

**FIRST THINGS FIRST
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, REGINA
FEBRUARY 2021**

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

As this issue of "First Things First" is being put together, I'm participating in an online conference of the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators (APCE). I've attended this excellent conference a couple of times in person, and it is always a good opportunity to learn, be inspired, and come home with many new ideas and resources for Christian Education and Faith Formation in the congregation.

I am grateful that our Presbytery received several free registrations (\$100 each) to the first online offering of APCE, and that Bette Kelly and I are both able to attend. Jo Szostak is also participating in her role as Synod Congregational and Mission Development Coordinator. After only one day, our minds are already spinning with ideas and possibilities for new ways to engage and go deeper in our faith with children, youth, and adults of all ages. And the conference has only just begun!

But I'd like to tell you about a timely new resource that is being shared with us (for free!) from Dr. Tori Smit from the Synod of Central and Northern Ontario & Bermuda (CNOB), developed in partnership with the Foothills Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church USA. We will be sharing this wonderful, interactive Lent resource with you in the upcoming weeks, and hope that you'll enjoy exploring it with your family or on your own throughout the season leading up to Easter.

Beginning on Ash Wednesday (Feb. 17th) and each weekend following, you'll receive a link to a Lent Garden that you can explore. I'll send the links out by email, and post them on our website and Facebook page as well. Here's what you can expect:

*Enjoy your journey through the Lent Garden each week. Start by clicking on the **bible on the park bench**. With one click you will open up a collection of daily bible readings, children's bible story readings, prayers, and questions to think about throughout each week. Once you've got*

these devotions at hand, go ahead and click around the rest of the garden to discover so much more.

*Each of the **itty bitty library boxes** behind the park bench (there may be one or two to click on each week) unlock one or two video recordings of a wonderful bible story read by a church leader for everyone to enjoy. These stories come from the bible story books listed in the weekly devotions.*

*The **hanging flower basket** will take you on a weekly adventure of garden musings and ideas with Kristine O'Brien, an avid gardener and thoughtful minister.*

*The **guitar** leaning against the tree sings out a brand new or much-loved hymn or song that will connect you to our weekly bible stories and themes. You'll want to sing along with all of these talented musicians.*

*Are you feeling like going for a walk? Click on the **wooden door** and walk into a world of labyrinth visits, reflections and finger labyrinth opportunities.*

*Is it time to be creative? The **garden gnome** reveals a simple craft idea that makes use of materials that you likely already have at home.*

*And when it's time for something to eat, click on the **picnic basket** for a new recipe or two to try out at home.*



There are many ways to engage spiritually during the Season of Lent. Consider adding one new spiritual practice during the season – making a specific commitment to draw close to God through prayer, reading, reflecting, or putting your faith into action.

- Join us online for worship every Sunday at 10:30 am and Sunday School for the kids at 12:15 pm.
- Participate in the “Presbyterians Read” Book Study independently or in our Tuesday evening discussion group on Zoom.
- Meet other Presbyterians from across the country at “Lent with the Moderator: Leaning into the Promises of God” – a Zoom gathering on Sunday, Feb. 21st at 3 pm CST.
- Join First Church folk for weekly Bible study on Thursdays at 1:00 pm by Zoom.
- Explore the Lent Gardens each week with your family or on your own.

May we all have a good season of prayer and preparation as the days lengthen, Spring comes closer, and the time of celebration and joy draws near!

Rev. Amanda Currie

SESSION

Mark your calendars! The date for the **annual congregational meeting** is Sunday, May 2, 2021 at 1:00 p.m. We will have to see how things unfold over time, but there's a good chance that this meeting will be held by Zoom.

The Session received information about a book called **Orchestrations of Colour** - devoted to the life and work of the Glaswegian stained-glass artist-craftsman, Douglas Hamilton (1895-1959). A pair of the war memorial windows in First Church were created by Douglas Hamilton. While there are no pictures in the book of the First windows, they are mentioned in several places. The author is a priest in the Church of England, now retired and living in Leicestershire. Full colour throughout, 128 pages and more than 75 illustrations. Retail price £19.95. The church has purchased a copy of the book - if you would like to read it, you can make arrangements to borrow it through Shirley in the office or if you

would like to purchase your own copy, Shirley has the contact information.

