



# The Bell

February, 2024

Monthly Newsletter of the First Presbyterian Church Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin

## GOD ALWAYS HAS A PLAN

God's blessings upon you. Boy, the first month of the new year is almost done. That is the season of Epiphany for you - sudden, quick and sometimes unexpected. Last week with the announcement of the closure of St Joseph's, Sacred Heart and Prevea falls into the Epiphany timeline – sudden, quick and unexpected for the entire area.

I want to share an experience with you that I had this week. Some of you know that I started another class for my Commission Ruling Elder program at the University of Dubuque Seminary. The course this time is on the Old Testament and last week's assignment was to pick any book from the Old Testament and tell our professor about it and how we would use it in our ministry. I picked Habakkuk. (It is only three chapters long and I encourage you to read it.) I can't tell you why I picked that book. This is my answer to the question and my professor's response:

The overarching question Habakkuk is asking is "Why do bad things happen to good people?" How to use this in my ministry is difficult. When someone dies or a tragedy happens, you really don't want to say "It's part of God's plan" even though God's time and our time are different and the reasons for either cannot be explained. As the last chapter points out, there may be a delay in God's judgment or plan and we need to be okay with that, as Habakkuk seemed to be.

The professor responded "Agreed that simply telling someone who is suffering that "It must be God's plan" is a non-helpful (at the least) thing to say. I wonder, however, if simply talking about books like Habakkuk might be helpful. Sometimes just mentioning that others go through things helps. I think of the origins of the hymn "It Is Well with My Soul" as similar." (Please feel free to look that up. It may help.)

A bad thing has happened to our community. There is no doubt that we as a church family will see the ramifications of this up close. But, other people have gone through things as well and survived and sometimes thrived. Our best response for our community is as simple as telling them that God loves them and so do we. We will help where we can and pray that all find comfort and rest in the arms of the Lord.

God bless you and your family. Please if you are anxious about this, take your anxieties to God in prayer. If you need to talk to someone or need help navigating through this time, please come and see me. I will be happy to help if I can. I am always here for you.

God's blessings, Ed

## **ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE AND FISH FRY PLANNED**

The traditional Ash Wednesday worship service will again take place in our sanctuary on February 14. The service, which will begin at 6:15, will include communion and imposition of the ashes. As we have done in recent years, the service will be shared by worshippers from Trinity United Methodist and Christ Episcopal churches in Chippewa Falls.

Joining Ed Williams in conducting this service will be Rev. Eddie Crise of Trinity United Methodist and Deacon Rose Ruthy of Christ Episcopal.

Ash Wednesday is celebrated in many churches as the first day of Lent. Ash Wednesday occurs six and a half weeks before Easter (between February 4 and March 11, depending on the date of Easter). Ash Wednesday is a solemn reminder of human mortality and the need for reconciliation with God.

The ashes used during the service are obtained by burning the palms from 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. The cost for adults is \$12. For children 5 to 12 the cost is \$5 and children under 5 eat free.

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

## **PCUSA COLLECTS PER CAPITA FUNDS**

January is traditionally the month the per capita donations are collected by the church and sent to the Presbytery and Synod.

Per capita is a set amount of money (apportionment) per member that congregations pay to the larger Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to provide for the continued growth and work of the church as a whole. This year that amount is \$34.00.

Per capita exists as a way for all Presbyterians to share the costs that belong to the whole church, to give meaning to the interdependent nature of Presbyterian polity. Per capita is part of the glue that holds Presbyterians together. It exists to allow the whole church to share equitably in those things that make us Presbyterians.

## **SESSION ELECTS BARB SHORREL AS CLERK**

After over a year of praying and searching, the Session has elected a new Clerk of Session in Barbara Shorrel

Barb is no stranger to us since she is very involved in the Food Pantry and serves as chair of the Mission Team. She was recently elected to serve on Session but this isn't her first time serving as an Elder.

In her role as Clerk of Session, she is one of three officers of the church the others being Ed Williams, our Pastor, and Carla Ingalls, our Treasurer. Barb will help Ed prepare the monthly Session agenda, take the monthly Session minutes, update the church registry with changes including marriages, baptisms, deaths, names of Session and Deacons and making certain we follow the rules outlined in the Book of Order and our own church by-laws.

## **CONGREGATIONAL MEETING SET FOR FEBRUARY 11**

The regular Congregational Meeting of our church will be held in the sanctuary immediately following service on Sunday, February 11.

The purpose of this meeting will be to receive the annual budget, the report of the activities of our committees, dismiss the 2023 Nominating Committee and elect new committee members for 2024. In addition, changes to the Endowment Fund By-Laws will be presented for approval.

## **ELEVATOR REPAIR IN THE NEAR FUTURE**

As we reported last month, our elevator is in need of repair which costs upwards of \$1600. The repair which will be to replace four guide shoes is being scheduled and will be performed by TK Elevator, a subsidiary of the company that built and installed the elevator in the first place.

