

The Bell

February, 2026

Monthly Newsletter of the First Presbyterian Church Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin

FEBRUARY ARRIVES AND BRINGS MORE COLD

God's blessings upon you on this fine day. What a cold end to January. It will be interesting to see what Punxsutawney Phil and Sun Prairie Jimmy see when they are awakened on Tuesday February 2 and tell us if we have more winter coming or if we have an early spring. I think I will listen to my local weather man first rather than two groundhogs, but it is still a cute scene.

As Barb and I are getting ready to take a week of vacation and then a return trip to North Carolina for our annual Northern Waters Presbyterian Mission Trip from the February 8 to 15, I think of how many trips like this were taken by our forefathers in the faith to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in Ashville, N.C. and other places which suffered devastation.

And I think of the men who were starting to spread the good news of the Gospel to all the parts of the known world at the time. There were Peter and Paul, Andrew and James, John and his brother James, the first Apostle killed for bringing the good news to his fellow Jews. I try and remember it was lot harder for them to do it than it will be for us. And they weren't making the trip to rebuild something but to build a new church, a new way of life for us all. They were risking their lives for us. All we are risking on our trip are a few bumps and bruises.

While I am away from Chippewa Falls, Pastor Pauline Bangle will be filling in for me in the pulpit. February is an exciting time and brings with it Transfiguration of the Lord Sunday on February 15 followed closely by Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, on February 18. (See the special article on Ash Wednesday here in the Bell.)

I hope you have been able to keep warm during this winter. Hopefully, it will be on its way out, but you never know what our two groundhogs may see.

Please continue praying for our churches, our country, and our world and remember Jesus Christ told us to love everyone, even those you disagree with. It is our job to continue Jesus Christ's ministry and spread love to everyone. No exceptions!

God bless you all.

Ed

WE CELEBRATE ASH WEDNESDAY AND FISH FRY

The traditional Ash Wednesday worship service will again take place in our sanctuary on February 18. The service, which will begin at 6:15, will include communion and imposition of the ashes. As we have done in recent years, the ecumenical service will be shared by worshippers from Trinity United Methodist, Zion Methodist Church and Christ Episcopal churches in Chippewa Falls.

Joining Ed Williams in conducting this service will be Rev. Eddie Crise of Trinity United Methodist, Rev. Paolo Vasquez of Zion Methodist and Deacon Rose Ruthy of Christ Episcopal. Rev. Crise will deliver the sermon.

The ashes used during the service are obtained by burning the palms from a previous Palm Sunday and are applied in the shape of the cross on the forehead of worshippers. The ashes are often accompanied by some variation of the words “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

As we have done in the past, the Ash Wednesday service will be preceded by the Fish Fry hosted by the Presbyterian Men. The dinner will include fish, Denman baked beans, cole slaw, dessert and beverage. Meals will be served in Fellowship Hall but also will be available for take out.

Dinner will be served beginning at 4:45 PM with the last serving at 5:45. The Fish Fry and Ash Wednesday service are open to all.

A REMINDER ABOUT 2026 ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

The Book of Order specifies that each church will have an Annual Congregational Meeting to receive the annual report and conduct such other business as is necessary. The timing of that meeting is left to each individual church.

Our church by-laws stipulate (A3.002) that this meeting will be held no later than the second Sunday in February. Because Ed will be out of town on the Mission Trip for much of February, the congregation has voted to change the date of this meeting for 2026 only to February 22.

WE STILL NEED COOKS

In January we put out the call for cooks for the First-Wednesday-Night supper in February and April. Anne Welke and Bonnie Gullickson are set for February and the men of the church will cook in March. That leaves April.

Any takers?

ASHES SYMBOLIZE PENITENCE AND CONTRITION

We Presbyterians tend to think of Ash Wednesday and Lent as traditionally Catholic events with the accompanying fasting and giving up of beloved things or practices like smoking, watching television, eating meat or drinking alcohol to show penitence. But Lent and Ash Wednesday leading up to it have a much wider meaning which includes many other faiths than just Catholics.

Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent with a public act of confession and contrition. Acknowledging that we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, we stand in solidarity as fellow creatures before our Creator, acutely aware of our mortality. We pledge ourselves anew to live unto God's Word in Jesus Christ, the eternal Word that remains forever.

Historically, Ash Wednesday was a time when penitents were presented for church discipline during Lent, culminating in reconciliation on Maundy Thursday. Today it is more a day of reflection and penitence and reshaping of one's life according to Christ's teachings although Ash Wednesday and Lent are seen in many denominations as times of fasting. In some churches, fasting is only practiced on Ash Wednesday while in others, it continues for the whole of Lent.

Some reformed churches do not observe Ash Wednesday and Lent in general at all. However, since the mid-twentieth century, many churches in the reformed tradition (including certain Congregationalist, Continental Reformed, and Presbyterian churches) do observe both Ash Wednesday and Lent at least as a time of prayer, fasting and repentance.

The Lenten journey from the ashes of death to resurrected life begins on the first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday, which this year falls on February 18. That day signifies a time to turn around, to change directions, to repent. In many traditions, this is symbolized through the imposition of ashes on one's forehead. We are to remember that we are but temporary creatures, always on the edge of death. On Ash Wednesday, we begin our Lenten trek through the desert toward Easter.

