Reflecting at this time of year feels like opening a book. A new year, a new slate, new ideas. When the new year arrives, it feels like a new chapter is being written and we eagerly await how the story will unfold. I found myself, of course, thinking about the gift of books—especially during this pandemic time, because I find it comforting and enlightening as well as an escape from a world that seems a bit off kilter in so many ways.

There are many ways books can open the world to us. Books with themes about ways of life or industries lead me into worlds offering a chance to learn about new things. For example, a book called The Orchardist deals with a fascinating story woven around the world of apple farming—techniques, types, seasons, pruning and what things to watch for. Another book called The Language of Threads, by Gail Tsukiyama, is part of a series about silk sisters in China. I learned that these women were more than workers in the silk industry. This work shaped their whole lives. To become part of the sisterhood one participated in a ritual ceremony and committed to not being married. Others speak of the challenges of the early days of our nation as in Founding Brothers, and others challenge us to consider how racism has impacted our country and the world.

We are indeed people of books and, of course, of the Book. The Bible is filled with stories and histories, poetry and hymns that cover thousands of years and many ways of life from the rich to the poor, from the holy to the profane, from the obvious to the mysterious. They are filled with the stories of people of faith. I often find myself moved by the description used for the Bible, calling it the Living Word. Its words and power are found in the fact that the book is alive and breathing and still speaks to us in the present, not just about events frozen in time. I am always amazed at how the same passages at Christmas or Palm Sunday lead to new insights every year. The Living Word invites us to continually grow in faith.

Books can lead us to new kinds of awareness and perspectives. There are different ways we as a congregation share in the power of the written word. We discuss books in various groups and circles. We give books to those in our grief group and dementia groups as a way of supporting them in the issues they are facing. Our mission Committee decided to sponsor a book drive in Meacham Park in observance of Martin Luther King Day. Normally there is a gathering at the high school to mark this day, but due to the pandemic the planners created a new way by sharing books for the students. One of our scouts put up a reading house at the entrance at the preschool—a great place to drop off or pick up a book to share. In other programs, members have been a part of the Ready Readers program bringing the love of books into city classrooms for young children. Reading books became a bridge of connection between adults and students and they all look forward to when things open up again.

Reading is a gateway to new worlds, deeper faith, new insights and learning. As people of faith, may we share that gift through time, talents and conversation in the year to come enriching the lives of others as well as ourselves through words that offer wisdom, tell stories, and challenge us to see things anew. Indeed, we await the coming of our interim pastor and prepare for new chapters for the life of our congregation in the days to come. We all are awaiting new chapters as individuals, as a congregation and a community.

To a new year and a new chapter,

Karen
From the Director of Music Ministries
January 2021 Worship Schedule

January 10  The Baptism of the Lord
Rev. Dr. Craig Howard, guest preacher
Rev. Dr. Karen Blanchard, liturgist
Anthony Heinemann, soloist
Bill Stein, organist

January 17  Second Sunday after Epiphany
Rev. Dr. Alan Meyers, guest preacher
Rev. Dr. Karen Blanchard, liturgist
Bell Choir
Louisa Wimmer, hymn leader
Bill Stein, organist
Travis Evans, bell director

January 24  Third Sunday after Epiphany
Rev. Dr. Karen Blanchard, preaching
Rev. Dr. Tom Glenn, liturgist
Leslie Mallory, soloist
Travis Evans, organist

January 31  Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
Rev. Dr. Tom Glenn, preaching
Rev. Dr. Karen Blanchard, liturgist
Chancel Octet
Bill Stein, organist

We look forward to welcoming Rev. Dr. Bill Smutz, our Interim Senior Pastor, on February 1st!

An Advent and Christmas Thank You
I would like to personally thank the singers in our Chancel Octet, the Bell Choir ringers, our soloists, and Travis Evans for the wonderful music provided during the Advent and Christmas seasons. Making music during these months of pandemic has been a vital part of our ministry, and to do so wearing masks and maintaining distance and safety measures brings on additional challenges. To all our singers and ringers – THANK YOU for your dedication to ministry!

Bill Stein
Director of Music Ministries

The Church will be closed on Monday, January 18 in recognition of Martin Luther King Day.
MEETING & STUDY OPPORTUNITIES

Christian Concerns Class, 9:30 a.m. Jan. 10, 17, 24 & 31

Our next four adult education classes in January will focus on the mission of two police chaplains and the work of the St. Louis County Police Departments-Crisis Intervention Unit, which trains officers to work with community members who have mental health disorders (by building relationships to help them find the resources they need).

On January 10, our first speaker is Rabbi Mark Shook, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Temple Israel. He has been serving since 2020 as the chaplain coordinator of the St. Louis County Police as a Division Chaplain for the St. Louis Division, FBI, and as a chaplain for the Creve Coeur Police Department. He will be using Zoom, and asks that everyone join the meeting before 9:30 a.m. He will speak on "Police Chaplaincy, A Ministry Whose Time Has Come,” and take some questions periodically during the program.

