

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

PRESBYTERIAN CONNECTION

JANUARY, FEBRUARY 2021

GREETINGS,

Well, the New Year is not exactly off to the start that I had hoped for. As I said goodbye to 2020 and the upside-down world that defined it, I turned my attention to rolling out the welcome mat for 2021 and with it a fresh beginning. However, the unfolding events of political unrest culminating in the siege of the Capitol quickly jarred my senses out of any kind of reset I was hoping to enjoy. Just when the light at the end of COVID's tunnel began to emerge, political upheaval arrived on the scene.

I am not going to comment on the political implications of this situation as it has been debated ad nauseam on whatever news source that you prefer to get your version of the "truth" from. I will say however that none of it should have surprised anyone who intelligently surveyed the landscape leading up to it. It was obvious that society cannot plant the kinds of seeds sown in Washington, water and fertilize them through social media, and somehow think that they will not bear fruit.

My real concern is the church's complicity in all of this. The church of Jesus Christ is not a bystander in this whole thing but rather the catalyst and fuel behind it and this breaks my heart. Behind this real concern is the degree to which the Christian faith has become merged with political agendas, willingly offered its devotion (dare I say worship and adoration) to politicians, and aligned itself with some version of Christian nationalism. Civil religion has replaced biblical faith and brought us to this unholy place.

I can understand someone who is a lifelong Democrat or Republican finding a way to merge their identity with a particular candidate and holding their political idealism so

passionately that they act or do things that cross over a line. I can even understand those same devotees buying into ideas that might suggest that the fate of a country or even the world is decided by the success of their political platform. I can also find a bit of understanding for those same people to believe that any means is acceptable to achieve a desired end because I have seen it over and over again on multiple issues. I don't agree with any of these things, but I can make room for it. But I cannot understand any true believer participating in any of this when their devotion, fidelity, passion, actions, and thinking have been pledged to Jesus the only King and Sovereign.

I have spent my entire adult life serving the church. I have sought to nurture it, instruct and equip it, model the life of Jesus to it, and call it away from idolatrous tendencies and into full devotion to Christ. I admit to not always doing this well and in reviewing my forty-two years of service I am well aware of where I have missed it. But now as I come to the finish line of ministry, I realize that the church is truly lost to political adultery and seductive worldly ambitions. I will soon retire knowing that my generation of ministers has failed in our mission to lead God's people forward into the glorious witness God asks of us. This really hurts. I mean it is deeply painful and a bitter source of heartache.

I thought that last year's experience as commissioner to the General Assembly of the PCUSA was the low point of my life as a minister of the gospel.

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(Cont from Page 1) A significant majority of the Assembly's docket and energy was devoted to eliminating racial inequality in our nation. I am supportive of all avenues that seek to eliminate this hideous side of human darkness, as I truly believe that racism has gone on too long in this nation. But when the General Assembly actually passed a measure that aligned PCUSA as allies with the Black Lives Matter political movement I was angered and disturbed.

At a moment in time historically when the PCUSA is faced with issues of denominational viability and church health in terms of attendance and aging, the Assembly chose to join in political alliance with a divisive and radical political movement. I'm not sure what the solutions are to end systemic racism, but the church aligning itself with a political movement is certainly not it. Religion getting into bed with politics always produces illegitimate offspring.

But 2021 has now unveiled a completely different segment of the church happily throwing itself completely under the bedsheets with the whole MAGA political bandwagon. The offspring that has been produced is a hideous creature full of toxic waste and infectious destructive diseases.

The white evangelical movement (by far America's biggest Christian identity group), its leaders, churches, and organizations loudly and proudly proclaimed its support for a president who was promoted at various times as "*the Savior of Christianity in America*". With an American flag in one hand and a cross in the other, this misguided group threw their allegiance to the president and his "theology" of Christian nationalism that eventually landed us squarely in this political quagmire. My personal sadness, and disturbance at last year's denominational sellout to the radical left, has now become anger and painful shame at this year's display of evil affiliation with the radical right by evangelicals selling their birthright for a bowl of red stew filled with political power.

And even though we are not a part of this particular Christian Movement, we have to own up to it. Those unconvinced with the merits of Christianity, will never see this as the actions of a limited group of radical extremists. To the unconvinced, all those identified with the Christian faith are lumped together. Fear of a Christian social agenda (left or right), bias

against Christians holding office (progressive or conservative), and suspicion of future intolerance being unleashed upon those outside of our faith is sure to follow. And I might say, rightly so. This will not end well.

This segment of the church cheered on the vitriolic words of an angry President directed through rallies, and social media toward anyone and anything not in total alignment with his agenda. It excused Christ-less character, behavior, and speech toward others by the Whitehouse. It bought into still unproven conspiracy theories and outrageous claims of election fraud. It laughed at those the President mocked as being weak, or physically inferior, or losers. It booed those who were cancelled for failing the unconditional loyalty test, and joined in seeking to intimidate those branded as enemies. Its leaders rushed to get to the front of the line in order to be visually and verbally connected with the president.

This group was strangely silent when the events of the Unite the Right Gathering unfolded in blatant racist intimidation in Charlottesville, Virginia. When Michigan's capital was besieged with gun toting mobs of angry people, many wearing Christian t-shirts and waving signs for Jesus to save America, it was viewed as necessary to keep America safe from the ruinous vacuum of the enemies of God a.k.a. the evil progressive agenda. When BLM protestors were tear gassed and forcibly removed from a legal rally in order for the President to pose with a Bible in front of a church, many shed tears of joy. When the plot to kidnap and execute the Michigan Governor was revealed, this group dismissed it as much ado about nothing and then vilified her.