Jo Szostak
Clerk of Session

WORSHIP COMMITTEE

The Worship committee met for our first meeting in the New Year, February 16 on Zoom. We are looking forward to a better year ahead and plans are ongoing at keeping worship services available to everyone who wishes to participate.

Our thanks goes out to all who are taking an active part in services. Special thanks to the young people and those young at heart for the Sunday School Christmas pageant. Great job! We received many good reports for the Blue Christmas Service, Christmas Eve Service and the Sunday service on December 27. Thanks Rev. Amanda, for keeping us connected and able to celebrate the season.

To start off the New Year, we remember Transfiguration on Sunday, February 14. Once again, the Church colours will change to white on February 14, then to purple on Ash Wednesday, February 17, which is the beginning of Lent. This year, we have a much shorter time between Christmas and the beginning of the Lenten season leading up to Easter on April 4. Rev. Amanda Currie is planning a virtual service on Ash Wednesday at 7:00 pm which will be available for those who wish to participate both on Facebook and on her website for those who wish to view at another time.

We continue to express our thanks to our Music Scholars, Cade Eastwood and Gabe Omolida for their contributions under the guidance of our Music Director, Bill Sgrazzutti. Our thanks to our soloists and ensembles, as well as those who have contributed to the Hymn Sings. And a special thank you to Nick Jesson who films our Worship Services.

As a Church Family, we are hopeful that we will once again be able to be in church before long. However, let's be patient while we wait for God's blessings on us.

Joyce McKersie
Worship Committee member

FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE

The Fellowship Committee held a Bingo and Games night on Friday, January 29. Everybody won at Bingo, and we had lots of fun playing Pictionary, Scattergories and, of course, Jeopardy. Many thanks to Jo Szostak for being our technical person and pulling everything together.

Watch for upcoming events in the future. 😊

Sheila Wilson
Fellowship Committee Convener

ONLINE SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sunday School at First Church has been pretty different for a while now. We miss getting together in-person, singing together, and playing in the gym at the church. However, every Sunday at 12:15-1:00 pm a small group gathers by Zoom for a lesson and a chat. Thanks to Bette Kelly for leading the program. Jo Szostak and I enjoy helping out as well.

Last week, I particularly enjoyed discovering that we could use the whiteboard feature on Zoom to make a cooperative picture. This is our rendition of the "Great Feast in the Kingdom of God" where there is plenty of food for all, and everyone is welcome around the Table of the Lord. In these days when we are unable to gather at tables together, I invite you to hold on to this image and look towards the future of promise.

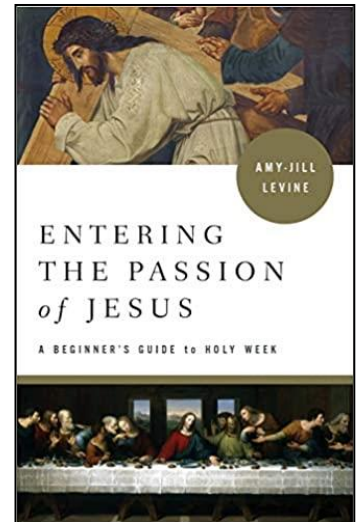


For those families that have not yet gotten into the habit of joining us on Sunday afternoons, please consider doing so. We would love the group to grow! Just watch for an email from Bette every Saturday with the Zoom link, print out the colouring sheet for the lesson, and login at 12:15 pm.

Rev. Amanda Currie

PRESBYTERIANS READ: LENT 2021

In Lent 2021, Presbyterians across the country are invited to join a denomination-wide book study on Amy-Jill Levine's *Entering the Passion of Jesus*. Guided by Levine's deep knowledge of the New Testament and strong storytelling skills, Presbyterians will journey through Lent reflecting on the Passion of Jesus as it is told in the gospels.



