

# First Presbyterian Church

Everybody's  Church

*As Everybody's Church we commit ourselves to serving Christ by cultivating mission, inclusion and community.*

Pandemic Edition: Second Quarter 2020

## How Church Changed in March 2020



Our socially distanced worship team on Palm Sunday.



A view from the chancel of an empty sanctuary while doing online worship during Eastertide.

So how did First Presbyterian Church in Birmingham continue to be our church in a pandemic? How did change unfold? The first confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Oakland County, a total of four, were reported on March 9 and the number climbed steadily. That week, FPC was still planning for Holy Week in person the first week of April and regularly scheduled meetings such as bible study, choir practice etc. were still taking place. We proceeded with in person worship on March 15 but advised our community in an email on March 12 not to attend if they were older or had any pre-existing health conditions. We cancelled coffee hour. The day before the service, Andrew Herbruck, the Director of Music Ministries decided the choir should not sing in worship. We encouraged people to tune into online worship through the Sanctuary Cam, which

had been in place since late 2019.

On Sunday, March 15, we held both services at church. There were approximately 18 people at 8:30am, less than half of the typical number and approximately 65 people at 10:00am. Many people tuned into the Sanctuary Cam; we estimated between 100-150 people. People were not advised to wear masks at the time and the concept of “social distancing six-feet apart” was just starting. The session met after worship and decided to cancel in-person worship for March 22 and 29 and make a further determination after that if we should cancel services going forward.

On Monday, March 16 the State of Michigan said that there shouldn't be any gatherings over 50 people until after April 5, but there was an expectation that could change. There was advice coming from the federal government

*continued on page 3*

## First Presbyterian Church

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### Weekly Worship

Sundays:

Currently  
10:00 AM Worship  
Online

Rejoicing Spirits  
had to be discontinued  
during this time

### Program Staff

John Judson  
Senior Pastor

Bethany Peerbolte  
Associate Pastor for Youth  
and Mission

Cindy Merten  
Director of Christian  
Education & All Abilities  
Inclusion Ministries

Andrew Herbruck  
Director of Music Ministries

Julie Madden  
Ted Thode  
Kate Thoresen  
Parish Associates

### Pastor's Corner

by Dr. John Judson

It was not the wisest of decisions, but what did we know? We were teenagers. It was the early 70s and my older brother David decided that he and his college buddies were going to go canoeing on the Guadalupe River in central Texas. Loving canoeing myself, I asked if my next younger brother, Richard, and I could go along. David agreed and said that Richard and I could go, but we would have to have our own canoe. Under normal circumstances, the Guadalupe is a lazy river along which thousands of people slowly float in innertubes, complete with their favorite adult beverages. This time however, the river was nearing flood stage. There had been heavy rains and the river was running high and fast. All the better we thought.

It was exciting. The rapids were fast and challenging. The river swept us along. All was fine until we reached a low water bridge with the river lapping at the pavement. The canoes ahead of us pulled alongside the bridge, the riders carefully got out, and then pulled the canoes out in order to put them in on the other side. Richard and I followed suit...only when Richard tried to get out, the canoe tipped, filled with running water and was sucked under the bridge, with Richard in tow because his foot was caught in the canoe. Without thinking I jumped in the water, grabbed his wrist and held on to him with one hand, and the bridge with the other. Somehow I managed to keep him from being sucked under the bridge and lost. Quickly the other canoers came to our rescue, pulling us both out.

That story resurfaces from my memory banks whenever I feel like life is sweeping me out of my canoe and into the rushing river of chaos. I offer this story to you because it may be that many of you feel this way about our

present moment; that your exciting ride in an upbeat economy and regular routines has been sucked under the bridge by a powerful irresistible current and you are being pulled down with it beneath the waters, unsure where, when, or if you will emerge. It can be a frightening and helpless feeling. What I hope you will hear in my story is what I hear, that when we are being pulled out and under, there are always hands to keep us from being lost. First there is God's hand. For it was and is God who jumped into the stream of human life with us, in and through his incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth. God did not try to save us from afar. God got down in the chaotic waters of life and grabbed hold, refusing to let us go under. Second, there are other hands to help pull us out of the chaos. While for some of us, those hands might be of friends and family outside of the church, for all of us there are the hands of this amazing church family. There are the hands of staff who are always around. There are the hands of the elders, deacons and Stephen Ministers. There are the hands of other members who are willing to step in, listen and serve. Though the waters roar and foam, you are not alone.

