people they wish to elect. Any member who doesn’t wish his/her name to appear on the ballot is asked to notify either Raymond Reichelt or John Zondag in early January.

When the votes have been counted, all who received the minimum number of votes will be “vetted” by the Session, and the candidates considered suitable will be contacted to see if they are willing to serve, beginning with those who received the greatest number of votes. An orientation session will then be offered for those being elected to the eldership for the first time, and a date will be set for new elders to be ordained, and for returning elders to be re-admitted to the Session. That will take place during a regular Sunday service.

Keep an eye on the weekly announcements sheet in January for further details, including dates.

“VACANCIES”

As announced in the September issue of the Newsletter, we are looking for people to fill “vacancies” on three of our Session committees:

- The **Finance and Maintenance Committee** - The term is for three years (until the summer of 2023). The committee meets every month, except July and August, on the 2nd Wednesday of the month, at 6:30 p.m. Contact Keith Kelly (857-5712) if you are interested, or have questions.

- The **Worship Committee** - The term is for a year at a time. The committee meets three or four times per year, as needed, mainly to plan the worship schedule and to organize our special services. Contact John Zondag if you are interested, or have questions.

“VACANCIES” cont’d

- The **Soup Kitchen Committee** - The term is for a year at a time. The committee meets as needed, at least twice per year, to review the Soup Kitchen’s finances, and to support and advise the coordinators. Contact John Zondag if you are interested, or have questions.

THE “FEAST OF STEPHEN”

Do you ever wonder what the “Feast of Stephen” is in the Christmas song “Good King Wenceslas”? It is a so-called “Lesser Festival” commemorating the life and death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr (the first Christian to be put to death for his faith). It is observed on December 26. Its traditional full name is “The Feast Day of St. Stephen”. According to Acts 6 and 7, Stephen was one of a group of “deacons” appointed by the early church. He was tried by the Sanhedrin (the same governing body that had condemned Jesus to death) for allegedly spreading false teaching and speaking blasphemy; and he was put to death by stoning. Just as Jesus had said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”, Stephen said, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” as he lay dying (*Acts 7.60*).

Three additional Lesser Festivals fall during the following few days:

December 27 is the “Feast Day of St. John the Apostle”, honoring John, one of the original 12 disciples of Jesus, traditionally believed to be the author of the Gospel of John and of the three Letters of John.

December 28 is the “Feast Day of the Holy Innocents”. It commemorates the massacre of young boys in Bethlehem ordered by King Herod the Great, in an attempt to kill “the one born King of the Jews”, whom the Magi were looking for, and whom Herod perceived to be a potential rival to his throne (*Matthew 2.1-23*).

January 1 is the “Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus”, commemorating the circumcision and official naming of Jesus, a week after his birth (*Luke 2.21*).

In the early Middle Ages, the church created “holy days” to commemorate various events and people such as these. They are called “Lesser Festivals” because they are not as significant as the so-called “Principal Festivals” such as Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, and Pentecost. Although these days are not widely observed in Presbyterian Churches, it is worthwhile to be aware of them, especially the ones that commemorate events or people recorded in the Bible.

SOUP KITCHEN

The Soup Kitchen was going to open on Nov. 16th and then we went into code red so that ended that. We have a new assistant coordinator Gloria Nichols who has already taken over some of the responsibilities from me. The new counter tops look wonderful and I am sure the new microwave will work beautifully once we get to use it. We have lost a few of our volunteers who are going to be dearly missed. Laure Dyck passed away on August 10, 2020 and Pat Mullins as well as Gwen Henwood moved away. All of these ladies were very dependable and willing to volunteer whenever I needed someone. Gwen always ran for the eggs as well as wrote the letters to the businesses and organizations asking for donations as well as did the thank you notes to the supporters/donors! There will not be a Christmas Party this year for obvious reasons. When we do reopen it will look much different than in the past but that will be a conversation for a later newsletter.

FINANCE & MAINTENANCE

I hope everyone is surviving these interesting times. Thank you to everyone who has been able to continue to contribute to the church’s finance. Your help in keeping the church going in this way is greatly appreciated. Thank you to those who have been able to help with the cleaning of the sanctuary when in person services were able to resume, hopefully they will again soon. Thank you to all those who helped to make the fall supper a success. The biggest news from Finance & Maintenance is the new eavestroughs on the South side of the church. Hopefully this will do the trick and prevent further water from leaking in to the kitchen. The boiler has been serviced and is ready for the winter.

Please continue to prayer for our health care workers, first responders, our church and John as he continues to conduct our virtual services.