We have ordered and received 20 copies of the book. Please let Rev. Amanda know if you would like a copy, and pick it up from the church office whenever it is convenient for you. The church is paying for the books. If you would like to make a donation to cover the cost, it is about \$17.

Beginning on Tuesday, Feb. 23rd, we will meet for discussion on Tuesday evenings at 7:30 pm by Zoom to explore each of the six chapters. You are also welcome to read and reflect independently, to join in the Facebook discussion with other Presbyterians across Canada, and/or to attend a Q&A Session with the author on Wednesday, Feb. 17th at 12-1pm (SK time). Register on the PCC website on the "Presbyterians Read" page.

Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner's Guide to Holy Week

Jesus' final days were full of risk. Every move he made was filled with anticipation, danger, and the potential for great loss or great reward. Jesus risked his reputation when he entered Jerusalem in a victory parade. He risked his life when he dared to teach in the Temple. His followers risked everything when they left behind their homes or anointed him with costly perfume. We take risks as we read and re-read these stories, finding new meanings and new challenges.

In *Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner's Guide to Holy Week*, author, professor, and biblical scholar Amy-Jill Levine explores the biblical texts surrounding the Passion story. She

shows us how the text raises ethical and spiritual questions for the reader, and how we all face risk in our Christian experience.

Do not let the title fool you; this book is not just for beginners!

The book supplies a rich and challenging learning experience for people from various stages in the Christian journey. As Levine draws us deep into the history of last days before Jesus' crucifixion, you will find yourself pondering allusions to Jewish texts and Roman history that you had not noticed before, making connections to other stories in the Gospels, and exploring themes that are as relevant today as they were in Jesus' time.

Lent & Ash Wednesday

The Season of Lent is a penitential time in the year, as we confess our sins, draw close to God, and prepare our hearts and lives for the celebration of Easter. Ash Wednesday is the first day in the forty-day season of Lent (excluding Sundays). You are invited to a special service for Ash Wednesday on **Wed. February 17th at 7:00 pm** which will be livestreamed to Facebook, just like our Sunday morning services.

In normal times, worshippers would each receive the sign of a cross in ashes on the forehead or the back of the hand. The ashes remind us of our human frailty, and the places where we have sinned and fallen short. The ashes are mixed together with a little oil and a little water. Water reminds us of our Baptism, our identity as God's beloved children, and God's grace. The oil reminds us of the way God pours Godself out for us in Jesus Christ. When ashes and oil come together, a primitive soap is made. Our life is made up of ashes, places we fall short, and oil, places of God's grace. When the two come together, a cleansing agent is formed. The psalmist longed to be cleansed as well. Psalm 51:10 cries out, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me."

Since we'll be together online this year, we won't use actual ashes in the service, but we will be contemplating these themes, confessing our sins, and turning to God who is gracious to cleanse us and make us whole.

Rev. Amanda Currie

CAMP CHRISTOPHER

Thank you to all who supported the Camp Christopher Robbie Burns Fundraiser. We made 70 meals and 18 of those came to Regina. We also had over 80 people join us on Zoom for the program. With meals and donations, we raised \$2,800!

Thanks again for your support!

Donna Wilkinson
Camp Christopher



LENT WITH THE MODERATOR: Leaning into the Promises of God



When: Sunday, Feb. 21, 2021 | 3:00 pm CST
You are invited to spend an hour with the Rev. Amanda Currie, [Moderator of the General Assembly](#), and begin the Season of Lent together with Presbyterians across the country. Although Lent is a time for confession and penitence, it is first and foremost a time for turning and returning to God. We will reflect on the covenant texts that show up in the lectionary

readings during Lent, considering both the blessings and obligations that come with covenant relationship. As we continue to endure the challenges of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, let us begin this new season together by leaning into the promises of God.