How ever Ash Wednesday and Lent are celebrated in the church, they remain at least a time for reflection on the past and preparation for the future.

We traditionally celebrate Ash Wednesday in Chippewa Falls with an ecumenical service including the Methodist, Episcopal and Presbyterian churches, their members and pastors. This service, which is held in our sanctuary, will include a sermon, communion and imposition of ashes led by the pastors of our community.

The imposition of ashes is typically done with the sign of the cross, signifying that the recipient is a follower of Jesus. The ashes are prepared by burning palm leaves from previous Palm Sunday celebrations. Ashes were used in ancient times to express grief or repentance. Throughout the Bible there are references to the wearing of ashes or sackcloth and ashes as a form of penitence.

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Although we do not openly practice fasting during Lent, we in the Chippewa Falls church do strive to give up some of the more ostentatious symbols of the service.

For instance, most Protestant churches turn to purple paraments during Lent. Instead we use the simple beige muslin paraments, banners and communion napkins made many years ago by Jeanette Miller.

You will see plain muslin banners on the walls of the sanctuary and a muslin parament adorned with a sheaf of wheat on the pulpit. That matches the communion napkins used from Ash Wednesday through Lent.

Instead of the traditional silver communion service, during Lent we choose to use simple terra cotta patens for the bread. The juice is presented in a pottery pitcher and poured into a pottery chalice.

Once Easter is reached, you will again see the Easter banners on the walls, the white parament on the pulpit and the silver communion service in use.

BASEMENT FLOORING GETS A BRAND NEW LOOK

The work on the new flooring in the basement is complete and ready for “company”.

The new gray floor material extends from the elevator, down the hall to the Multi-Purpose Room and also includes the Open Door Clinic examination rooms.

The original floors were either tile or carpet and had seen much better days having been walked on for over 20 years. The new material, which was designed for use on garage floors, should last for many years to come, according to Bill Martin, the church “supervisor” on the project.

After soliciting several bids for the work, the Session settled on using Rock and Tait to do the demolition and Garage Force NYA to provide and install the new flooring. Before the new material could be laid, the old tile and carpets and baseboards had to be removed. Next the floors had to be cleaned, vacuumed and smoothed to get ready for the liquid.

Similar to epoxy, the new flooring called poly-spartic, was applied in three steps. The first coat of material was poured then the color chips were added and finally a second layer of material was poured.

And then we waited. The curing process took two days but the new flooring is finished and ready to welcome visitors.

Be sure to stop by and see the newest addition to our church.

THE CHIPPEWA FALLS YEARS

By Irene Robertson

Editor's note: Following is the sixth installment of Irene Robertson's letter about the years she and her husband, Rev. Wallace Robertson, spent in Chippewa Falls between 1938 and 1941. Mrs. Robertson's letter goes into detail about life in Chippewa Falls and at the church.

Due to the length of the letter, portions of it will appear in subsequent issues of the Bell.

Not long after our wedding one of my bridesmaids, Elaine Gussy, broke up with Bert Jaggard. Bert was a friend of Wally's at Carroll College and the four of us became good friends and did many things together. Bert was working at the Milwaukee YMCA, and had begun dating Anita Helmsley. In 1939 Bert suggested that he and Anita and Wally and I take a trip west that summer. We decided to do it. We didn't own a car, so Bert drove. Anita and I shared motel rooms as did Bert and Wally. It was a wonderful trip. I had gained weight the first year of marriage and decided to go on a diet just before the trip. I procured a calorie book and counted calories during the whole trip, and afterward until I lost all the weight I had gained. A few months later Wally learned that there was a job opening for an activity director at the Rutledge Home in Chippewa Falls and he urged Bert to apply. He did apply and got the job. He lived with us until he and Anita married on New Year's Day, 1940 and moved to Chippewa Falls. Their first child, Betty Jo, was born in Chippewa Falls not long after we moved away.

Some of my activities at church were: teaching Sunday School, singing in the choir, composing and printing the Sunday bulletins, helping at church suppers, and being advisor for the Junior High Fellowship, all of which I enjoyed. I never really enjoyed women's group meetings such as Women's Society and Missionary Society. Soon after our arrival the Missionary Society asked me to speak to their group. It was meeting at the home of Mrs. Calder, a nice lady who I couldn't turn down. So I studied hard and tried to make my speech on missions interesting. I was nervous, but I needn't have worried. Within a few minutes all of the old ladies except Mrs. Calder and me were asleep.

Many women in the congregation enjoyed playing bridge and I think they were disappointed when I told them I didn't play bridge. One card game I did learn was pinochle (sic). We learned the game from Dr. and Esther Dorland. He was our dentist and they became good friends. Their daughter, Jean, became a nurse and married Lloyd Crane. The wedding took place in the Dorland's home in deference to Lloyd's mother, who was crippled. We keep in touch with Jean and Lloyd each Christmas. Esther Dorland's father, A. Z. Anderson, was the church sexton. He had a large strawberry patch and shared them generously with us. I soon learned how to make strawberry jam.

WE WERE WARNED!

If you read the Old Farmer's Almanac for 2026, you would see that it predicted that this winter would be dry and VERY cold. That old farmer knew what he was talking about.

We can't say we weren't warned!