I pray that God will continue to look after everyone and keep you all safe and healthy. Merry Christmas and here’s to a normalish New Year.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION CALLS TO ACTION - 43-53

We have covered the broad areas of Child Welfare, Education, Language and Culture, and Health and Justice; which leaves us with the last and largest of the categories called Reconciliation, CALLS 43-94. However, I have already written about many of them so we have made more progress than it might seem. For this newsletter, I will look at calls 43-53:

43 - ADOPT AND IMPLEMENT THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES - in progress - projects proposed

44 - DEVELOP A NATIONAL PLAN, STRATEGIES AND OTHER CONCRETE MEASURES TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS OF THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (UNDRIP) - in progress - projects proposed

In its December 2019 throne speech, the government promised to introduce legislation within a year to implement the United Nations' declaration.

45 - DEVELOP A ROYAL PROCLAMATION OF RECONCILIATION TO BE ISSUED BY THE CROWN - not started

46 - DEVELOP AND SIGN A COVENANT OF RECONCILIATION AMONG PARTIES TO THE INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT - not started

47 - GOVERNMENTS TO REPUDIATE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY AND TERRA NULLIUS AND REFORM LAWS THAT RELY ON SUCH CONCEPTS - not started

48 and 49 - see October 2018 newsletter

50 - ESTABLISH INDIGENOUS LAW INSTITUTES - in progress - projects proposed

The 2019 federal budget proposed to provide \$9.1 million over 3 years to support the construction of an Indigenous Legal Lodge at the University of Victoria.

51 - GOVERNMENT OF CANADA TO DEVELOP POLICY OF TRANSPARENCY ON LEGAL OPINIONS UPON WHICH IT ACTS IN REGARD TO ABORIGINAL AND TREATY RIGHTS - not started

52 - ADOPT LEGAL PRINCIPLES ON ABORIGINAL TITLE CLAIMS - not started

53 - ESTABLISH A NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR RECONCILIATION - in progress - projects proposed. There has not been an enactment of legislation but there are commitments to do so.

AS OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2020:

24 - NOT STARTED

38 - PROJECTS PROPOSED

22 - PROJECTS UNDERWAY

10 - COMPLETE

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH – 2020**JAN – OCT 2020****FINANCES:**

INCOME RECEIVED:	76,822.01
EXPENSES PAID:	<u>80,834.56</u>
SURPLUS (DEFICIT):	<u>(4,012.55)</u>

PRESBYTERIANS SHARING – Total Allocation for 2020 is \$3,200.00:

DONATIONS RECEIVED: 3,175.00

FUNDRAISING:

INCOME:	4,168.00
EXPENSES:	<u>1,664.21</u>
SURPLUS:	<u>2,503.79</u>

Fundraising expenses include amounts paid for the Fall Supper which occurred on November 1, 2020. Income for Fall Supper will be reported in November.

For information purposes, the net income for Fall Supper was 3,000.68.

A summary of the surplus from the following events (the amounts are Included in the above year to date fundraising information):

Pasta Dinner

Spring Dinner	
Fall Supper	
Catering	
Meal In A Bowl	1,043.11
Presbyterian Pie Sale	149.00
Greeting Cards	350.00
Virtual Fundraising	2,335.00

Our Thanksgiving Offering this year was \$1,285.00. Thank you for your continued generosity.

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ENDOWMENT
FINANCIAL STATEMENT – October 31, 2020**

REVENUE:	MONTH	Y-T-D
Honour Gifts		
Interest – Scotia Bank		.69
Stride CU (High Interest Saving Account)	2.41	325.32
Investment Interest - Scotia Bank		
Stride CU (Share Dividend, Investment Income)	896.96	23,025.51
Investment Redeemed – Scotia Bank		5,000.00
Memorial Gifts		2,000.00
Offering Envelopes	35.00	<u>80.00</u>
TOTAL REVENUE	934.37	30,431.52

EXPENSES:		
Bank Charges – Scotia Bank		1.25
Stride CU	25.00	26.50
Investment Purchase	864.04	28,522.17
Miscellaneous (High Interest Saving Account)	2.41	325.32
Finance & Maintenance		5,500.00
GST		
TOTAL EXPENSES	891.45	34,375.24

BANK: SCOTIA

Opening Balance: January 1, 2020	\$2,885.89
Total Revenue – Year to Date	7,330.00
Total Expenses – Year to Date	10,215.89
Closing Balance: September 30, 2020	00000 Account closed Sept 24/20

BANK: STRIDE CREDIT UNION (SCU)

Opening Balance: January 1, 2020	236.66
Revenue – Year to Date	7,806.51
Total Expenses – Year to Date	5,310.81
Closing Balance: October 31, 2020	2,732.36

INVESTMENTS:

DATE	BANK	INVESTMENT	AMOUNT
PURCHASED			
April 22/19	SCU	High Interest Saving Account Paid Monthly \$2.41	\$ 5,702.05
Oct 31/17	SCU	GIC – Westbourne Fund – Due Oct 31/23 @1.50% 400450	1,500.00
Oct 14/15	SCU	TD – Harvest Term Due Oct 14/21 @2.65% 307879 Pd \$864.04	33,450.22
May 25/18	SCU	TD – May 25/21 @ 1.60% 370687	22,658.13
Sept 24/20	SCU	TD – Due Sept 24/21 @1.70% 620792	5,000.00
	SCU	Share	<u>5.00</u>
		TOTAL INVESTMENTS	\$68,315.40

Fall Supper

I can't say enough "Thank-Yous" to everyone that helped with our Fall Supper on Sunday, November 1st, 2020. We had an overwhelming success of pre-selling the meals – 257 of them. 253 of those meals were actually paid for - 2 were forgotten about from pre-ordering date and 2 were for medical reasons but gave a donation anyhow.

It was a learning curve for us and we have learnt from our mistakes and what we can change for another time – which could be in the spring!!

I am sure everyone was tired on Monday as I was, BUT my phone rang again quite a few times – just thanking us for such an excellent meal – how lovely it looked in those fancy containers, how delicious it was, and for taking on such an endeavour in these crazy times! I have an email I received I would like to share -

Hi Lisa,

Stephanie and I would like to thank the Committee of the First Presbyterian Church for the preparation and pick-up or delivery of the Turkey Fall Supper on Sunday November 1-2020. The meal was delicious and well - appreciated in these Covid-19 days. A big round of applause from all who dined well. Thanks to your group.

Stephanie and Shirley Christianson

I am so happy that it went over so well and so happy for the donations from 2 farmers for the vegetables; & from another farm for the donation of cooking all 9 turkeys (in a certified kitchen) & **ALL** the help I got from everyone in our congregation. Also I want to thank Winnie Duncan of Queens Court and Doug Blyth of Lakeshore Apts. for taking on the organizing of pre-selling and getting those 70 meals to their residents.

And now the Financial – that everyone was waiting for:

Income	4,068.00
Expenses	<u>1,067.32</u>
Net	\$3,000.68

Thanks again
Lisa Sneesby

Mardine, Lalaine, Ria
filling gravy containers



Ria & Lalaine filling
dessert containers



Bruce packing the meals



Kitchen workers – Debbi,
Bruce, Margaret, & Shauna

INCARNATION

by Neil Block

'Incarnation' is a complicated word that describes a marvellous, indeed, an astonishing concept. Though its meaning lies at the heart of the Christian message, the word is seldom used in our common conversation. Webster's dictionary defines incarnation as "the embodiment of a spirit in some earthly form – the union of divinity with humanity in Jesus Christ". It is one thing to read a definition of a concept; it's a whole other thing to read about this becoming an actual event. Speaking of Jesus, the

While we may be in wonder and awe with the truth that Jesus came, we need to follow with **why** Jesus became one of us. It could hardly be because we had made such a beautiful world out of what He began in creation. At one point near the end of his years of ministry Jesus tells those around him about his impending death. At the same time, he confesses that he is troubled by what lies ahead and questions whether he should ask to be spared the agony of death. He allows no deliberation, but declares, "No, I was for this very reason **I came** to this hour." (John 12:27). The nostalgic scenes of Jesus coming as a babe in a manger in Bethlehem to be one of us is never the end of the story. It continues through his teaching, healing, death, resurrection, ascension, Pentecost and on.

CHRISTMAS

N	For unto us a Child is born...
C	And His name will be called
A	Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
R	Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
N	- Isaiah 9:6
A	H R
T	LOVE
I	F I
REJOICE	G
N	N
	SUPREME

Scriptures make this declaration "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form." (Col. 2:9) and "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." (John 1:14). We are grateful for the gift of faith that enables us to grasp the fact that God, in Jesus Christ, became one of us. The Creator chose to become one with His creation.

Jesus explains what happened and why by using the metaphor of light, in fact making the declaration: "I am the light of the world." (John 8:12). In his conversation with Nicodemus he explains that "... light has come into the world" and "whoever lives by the truth comes into the light" (John 3:19 & 21). We may never fully grasp the miracle of the incarnation, but each Christmas season we are given opportunity to contemplate the majesty and grace of God. We join the magi in wonder and worship. Mark Lowry expresses the marvel of the event:

Mary did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?

Mary did you know that your baby boy would one day rule the nations?

Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect lamb?

The sleeping child you're holding is the Great I Am!

Incarnation is not merely a concept; it is an astounding reality.

~ Submitted by Charlie Clifford ~