Please register for this gathering to receive your unique link to join the meeting:
<https://presbyterian-ca.zoom.us/join/66223427040>

Note: After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

FROM THE PCConnect
- Reflection from the Moderator -

You can read the reflection below and/or watch the video online here:

<https://presbyterian.ca/2021/01/26/moderator-reflection/>

Greetings to you, friends in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

I've been feeling tired this week. Not tired in a physical sense, as I'm still getting enough sleep and exercise, and I'm eating well. But I'm tired of the COVID-19 pandemic. I miss seeing my congregation, and hugging them, and sharing food together, and all the other things we used to enjoy before this terrible plague began. And I'm tired of worrying—about the ones that are sick, and the ones that are grieving, the ones that are on the front lines, and the ones that are not staying as connected to the church community.

I wonder if you're feeling tired too. Tired of preaching to a camera or trying to worship in your living room. Tired of balancing work and home-schooling your kids. Tired of being alone. Tired of being scared. Tired of waiting and hoping and longing to be able to make plans again.

Recently I had the opportunity to participate in an information session on COVID-19 vaccination and public health measures with Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer. The Privy Council asked the Canadian Council of Churches to share the invitation with local

congregational and parish leaders across Canada, acknowledging the important role that faith communities are playing in supporting the spiritual, mental and physical health of Canadians across the country during this difficult time.

Dr. Tam took time to share with us about the remarkable development and approval of the two vaccines that are being administered in Canada to the most vulnerable populations first, and hopefully to all Canadians by September 2021. The incoming supply requires a phased approach, and recent delays are an additional challenge, but she assured us that the doses will arrive, and the vaccines will be effective. And my favourite line (that I've heard her say on the news as well) was that "This pandemic WILL come to an end." And she is hopeful for the year ahead.

It makes me think of the Judean exiles in Babylon. Towards the end of nearly 60 years in captivity, in 539 BCE Cyrus captures the Babylonian Empire and suddenly the hope of return to Judea is real. Cyrus would allow the captives to return to their original homelands, and for the Judeans, this was nothing less than a miracle from God.

But even as they receive this good news, it becomes clear that the people have doubts and concerns. There is a long way to go to make that journey home again. And what will they find when they get there? What new challenges will they face? Undoubtedly, things won't just be the way they once were. Second Isaiah discerns that the people doubt whether God is still with them. And even if God is there, they wonder if God has any more plans for them.

I wonder if that description resembles your community at this time.

Of course, you may have very specific concerns about the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines. If that is the case, good information on the development, testing and ongoing monitoring of the vaccines is available on the Canada.ca website under Coronavirus . Any question you may have is likely answered there, and you are encouraged to share the information with your community.

Or maybe you're worried about how long the roll-out is going to take. Based on my age group and low risk factors, I likely won't get vaccinated until the summer, but I'll be ready when my turn arrives. And in the meantime, I'm rejoicing every time I hear about a healthcare worker, or a long-term care resident, or an elderly congregation member who has received the shot. I'm hearing lots of those stories already!

Or perhaps it's the future of the church that has your stomach tied in knots these days. Will your congregation survive the economic impacts of the pandemic? Will folks get out of the habit of coming to church and just not come back? You've probably realized that this pandemic will have permanent impacts on our churches and ministries, and that when it's finally over we won't just be going back to where we were before it started. We will be in a new normal that is as yet unknown.

I'm praying that the new normal won't just be a battered and tired remnant of what once was. But that it will be a vibrant, hopeful and innovative church that has been renewed and strengthened for God's mission in the world. My hope is that we will take what we have been learning in the last year about community, pastoral care, worship, mission, justice, and even technology, and let God guide us into a new normal that is moving towards the Reign of God that is coming.

I don't believe it's up to you and me alone to build it either, because God has not abandoned us. God has not been overcome by a virus. As Second Isaiah asked the tired and doubting exiles, I ask you also:

*“Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew
their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.”*

If you're feeling tired right now, you're certainly not alone. They've even given this kind of weariness a name—Covid Fatigue. But as Christians, we know the ultimate source of our strength, our hope and our power to endure. It is God alone who will raise us up to continue this journey.