This group sincerely believed that their President could do no wrong, their enemies could do no right, and God could do nothing apart from their call to arms, plans to intimidate, and donning armor as Christian soldiers marching on to war against their fellow Americans. As I watched "Christians" carrying crosses among those smashing windows out of the Capital Building, toting Christian flags and adorned in Christian symbols roaming the Capital grounds *(Cont on Page 3)*

(Cont. from Page 2) in search of lawmakers, law enforcement people, and anyone else considered a threat to their cause, I was horrified. The expressions of fear on the faces of those being sought out and the outright disgust expressed by non-believing onlookers at home should never be an acceptable response to the faith we represent.

Where is the way of Jesus in all of this? Where is the Sermon on the Mount; the political and moral platform of Jesus in all of this? Where is the only evidence of true faith; "By this all will know that you are my disciples, that you love one another" in this? Where is the recognition that we are strangers and foreigners on this earth with a citizenship in heaven's kingdom? Where is the example of Jesus who responded to suffering and injustice by forgiving and reconciling in all of this? Where is the command to pray for and bless our enemies in all of this?

As David Cassidy, a Presbyterian minister who remains faithful to the gospel has stated, "The confusion of Christ's glorious Kingdom with fallen, fallible,

and finite human governments and party politics must come to an end. Our love for Jesus must be renewed and repentance born of remembering his love for us in his cross is the only way ahead." We cannot afford to neglect this response.

Whether aligned with the ideology of the left or the right, we as Christians must be aligned first and foremost to Jesus. Whether we identify with Democrats or Republicans, we first of all must be identify with being Christ-followers. Though we are citizens of America, our love of and allegiance to the Kingdom must prevail. The kingdoms of this world are broken, damaged, sinful, and self-serving. Ultimately they will bow the knee to the Kingdom of God and its King, the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To that Kingdom I pledge my allegiance and sing of my love.

I pray that you will join me. . . .

Blessings,
Pastor Tom

ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

Due to circumstances related to Covid the Annual Congregational Meeting will be held Sunday, March 14, with April 11 as a back-up date.

The platform of the meeting will be live-stream, in-person, or zoom. Annual Reports will be emailed and/or mailed as needed. We will keep you updated!



February 17, 2021

The Ash Wednesday service this year will be prerecorded and can be viewed online prior to Ash Wednesday. A link will be sent.

BIRTHDAYS!

JANUARY

19 Bob Brubaker
 21 Kathy Rubinstein
 22 Phillip Etoll
 27 Lisa Brejcha

FEBRUARY

4 Chris Luzny
 10 Jim Johnston
 18 Ben Reese
 21 Jim Stevens
 24 Carol Detmer



2020 GOOD NEWS!

Congratulations to Phillip Etoll and Angela Sweet-Operacz on the birth of their son, Nolan Michael James Etoll, on Monday, December 28, 2020.

Congratulations and best wishes also to the happy and proud grandparents, Jim and Lynn Etoll.



IN OUR PRAYERS

ST. LUKE'S HOSPITAL: Margaret Whitman

ALPINE VILLAGE: Sherry Joseph, Connie Cobb

FULTON MANOR: Kathy Rubinstein, Frank Brown

HOME: Bob Brubaker, Mike Hershberger, April Brown, De-
 lores McColley, Dan Badenhop, Ann Spieth, Sandy Johnson



PRAYER WARRIORS

PLEASE CONTACT THE CHURCH OFFICE WITH YOUR PRAYER REQUEST.. PRAYER REQUESTS ARE CONFIDENTIAL. NAMES WILL BE PUT ON THE CHURCH PRAYER LIST ONLY IF REQUESTED.

STATISTICS FOR DECEMBER

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF THE CHURCH, COMMUNITY, AND THE WORLD.

Attendance

December 6 20
 December 13 23
 December 20 (No in person service)
 December 27 (No count)

Financial

Budgeted expenses/month \$13,282.00
 December contributions \$22,405.00

Per Capita Dues for 2021
\$37.23/Member

THANKS YOU!

Thank you to everyone that donated gifts, money,
and/or shopping for Project We Care 2020.



LOCAL MISSION APPRECIATION TO FPC

The Pillars of Success organization is very grateful for your generous donation. We are appreciative, especially during these unprecedented times, and will work hard to make good decisions regarding the money given us.

The funds raised will help us reach out to people of Henry County without housing, offer transitional housing, and provide avenues for them to obtain the skills needed to live independent, successful lives.

Thank you,
Pillars of Success Bord of Directors

On behalf of the members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the poor we serve, I want to thank you all for the very generous gift to support our work to help the needy in our area. We are very grateful for your strong support each year.

Thanks to everyone and may you all be blessed this new year.

On behalf of The Salvation Army of Northwest Ohio and those who will benefit from your generous donation, please accept our heartfelt thanks and appreciation.

We are grateful for your partnership in meeting the needs of the community. Your willingness to share brings much joy to others. Thank you for allowing us to be your hands and feet to those in need. By standing together, we are making a difference in our community. Again, we want to thank you for your assistance. By contributing to The Salvation Army, you help to make the future brighter for those who are in less fortunate circumstances.

May God Bless You,
Major Tom Duperree, NW Ohio Area Service coordinator

The Henry County Ministerial Association gratefully acknowledges your generous gift to the 2020 Christmas Cheer Program. Your thoughtfulness provides blessings for over 250 families.

We wish you and yours a very blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year!

LeRoy Helberg, President
The Henry County Ministerial Association
Christmas Cheer Board of Trustees

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TOM POLKER, PASTOR

10:00 a.m. Worship In-person or Live Online

