

JULY 2026

PEW ECHO

FIRST REFORMED CHURCH
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In God We Trust

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord...

~ Psalm 33:12a

We have a national anthem, and a national flag that we face when the anthem is played or sung. We have a national motto on our money, and national parks all across the country. We even have a national cathedral in Washington, D.C. But did you know we also have a national hymn?

In 1876, the United States was celebrating its Centennial, and the town of Brandon, Vermont, planned a special Fourth of July patriotic service. The pastor of the local Episcopal church, Daniel C. Roberts, was asked to write a poem for the occasion. He wanted to compose a text that praised God first, while reflecting on the blessings of liberty and guidance for the nation. As a result, unlike many patriotic songs that focus heavily on national pride, "God of Our Fathers" maintains a theological focus.

For 16 years, Roberts' poem was recited or sung to various existing tunes. It wasn't until 1892 that the hymn took its famous form. The Episcopal Church decided to compile a new hymnal and asked organist George W. Warren to compose a dedicated melody. Warren created the bright, sweeping tune known today as National Hymn, which includes a stirring trumpet fanfare before each verse. Nearly four decades later, "God of Our Fathers" was formally recognized as the national hymn of the United States by an act of Congress signed into law by President Herbert Hoover in 1931.

Now, we find ourselves 150 years after the occasion for the writing of the lyrics for the national hymn, preparing to mark another milestone as America celebrates its 250th birthday this month. And, much like festivities for the Centennial included expressions of worship, communities across our country are prepar-

ing for America 250 events which include coming together to "give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done." (Psalm 105:1)

Here in Sheboygan Falls, our America 250 community celebration will be held on Sunday, August 2. It will include a parade and activities at River Park; but it will begin with a community worship service at River Park in the morning. In response to the call of our community leaders to acknowledge the biblical heritage at the core of our nation's founding, our Falls Clergy group has been planning and will be leading the service. This special service ties in well with our church's recent emphasis on growing our connections up with the Lord, in as a church family, and out with our community. Our community leaders and pastors are inviting our churches to adjust their schedules that morning, and to consider foregoing their normal services at their churches in order to come together for this special community service.

As a result, we will not have our normal worship service here at our church that morning. Instead, we will be participating in the community service, and encourage you to join us for this special Sunday. There will be a large tent set up in the park for the service. There will also be a livestream of the service for those who are unable to attend. Yes, it will be something different, and it will be a change from what we're used to; but it will also be a unique opportunity to experience a part of what we say in the Pledge of Allegiance, to be "one nation under God."

Grace and Peace in Christ,
Pastor Brad



JULY BIRTHDAYS

- 1 Steve Klescewski
- 2 Mary Ann Otte
- 3 Stephanie Veenendaal
- 4 Nathan Wagner
- 12 Luella Justinger
- 13 Nora Halverson
Beth Steffen
Betty DeRuyter
Vern Heidenreiter
- 15 Valerie Halverson
- 17 Lin Wilterdink
- 19 Tom Van Haveren
- 22 Hannah Steffen
- 23 Sara Born
- 24 Bernice Buehler
- 25 Dennis Beach



John Adams, who became America's second president, was so elated when the United States was about to celebrate independence from England that he wrote:

"It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward, forevermore."



YOUR TICKET IS STAMPED

On a train trip, a pastor struck up a conversation with a seatmate who thought character and good works led to salvation. The pastor wasn't making progress but had a realization when the conductor collected tickets, quickly checking the date before stamping each one.

After the conductor passed by, the pastor told his fellow passenger: "All the conductor looked at was your ticket. He did not inquire about your character. He didn't care who you were — whether you were a good or moral man or a criminal. So it is with salvation. You need only God's 'ticket to heaven' stamped by the blood of Jesus Christ."

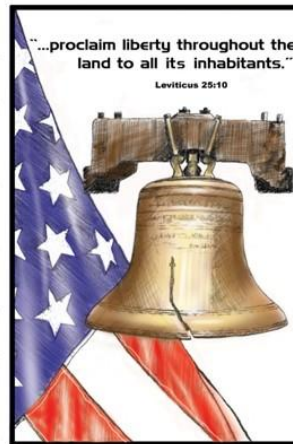


JULY ANNIVERSARIES

- 3 Travis & Morgan Steffen (23)
- 9 Steve & Sharon Crivello (50)
- 10 Steve & Lynette Stoffregen (45)
- 19 Howard & Bernice Buehler (68)
- 26 Gary & Janice Ten Haken (51)

"America was founded by people who believe that God was their rock of safety. I recognize we must be cautious in claiming that God is on our side, but I think it's all right to keep asking if we're on His side."

~ Ronald Reagan



"It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religions, but on the gospel of Jesus Christ. For that reason alone, people of other faiths have been afforded freedom of worship here."

-Patrick Henry

THE DAYLILY



In the many flower beds in our yard, one flower stands out as prominent and most prolific, the daylily. They vary in color, from yellow, orange, or multi-colored. Some are a foot tall while the old-fashioned ones stand nearly four feet tall. They are a hardy perennial, withstanding the cold of winter in their dormancy to the drought of late summer. With minimal care, they produce their blooms throughout the long, hot Southern season.

Although probably different from the lilies found in our flower gardens, the flower is mentioned several times throughout the Scriptures, especially in the love song of Solomon. Most bible students agree that the "lily of the valleys" in Song of Solomon 2:1 is a type of Jesus Christ. Jesus used the natural growing lily to illustrate God's providential care for us.