Dr. Tam humbly asked faith communities to continue to support the people of Canada in three ways: First, by helping to inform others about the virus and the vaccines, and sharing credible information from public health sources; Second, by staying vigilant in our precautions including hand hygiene, physical distancing, wearing masks, staying home when sick and following the current guidelines of local health authorities; and finally, by maintaining social, emotional and spiritual closeness during this time when physical closeness is not possible, as well as encouraging those who are struggling to reach out.

Thank you for all the ways that you are already fulfilling these requests in the communities where you live and serve. May God, who does not faint or grow weary, renew your strength in the months ahead.

The Rev. Amanda Currie,
Moderator of The Presbyterian Church in
Canada

PRAYING FOR PEACE IN ETHIOPIA

A serious humanitarian situation is developing in the Tigray region of Ethiopia – with large numbers of displaced people and refugees hosted in South Sudan. A long-standing political disagreement between the Ethiopia federal government and the northern regional state of Tigray's regional government led to the outbreak of hostilities in November 2020.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that 950,000 people were in need prior to the crisis, with a further 1.3 million people projected to require aid as a result.

After several months of fighting, the humanitarian situation is dire. Supply routes have been cut off and the harvest season has

been impacted by the conflict—leaving many incredibly food insecure.

PWS&D is monitoring the situation and is prepared to respond as soon as possible, using available mechanisms. ACT Alliance has issued [an appeal](#) in response to the situation, for which funding is desperately needed.

The ACT Ethiopia Forum has also [released a statement](#) calling for the establishment of a humanitarian corridor to allow relief operations and the protection of civilians and humanitarian aid workers.

Furthermore, the Canadian Council of Churches recently released a [call for prayer and action](#) in response to the conflict.

You can make a gift through First Church. Mark your donation, “PWS&D: Ethiopia Crisis.”

A HYMN PRAYER FOR LENT

We lay our broken world
in sorrow at your feet,
haunted by hunger, war and fear,
oppressed by power and hate.

Here human life seems less
than profit, might and pride,
though to unite us all in you,
you lived and loved and died.

We bring our broken towns,
our neighbours hurt and bruised;
you to unite us all in you,
you lived and loved and died.

We bring our broken loves,
friends parted, families torn;
then in your life and death we see
that love must be reborn.

We bring our broken selves,
confused and closed and tired;
then through your gift of healing grace
new purpose is inspired.

O Spirit, on us breathe,
with life and strength anew;
find in us love, and hope, and trust,
and lift us up to you.

FEBRUARY EVENTS

Feb. 7	10:30 am	Worship
	12:15 pm	Sunday School
	1:00 pm	Coffee Hour
Feb. 9	12:00 pm	Freedom 55ers
Feb. 10	7:00 pm	Book Club
Feb. 11	1:00 pm	Bible Study
	7:00 pm	Mission & Outreach
	8:00 pm	Choir Chat
Feb. 14	10:30 am	Worship
	12:15 pm	Sunday School
	1:00 pm	Coffee Hour
	2:30 pm	Half an Hour of Hymns for "Valentine's Day"
Feb. 16	12:00 pm	Freedom 55ers: Mardi Gras Party!
Feb. 17	7:00 pm	Ash Wednesday Worship
Feb. 18	1:00 pm	Bible Study
Feb. 21	10:30 am	Worship
	2:15 pm	Sunday School
	1:00 pm	Coffee Hour
	3:00 pm	Lent with the Moderator
Feb. 23	12:00 pm	Freedom 55ers
	7:30 pm	Lent Book Study
Feb. 24	7:00 pm	Board of Managers
Feb. 25	1:00 pm	Bible Study
Feb. 27	10:00 am	Worship Committee
Feb. 28	10:30 am	Worship
	12:15 pm	Sunday School
	1:00 pm	Coffee Hour
Mar. 2	12:00 pm	Freedom 55ers
	7:30 pm	Lent Book Study
Mar. 3	7:00 pm	Session & Board Meeting
Mar. 4	1:00 pm	Bible Study