We live in a moment of fast flowing waters that are difficult to navigate. Yet my prayer for all of us is that we feel God's hand holding us tight, and that we trust that there are other hands ready to help. I pray that we will trust and believe that we will never be swept away, but will find ourselves being led to higher and drier ground.

John



# Worship and Education

## *How Church Changed in March 2020, continued*

that there should not be any meetings of 10 or more people in person where there were outbreaks. In Michigan, all schools, restaurants, bars, gyms, movie theatres, fitness centers etc. closed on March 16. The next day FPC staff decided that all in-person meetings would be cancelled and we'd reduce building hours. We wanted people to come only to and pick things up and drop things off. All concerts and events were cancelled through the end of June. We started using Zoom (a teleconferencing video system) to get groups of people together.

We started encouraging people to donate to the FPC Pontiac Emergency Food Pantry either with monetary or food donations they could drop off at church. We didn't know at this point if we would have to cancel South Oakland Shelter the last week of April, but later in the month SOS was cancelled. We provided a large donation to SOS in

lieu of being able to host. All funerals and weddings were cancelled for four months. Pastors did graveside funerals or interments in the columbarium for 10 people or fewer. Memorial services were postponed until after the pandemic subsided.

On Sunday, March 22, we had online worship only at 10:00AM. We had the service on both the Sanctuary Cam and Facebook Live for the first time. The technology behind the scenes over the next months was challenging because different microphones were set up for Facebook Live and the Sanctuary Cam, and we ran into technical difficulties at times. However, we kept fixing glitches so we were able to continue to worship. We estimated that 250 people watched worship that first online Sunday, which was an increase over the previous week on in-person worship. Online attendance kept rising, surpassing what in-person worship would likely have

been, especially in the month of May.

By March 22, COVID-19 cases in the State of Michigan were increasing quickly with nine deaths and 1,065 documented cases. Tests for the virus were hard to obtain, so actual cases were probably higher. On Monday, March 23, the Governor of the State of Michigan issued a "Shelter in Place" order to try to stop the virus from spreading. We locked the building and began having people leave donated items, such as handmade face masks and supplies for Angels' Place homes, outside the door.

The next few months were challenging. Still, we continued to be the church even without using the building. In the following pages there are examples of how we continued to cultivate mission, inclusion and community and be the church during a pandemic.

## *What Happened to Sunday School?*



Like most everything else since the novel coronavirus COVID-19 descended upon us, we have been navigating through a maze

of challenges. No longer able to meet in person, we have shifted our traditional ways of meeting to focus on:

- Staying connected,
- Making the home the center of faith formation,
- Sharing our faith in both virtual and concrete, hands-on ways.

### *Staying Connected*

Almost immediately we began to miss one another. What was happening with those whom we didn't see in worship, at coffee hour, or at meetings and classes during the week? Was anyone ill? How would we know?

As we contemplated the coming of Easter, we couldn't imagine not being in worship in our sanctuary with our faith community. How could Easter worship possibly happen without the choir, the trumpet fanfare, the Hallelujah chorus, the flowering of the cross, and the children unfurling the "Alleluias?" Lent, Holy Week and Easter came and went, and we celebrated Pentecost 40 days after Easter, the day we know as the birthday of the church.

It seems that we may be on our way to the birth of a new way of being the church. We have sought to stay connected by email, phone calls, text messages, Zoom meetings, Facebook Live prayers, social distancing walks, drive by visits and more. We have learned that we are hungry to know how our church family is doing, and all are reaching out in ways we have never experienced.