The repair cost, which is a healthy one, is being funded from our Scrip program. No money will have to be taken from restricted fund of the church.

## **2024 CHURCH DIRECTORIES ARE READY**

The 2024 church directories have been printed and are ready to be picked up from the welcome desk on Sunday mornings and from the church office during regular business hours.

As in the past, we will not mail the directories to our members and friends so if you want one, stop by the church to get it. The complete list of names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses is also on the church website in the Members Only section.

## **EPISCOPALS SCHEDULE SHROVE TUESDAY FESTIVITIES**

Shrove Tuesday or Fat Tuesday as it is sometimes known is the day immediately preceding Ash Wednesday and occurs between February 2 and March 9, depending on the date of Easter.

Better known in the Southern United States, particularly in Louisiana, Shrove Tuesday has many customs pertaining to food since it is the final day before the austerity of the Lenten fast.

Shrove (from the word shrive) actually refers to the confession of sins in preparation for Lent. This was the usual practice in Europe in the Middle Ages. Although the day is sometimes still used for self-examination and introspection, Shrove Tuesday eventually acquired the character of a carnival or festival in many places and is often celebrated with parades.

Pancakes are the traditional fare on Shrove Tuesday because eggs, sugar, and fat, commonly forbidden during the Lenten fast, are used up so they will not go to waste. The day is known as Pancake Day or Pancake Tuesday in Ireland and in many Commonwealth countries. Similarly rich pre-Lenten treats, sweet *pażki* are traditional in Poland, and king cake is an iconic part of Mardi Gras (“Fat Tuesday”) in New Orleans.

Not to be outdone by our southern neighbors, Shrove Tuesday is traditionally celebrated here in Chippewa Falls at Christ Episcopal Church. Every year, the church opens its doors and its kitchen to prepare pancakes and other traditional Cajun food for the community.

And this year is no different.

The Shrove Tuesday dinner will be held in the basement of the church (unfortunately the basement is not handicapped accessible) and will be free of charge. A freewill offering will be taken, however. Diners are instructed to enter the church using the door on Spruce Street. At this time the starting time for dinner is unknown but FPC will send out an eBell as soon as the time is set.

## **CHURCH COLORS CHANGE WITH THE SEASONS**

The colors in the church are changing again.

Purple was the color during most of December, signifying Advent. On Christmas Eve the colors changed to white for Christmastide and continued through Baptism of the Lord Sunday (January 7) only to change to green for the rest of the month.

Green, which is the color of growth in our church, will continue to Transfiguration of the Lord Sunday (February 11) when we revert to white for one Sunday.

On Ash Wednesday, February 14, we will again use purple through Lent.

## MORE THAN YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT GROUNDHOGS

The first official Groundhog Day celebration took place on February 2, 1887, in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. It was the brainchild of local newspaper editor Clymer Freas, who sold a group of businessmen and groundhog hunters—known collectively as the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club—on the idea. The men trekked to a site called Gobbler’s Knob, where the inaugural groundhog became the bearer of bad news when he saw his shadow.

Nowadays, the yearly festivities in Punxsutawney are presided over by a band of local dignitaries known as the Inner Circle. Its members wear top hats and conduct the official proceedings in the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect. (They supposedly speak to the groundhog in “Groundhogese.”)

Every February 2, tens of thousands of spectators attend Groundhog Day events in Punxsutawney, a borough that’s home to some 6,000 people.

While sunny winter days are indeed associated with colder, drier air, don’t trade in trained local meteorologists for groundhogs just yet. Studies by the National Climatic Data Center and the Canadian weather service have yielded a dismal success rate of around 50 percent for Punxsutawney Phil. Staten Island Chuck, on the other hand, is reportedly accurate almost 80 percent of the time.

Also known as woodchucks, groundhogs belong to a group of large ground squirrels known as marmots. They grow up to 25 inches long and can live for 10 years in captivity. (According to legend, Punxsutawney Phil is more than 125 years old thanks to the magical punch he imbibes every summer.)

Groundhogs spend the winter hibernating in their burrows, significantly reducing their metabolic rate and body temperature; by February, they can lose as much as half their weight. When they’re out and about, the bristly rodents eat succulent plants, wild berries and insects—and they don’t mind helping themselves to garden vegetables or agricultural crops.

For the last 30 years, residents of Vermillion, Ohio, have turned to a very different creature for their annual weather forecast: the woolly bear caterpillar. According to tradition, if the bugs have more orange than black coloring in autumn, the upcoming winter will be mild. More than 100,000 people attend the town’s Woollybear Festival, held every fall since 1972.

But woolly bear caterpillars aren’t the best prognosticators, either: While their bands may vary from year to year, researchers have found the variation is due to *last* year’s weather, not the upcoming winter.