"Consider the lilies, how they grow, they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." (Luke 12:27)

One characteristic of our daylilies and perhaps a sad one, is the short lifespan of the blooms. They last only a day, then wither away only to be replaced by another bloom the day after. The Lord uses a flower as a metaphor to describe the brevity of life. *"All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever."* (1 Peter 1:24-25)

As we enjoy the flower of the daylily today, let it remind us of the shortness of life and to make the very best of this day the Lord has made and to rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:24)

YOU CALL THAT FREEDOM?

Very soon we will celebrate the independence of our great nation. Our pledge to the flag ends by saying, "With liberty and justice for all!" We sing patriotic songs with lyrics such as "Land of the free and the home of the brave!" and "God bless America, my home sweet home." Yet, many Americans take their independence and liberty for granted, using it instead to curse and rebel against the very country that gives them their "blood bought" freedom.

Our freedom to practice religion, assemble for worship, and the ability to possess, read and discuss God's word are the greatest of blessings, yet so many choose not to practice their faith. What if the confession of Christ and the exercise of the "law of Liberty" could cause you to be arrested and land you in prison? How many of us would really stand up for what we believe and hold dear?

As we read the letters of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon and Hebrews, we find similar phrases from the author(s) as, "in my chains". This would indicate that the author of these inspired words was either incarcerated or had spent time in prison for the gospel's sake. In many of his letters, Paul called himself "the prisoner of the Lord" and the Hebrew writer encouraged his readers to, "Remember the prisoners as if chained with them those who are mistreated since you yourselves are in the body also." (Heb. 13:3). However, the scriptures tell us that "Christ has made us free" (Rom. 8:2; Gal. 5:1). So how can we be free in Christ and a prisoner of the Lord at the same time? You call that freedom?

When we obey the gospel by making the "good confession" and putting on Christ in baptism, we become "slaves of righteousness" (Rom. 6:18) and commit to a life-long service to God (Rev. 2:10). For many patriotic American Christians, the thought of being a slave of any kind is offensive, including being a servant to the Lord. Thus, many practice a pseudo-religion that requires no sacrifice and does not encroach upon their personal freedoms.

Even though we live in the land of the free, we should embrace the opportunity to serve our Lord. Pray that America stays free for many generations to come and that God will continue to bless "the land that I love".

USHERS FOR JULY



Duane Gumm

Steve Klescewski



**USHER
SCHEDULE**

GREETERS FOR JULY

July 5

Lin Wilterdink, Bev Dulmes

July 12

Dick & Joan Koebel

July 19

Steve & Lynette Stoffregen

July 28

Gary & Janice TenHaken



Dear Friends,

Meltem (pictured with graduation cap) is a retired science teacher. She came to faith in Christ during Turkey's massive 2023 earthquake.

Meltem just completed a **nine-month online Bible survey class**. On Sunday, our church celebrated her accomplishment with a surprise party.



We have asked Meltem to use her new training to disciple **Zuhal** (pictured left). Please pray for this ministry and for all the other ways that God wants to use Meltem.



Our visitors from Tomah, Wisconsin packed in a tour of **eight biblical sites** during their second week in Turkey... After such an amazing trip, Turkey has definitely won over a few more fans!



Love,
Brian and Dana

Avant

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KID'S PAGE



Did you know God is a big baseball fan? He started off the Bible with "IN THE BIG INNING."

What is a dentist's favorite hymn?
CROWN HIM WITH MANY CROWNS



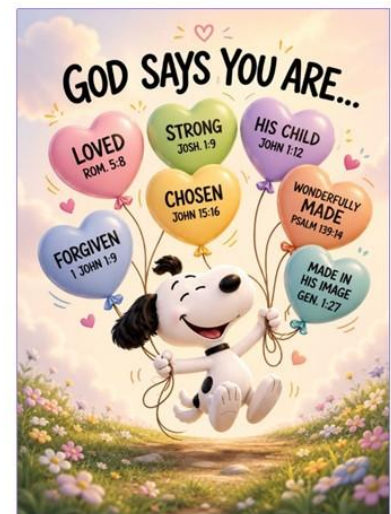
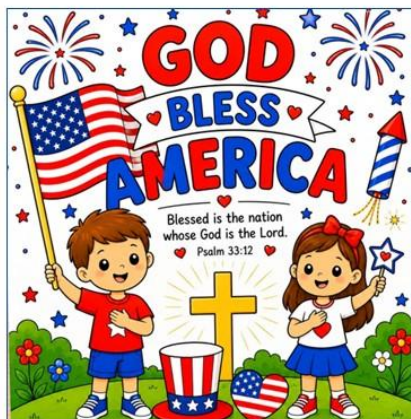
4th of July WOULD YOU RATHER
CHECK WHICH YOU WOULD RATHER DO

- HOST A 4TH OF JULY PARTY **OR** ATTEND A 4TH OF JULY PARTY
- HOT DOGS **OR** BURGERS
- PARADES **OR** FIREWORKS
- APPLE PIE **OR** CHERRY PIE
- GET SUNBURNED **OR** GET MOSQUITO BITES
- POPSICLES **OR** ICE CREAM
- DRESS UP LIKE UNCLE SAM **OR** THE STATUE OF LIBERTY
- HAVE A RED NOSE **OR** HAVE BLUE HAIR
- SPARKLERS **OR** GLOW STICKS
- ENTER A HOT DOG EATING CONTEST **OR** ENTER A PIE EATING CONTEST
- FLY A KITE **OR** USE SIDEWALK CHALK
- EAT WATERMELON **OR** EAT STRAWBERRIES



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It's refreshing!





Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4 
5 9:30am Worship	6	7 7pm Elders	8	9	10	11
12 9:30am Worship	13	14 7pm Consistory	15	16	17	18
19 9:30am Worship	20	21	22	23	24	25
26 9:30am Worship	27	28	29	30	31 	



Why did Noah have to discipline the chickens on the Ark?



They were using fowl language