### *Home is where faith is formed*

Instead of recruiting teachers, shepherds, and others to teach our children, we have asked children and their families to become our teachers as they re-enact Bible stories that reflect the upcoming worship theme and prepare us for Sunday. Families

*continued on page 4*

# Worship and Education

## *What Happened to Sunday School, continued*

are encouraged to watch the videos and participate in the activity suggested in the video. As we gather for worship on Sunday materials are provided to help children focus and participate in the service with their families. Resources for prayers for anxious days and nights, taking a mini-sabbath, and spiritual practices at home are sent out in an email each week. This is faith formation at home.

### *Sharing our faith differently*

As we gather for worship on Sunday, materials are provided to help children focus and participate in the service with their families. Worship continues beyond Sunday mornings with online hymn sings, a weekly Facebook Live prayer time, a special service of lament, a recorded Rejoicing Spirits service and the list goes on.

We have shared photos, stories, art, and music created by our families. Many seek ways to serve, to be the “hands and feet of Christ” by transporting meals and other food to Pontiac for an emergency food pantry, providing homework packets for children at Alcott Elementary, making masks, collecting supplies in demand for Angels’ Place, donating to our COVID-19 relief fund, driving by homes of church members and others to celebrate special days or events, dropping off groceries and meals to the more vulnerable among us and countless other expressions of care and concern. Families are able to do some of these together because work and school are now at home and schedules are altered. Life is different and so are the ways we share our faith.

## *Pastors Connect Mid-Week Through Community Prayer and Videos*



Beginning on March 24, Rev. Bethany Peerbolte began offering a Community Prayer via Facebook Live on Tuesday evenings at 6:30pm. It’s a new way for our community to connect, reflect and pray for one another mid-week. These videos have received many views, ranging from 150-300 views each week. In addition, we had an online community prayer service in the sanctuary on April 28 which had over 500 views. Rev.



Bethany led prayers, scripture and meditation. Andrew Herbruck and Sue Kohns offered music.

Dr. John Judson provided weekly video updates during the pandemic that highlighted what mission, inclusion and community opportunities were happening through the church. These videos consistently received 200-300 views per week. We also continued to connect on Zoom for coffee hours, meetings and bible studies.

# Family News

## **In Sympathy:**

- ✝ Suzanne Mumbrue, wife of Roger Mumbrue, December 21, 2019
- ✝ Madeline Haddad, mother of Marcia Tanner (Bruce), February 20, 2020
- ✝ Eugene Gregory Wojtowicz, father of Todd Wojtowicz (Susie), February 24, 2020.
- ✝ Esther S. Hufnagle, mother of Ed Hufnagle, March 7, 2020
- ✝ Jane van Dragt, March 25, 2020
- ✝ Rev. Dr. Joseph Lowery, grandfather of Dawn Campbell (Greg), March 27, 2020
- ✝ Josephine DuComb, mother of Laurence and Jeffrey DuComb, April 1, 2020
- ✝ Dorothy Elizabeth Meador, grandmother of Jeff Meador (Molly), April 2, 2020
- ✝ Arthur Greene, brother of Jim Greene, uncle of Cindy Merten (Forrest), April 6, 2020
- ✝ Dorothy McLean, mother of Katherine Leon, April 6, 2020
- ✝ Lorraine Kwiecinski, mother of Nancy Klein (John), April 7, 2020
- ✝ Harold Adams, father of Jim Adams (Ann), grandfather of Aidan, April 12, 2020
- ✝ D. Wayne Snyder, father of Christina Bradford (Bob), Kimber Ghareeb (Gary), and Timothy Snyder (Kelly), April 16, 2020
- ✝ Dean Gulis, father of Chris Gulis (Jessica), April 20, 2020