Rev. Byron “Sarge” Watson, a grief counselor and an ordained Pentecostal minister, will present the sessions on January 17 and 24. Rev. Watson retired from the St. Louis County Police Department after serving 28 years, and served as a campus police officer with St. Louis Community College for 8 years. He is now a police chaplain with the St. Louis County Police Department. He will discuss the duties and mission of a police chaplain including topics such as dealing with civil unrest, death and stress.

The fourth session will be January 31, presented by the St. Louis County Police Departments Crisis Intervention Unit. This three-member team works with people who have mental health disorders by building relationships to help them find the resources they need to move toward wellness. The unit is supervised by Sgt. Gary Robertson, Division of Special Operations. He and Sgt. Chris Koester will present the program.

The February series will feature Professor Clint McCann, speaking on Iona, a monastery and island off the coast of Scotland, considered the birthplace of Christianity in Scotland.

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* Spiritual Formation Class on Zoom: The group meets at 9:30am on Zoom on the Second Sunday of each month. If you'd like to join in, contact Tom Edelstein at tedelstein@att.net.
* The Esther Circle meets the second Thursday of the month at 11am. For more information, contact Carlin Scanlan at ccsccanlan@swbell.net.
* The Men's Saturday Morning Bible Study Group on Zoom meets at 11am on Saturday mornings. Contact Tim Morrison at timothy.lee.morrison@gmail.com to be added to the Zoom invitation list.

OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NEW YEAR

The new year brings with it a desire for many to recalibrate or a desire to enter into new commitments. Ways that can be helpful are through prayer and discernment. Here are a couple of suggestions to consider:

* Spiritual Formation Class on Zoom: The group meets at 9:30am on Zoom on the Second Sunday of each month. If you'd like to join in, contact Tom Edelstein at tedelstein@att.net.
* Month of Grace + Prayer—An Ecumenical Retreat in Everyday Life: A number of our members have participated in this program in years past, where individuals commit to praying on their own for 20 minutes each day and meeting one-on-one with a spiritual companion one hour each week for four consecutive weeks. This series starts January 17. All meetings will be virtual (Zoom or phone). Weekly meeting times are set around your schedule in a series tailored to your own desires. Committed couples also have the option to participate as a couple. The spiritual companions are not members of our church nor can they companion anyone they know. All adults are welcome regardless of denomination or affiliation. For more information, visit www.momentsofgraceandprayer.org or to register, contact Clarence Heller at clarenceheller@gmail.com.
Our Confirmation Class joined the church via a Zoom meeting with Session Lin December. We did the whole class in ten weeks in an effort to maximize our ability to meet outside and be safe. They learned about the history of the worldwide church, our own church, structure of the denomination and much more. We look forward to having them in the church as soon as things open back up! The video of them sharing their creed, as well as text from the creed, is available here: https://fb.watch/2xT3jbahpm/

Congratulations to our confirmands!


Confirmation Class Creed

Fall 2020

We believe God created Heaven, Earth and Us.
We know that Jesus is the Son of God, that he came to earth and died for our sins.
Because of that we know that God forgives our sins.
We believe that God accepts all of us as we are, and we are all equal, even if some do not believe the same as we do.
Because God accepts everyone, we should too.
We believe that God should not be portrayed as any particular gender.

We trust that God will help us through hard times
and that we should not take anything for granted.
Being a Christian is not only believing in God, it is also being good,
helping other people, and loving our neighbors.
As people of faith we believe that everyone should live their life to the fullest.
We believe that everyone should try to keep God on their minds at all times.
We believe that finding things that make you rejoice will bring you closer to God.
Examples include: puppies, noodles, chocolate and spending time outside.

Amen.

BOOK GROUPS

The Tuesday morning book group will resume on January 19 at 10:00am by Zoom. We will be discussing the book, Founding Brothers, by John Ellis. The book explores how the personalities and issues negotiated, discussed and argued about, impacted the formation of the nation in the early years. From the duel between Burr and Hamilton, to the issues of slavery to the stature of Washington, Ellis looks at how the issues of the day were shaped by the personalities of those who worked and argued together over those years. Please contact Karen Blanchard at kblanchard@kirkwoodpres.org, if you need to be added to the Zoom invitation list for this group.

The fourth Wednesday book group will meet on January 27 at 1:30pm to discuss the book, A Good American, by Alex George (note correction of the author’s name listed on the bookmark list for the book group), who traces the challenges and changes dealt with by a German family as they immigrate to America and the experience of four generations. If you need to be added to the Zoom list, please contact Karen Blanchard at kblanchard@kirkwoodpres.org.
Prayers are often requested from members regarding their loved ones or for themselves as they face health challenges or planned surgeries. If you are interested in being on the prayer list let Paula (paulab@kirkwoodpres.org) or Karen (kblanchard@kirkwoodpres.org) know and we will add you to the email list. It goes out most Fridays or on a special request basis throughout the year. We'd love to have you be part of this important sense of presence and support for our congregation.

Over the years, members have made a number of prayer shawls and blanket robes as a gift of warmth and an expression of encouragement and comfort. We have a number of these lovely, washable items available to be given to or mailed to someone. The shawls are called ‘prayer shawls’ because those who made them did so with prayer for those who receive them. It is a lovely way to connect with others in a time of need for healing of body or spirit. Contact the church office about getting one to share.