# Family News

## In Sympathy:

- † Roger Judson, father of John Judson (Cindy), April 20, 2020
- † Alison (Ziegler) Long Banister, daughter of Ellie Ziegler, April 28, 2020
- † Paula K. Davidson, daughter of Pauline Davidson, May 5, 2020
- † Marcia Ann Nichol, mother of Sam and Andrew Nichol, May 11, 2020
- † Gregory Joel Rest, brother of Kate Thoresen (Tom), May 23, 2020
- † Marion Wyatt, mother of Patricia Ali, May 28, 2020
- † Paul Clements, brother of Sally Spearin (Rod), May 29, 2020
- † Alice Winifred (Wynne) McCubbrey, mother of Olwen Merritt, June 2, 2020
- † Frank Griffio, husband of Lorene Griffio, June 4, 2020
- † Wilma Percefull, mother of Marsha Percefull, June 7, 2020
- † Chris Lawson, husband of Ellen Lawson, June 11, 2020

## Births:

- ☞ Sarkis Luke Anusbigian, son of Ariane and Austin Anusbigian, grandson of Margaret and Dave Breeden, February 26, 2020
- ☞ Ruthie Hazel Bozell, daughter of Jeff and Adrienne Young-Bozell, April 28, 2020
- ☞ Claire Isabelle Falconer, daughter of Rob and Monica Falconer, granddaughter of Diane and Dave Falconer, May 2, 2020

# Mission

## Feeding the Hungry



We partnered with FPC Pontiac and donated to an emergency food pantry. We initially distributed bags of groceries and then switched to gift cards to grocery stores as shopping in large quantities became more difficult during the pandemic. Monetary donations can still be made on our website. We have collected over \$10,000 as of the end of June. Because schools were cancelled for the remainder of the school year, food for families is a continuing need.

we delivered meals made by a chef in Royal Oak as well as a week's worth of groceries from Forgotten Harvest for 20 families a week. Each week since May 7, two volunteers have picked up frozen meat, fresh fruit and vegetables, canned and boxed items, and dairy products from a mobile Forgotten Harvest site. Then on Thursdays at least 8 teams of drivers deliver that food to 20 different families (123 people) from Alcott Elementary School in Pontiac. The Forgotten Harvest food delivery will continue through the summer.

We also delivered food to families at Alcott elementary school. From April through the beginning of June



## Blanket Sunday

We had a successful Blanket Sunday on May 10 despite not being in worship in person this year. Our church family donated \$2,260 to Church World Service for Blanket Sunday or 226 blankets!



# Mission and Inclusion

## Drive Through Event on May 28



Our first Drive Through Event happened, May 28, from 4:00-7:00PM, in the circle driveway.

Four stations were set up. We collected thousands of returnable bottles and cans and 52 old devices (laptops, smartphones, tablets) were collected to be refurbished and donated to foster care families to help complete

homework. Participants picked up a sign of hope based on Psalm 31 for their front yard and families received supplies for Sunday school-at-home. We asked everyone to place donations in the trunk of their cars and to wear masks to make it a contactless event.

Money collected from the can drive will go towards the youth fund.

## PRIDE Flag Art Installation



Many PRIDE celebrations were cancelled due to the pandemic but the community was invited to stop by and take a picture with this colorful art installation on our lawn. Posting this picture on Facebook n June 15 led

to our highest ever number of people reached with one Facebook post, over 10,000 people. Many new people found out about us and we gained over 75 new followers in a week.

## The COVID-19 Fund

The Session approved the establishment of a COVID-19 relief fund for anyone who is in need of assistance with rent, utilities, groceries, medical expenses, etc., during this crisis. A total of over \$50,000 has been donated as of the end of June and over \$25,000 has been disbursed so far. This fund is managed by the Deacons. If you would like to donate to this fund or if you would like to apply for funds, please go to the COVID relief fund page under Serve on our website. You can listen to two stories of people whom the fund has helped in Dr. John Judson's May 27 Video Update.

## Thousands of Face Masks Made



Mid-June marked a total of 2,300 face masks made by members and friends. They are distributed weekly to be used by our foster children, foster parents, child care field workers, grandparents raising grandkids plus the FAR staff. Congratulations everyone for making this possible! Our child care workers say more are still needed. Feel free to come and get supplies from the bin outside the Eagle entrance marked FACE MASKS. When completed, just bag them up and put the number and your name on the bag.

We have also received a thank you message from a head of the Wayne County Department of Health and Human Services to thank everyone for these great donations. She also wrote that we provided emergency help for 83 children by the contribution of gift cards.

# Community

## Hand-in-Hand Early Learning Center

This has been an unprecedented time and The Hand-in-Hand Early Learning Center has certainly been impacted as well. The center closed on March 16 and remained closed for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year. We are hopeful and making plans to open in the fall if it is deemed safe to do so.

We have been very blessed to have been able to continue to pay our staff and refund the tuition to our HIH

families. Our school year curriculum has been continuing using various methods such as weekly email packets, online flipgrid and zoom meetings. They have been well received by the HIH families. We have also been having weekly zoom music classes and enjoyed a virtual field trip with Skyline Camp and Retreat Center.

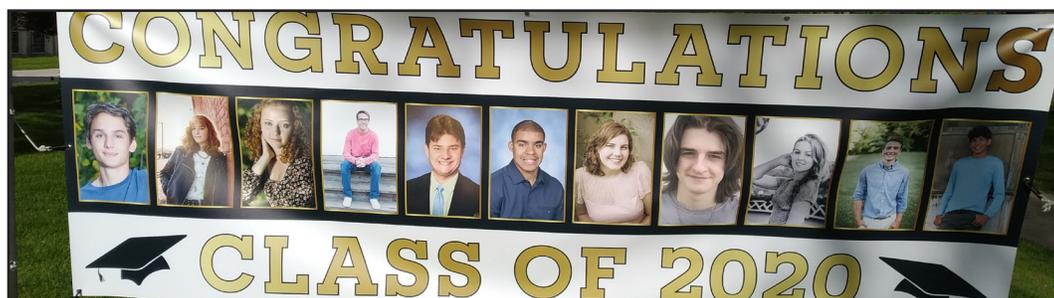
The month of May was the last month for this school year and we enjoyed a virtual HIH spirit week and

video end of the year concerts during this month. We also had drive by ceremonies for the graduating four and five year olds where they received their own lawn signs.

Hand-in-Hand has also been involved with two mission projects including thank you notes from our students to the Birmingham fire department and various donations for the COVID-19 floor nurses at the St. Joseph Hospital in Pontiac.



## Congratulations 2020 High School Graduates!



Congratulations to the Class of 2020: (left to right) Ross Sauter, Kate Gendruschke, Grace Schlafhauser, Colton DeVos, Casey O'Connor, Nicholas Thompkins, Jana Dinkeloo, Sam Leslie, Emily McGlynn, Bryce Gutowsky, and Ethan Alexander.



Kate Gendruschke, Jana Dinkeloo, Emily McGlynn and Grace Schlafhauser helped lead worship on June 21.

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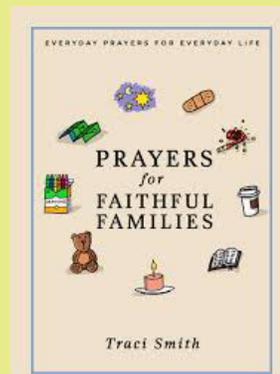
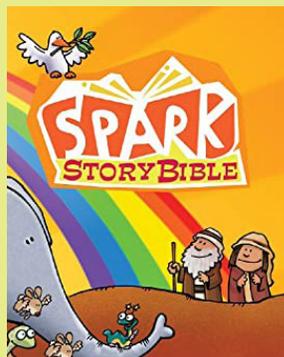
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First News  
Second Quarter 2020



## Pick Up & Drop Off Event on June 30



**Drop off a Loose Change Offering and Pick Up Materials for Summer.** Families will be given bibles and other books, magazines and booklets to help them with everyday faith at home. Look for a pick up date in the weekly emails.