* Our Mission Committee approved donating $200 to purchase books for Meacham Park kids, in honor of Martin Luther King day. This event is hosted by the EyeSeeMe African American Children’s Bookstore where free books will be distributed to children pre-k to high school. On Monday, January 18.

* The Bridge Bread bakery is a non-profit social enterprise that provides supportive employment to people without safe and stable housing. Through meaningful work they become valued, contributing members of our community. If you are missing buying Bridge Bread at church, Bridge Bread is continuing to operate from their retail location at 2639 Cherokee Street. We invite you to support this worthy mission. Thank you.

* St. Patrick’s Center provides opportunities for self-sufficiency and dignity to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Individuals and families build permanent, positive change in their lives through safe and affordable housing, sound mental and physical health, and employment and financial stability. Over the years, First Pres members have provided nourishing and delicious breakfast casseroles to St Patrick’s. There’s still plenty of need so please join us by preparing a breakfast casserole. You can pick up pans and/or drop off casseroles by contacting Julie Nesvig at mission@kirkwoodpres.org.

Prayers are often requested from members regarding their loved ones or for themselves as they face health challenges or planned surgeries. If you are interested in being on the prayer list let Paula (paulab@kirkwoodpres.org) or Karen (kblanchard@kirkwoodpres.org) know and we will add you to the email list. It goes out most Fridays or on a special request basis throughout the year. We'd love to have you be part of this important sense of presence and support for our congregation.

Member Directory Updates Through Our Website
Recently, with the help of church member Ray Lester, a link was added to our website’s homepage to allow members to submit changes, updates, etc. for the member directory. All you have to do is scroll down to ‘Directory Update Request’ and click on ‘Click Here to update your information’. From there, just fill in the fields you’d like to change or update and the information is sent directly to Office Administrator, Paula Bujewski. You will also receive a confirmation of your submission.
WE WELCOME OUR NEW INTERIM PASTOR, THE REV. DR. BILL SMUTZ

Our new Interim Pastor, The Rev. Dr. Bill Smutz, will begin his ministry with us on February 1, 2021. He shared some information with us to give you a sense of his educational background, experience and interests. We look forward to his ministry among us.

Bill has been an ordained Presbyterian pastor for over thirty years. A native of the St. Louis area (Webster Groves), his academic background includes a B.A. in Economics & Business from Westminster College (Fulton, MO), a M. Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary, and a D. Min. from Eden Theological Seminary. Bill has served churches in Ohio, Missouri, Wisconsin, Kansas, and Indiana. Most recently he has served interim pastorates at St. John's UCC, Chesterfield; First Congregational Church of St. Louis; and, St. Lucas UCC, Sunset Hills. Bill and his wife, Gina, have three adult sons, and are grandparents of Taylor, George, and Maggie. Bill is an anglophile, music lover, apple grower, architecture junkie, stamp collector, frustrated model railroader...who thinks the Green Bay Packers hold a special place in the divine pantheon...who trusts that there will always be a Church of Jesus Christ, but believes the Holy Spirit is presently shaping the church in new and different ways for God's future!

Bill is looking forward to becoming a temporary member of the First Presbyterian Kirkwood community, working with the staff, and (hopefully) a return to in-person worship and other gatherings in 2021.

THE NEXT TWO WEEKS

Sunday, January 10
9:30am  Spiritual Formation - Zoom
9:30am  Christian Concerns Class - Zoom
11:00am  Worship Service - Live Streamed
7:00pm  Sr. High Fellowship

Monday, January 11
8:00am  Preschool
1:15pm  Staff Meeting - 030

Tuesday, January 12
7:30pm  Incoming Elders Conversation - Zoom

Wednesday, January 13
8:00am  Preschool
7:00pm  Bell Choir Rehearsal - Choir Room
7:15pm  Board of Deacons - Zoom

Thursday, January 14
10:00am  Prayer Time - Sanctuary (sign-up required)

Friday, January 15
8:00am  Preschool

Saturday, January 16
10:00am  Prayer Time - Sanctuary (sign-up required)
11:00am  Men’s Bible Study - Zoom

Sunday, January 17
9:30am  Christian Concerns Class - Zoom
11:00am  Worship Service - Live Streamed
7:00pm  Sr. High Study Time

Monday, January 18 - MLK Day: Church Closed

Tuesday, January 19
10:00am  Book Group - Zoom
7:30pm  Session Meeting - Zoom

Wednesday, January 20
8:00am  Preschool
7:00pm  Bell Choir Rehearsal - Choir Room
7:00pm  Mary’s Women’s Circle - FH

Thursday, January 21
10:00am  Prayer Time - Sanctuary (sign-up required)
7:00pm  Section Leaders Rehearsal - Sanctuary

Friday, January 22
8:00 am  Preschool

Saturday, January 23
10:00am  Prayer Time - Sanctuary (sign-up required)
11:00am  Men’s Bible Study - Zoom

If you would like to receive by mail an Upper Room devotional booklet, call the church office or email Paula at paulab@kirkwoodpres.org.