

Good News



First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca

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Worship Schedule for January 2022:

Sunday, January 2 10am:

Scripture: Isaiah 60: 1-6
Matthew 2: 1-12
Message: "Illumined."

Sunday, January 9, 10am:

Scripture: Isaiah 43: 1-7
Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22
Message: "Demonstrations."

Sunday, January 16, 10am:

Annual Meeting Packets available!

Scripture: Isaiah 62: 1-5
1 Corinthians 12: 1-11
Message: "Vindication."

Plans for this Sunday may change as they develop for Martin Luther King, Jr. Sunday!

Sunday, January 23, 10am:

Scripture: Nehemiah 8: 1-3, 5-6, 8-10
Luke 4: 14-21
Message: "Fulfilling Scripture."

Please do not forget the Annual Meeting: Sunday, January 23, at 7pm on Zoom! The Zoom link and meeting documents (Password "calvinlovesyou") will be available from the church website, firstpresithaca.org. Please join us!

Sunday, January 30, 10am:

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13
Luke 4: 21-30
Message: "How Hard It Is to Love."

Dear friends,

The new year is here, and a sense, at least, that another stretch of both danger and opportunity stand before us. For many Americans, the uncertainty of this period of life is jarring and feels surreal. I have noticed I continually forget about Covid times; "Last year at Thanksgiving," I say, or "for Christmas Eve last year" - but I mean two years ago. Last year was so different it doesn't even belong on the same string of memories in my mind. It asserts itself subconsciously as abnormal, and even unreal.

While we may think of this all as strange or unusual, oddly it makes our lives in many ways more like that of the rest of the world. We usually read of disruptions to other societies with intellectual distance. Social disruption, regional violence, displaced people groups - we hear about these, but fail to grasp the stress and trauma they carry. Now, with coming on two years of pandemic supported as well as possible by the social structures of a wealthy nation, we feel the weight of our own stress - and can extrapolate to understand all that we miss about the traumas the rest of the world lives.

It is an important Christian value that the problems we face make us more compassionate, not less. One of Jesus' most-used aspersions is the term hard-hearted. Jesus "was grieved at their hardness of heart," Mark writes. Matthew: "It was because you were so hard-hearted." John: "He has blinded their eyes, and hardened

What's Inside:

- **Photos of Christmas events**
- **Upcoming classes: COP26, MLK Jr., and NOAA's local work on drought**
- **Welcome to our new Building Supervisor, Joe Bocchiaro!**

their hearts." We should not be like this, Jesus is warning. Find the opposite, and practice it.

Too often in life, when we were able to rise above some challenge, we congratulated ourselves and looked down on those who floundered. There was a time when this "sink or swim" mentality was not prevalent in the United States; poverty and loss were too common. Everyone had felt the sting of tragedy. Perhaps you yourself have not taken the path of hard-heartedness, but you have surely seen it in the world around us.

Today, however, with the communal concern of Covid, it seems to me that compassion as a value is growing again. I hope this is the case - and I believe Christians should lead the way. We as a people should practice compassion rather than triumph, understanding rather than blame. And - if our current situation is connecting us with the rest of the world in our appreciation of the reality of stress and trauma, perhaps our compassion will likewise grow, to encompass hope - not just for ourselves, but for all.

Be well, pray often,
and do it all with love.

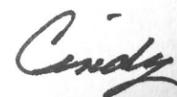
From Pastor Cindy

The story of creation has always fascinated me. As a child I would imagine how God decided what to create. How did God think of a rainbow or an octopus? Were there things God decided not to include in creation? And when I wondered if there were things God hadn't thought about creating, I tried to think of what they might be. This, of course, was the thinking of a child; it wasn't arrogance as much as it was a delight in considering what else might be - a sense of joining with God in the ongoing creation.

As a new year begins, we hear mention of resolutions and of promises made to ourselves to do and be better as though this is our one chance of the year to undertake such a challenge. Yet, we have a wonderful opportunity to create better lives every moment of our days without setting ourselves up to feel like failures if we fall short of our stated goals. At times it is hard to remember that God doesn't expect perfection from us and has paved a wide path to forgiveness if we but ask for it.

We celebrated the birth of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, just a few days ago, and in doing so, we were celebrating God's coming to be with us and to draw us closer to God so that we might join in creating a world filled with "the way of peace" and governed by the law of love. There is excitement not only at the thought of being a part of God's creation, but also in accepting God's invitation to join in creating a world filled with the love God showed us by coming to live with us. In doing so, we are not setting goals by which to judge ourselves, but are we freeing ourselves to try without fear of failure by trusting in God's mercy.

Wishing you all a new year filled with creative expressions of God's love, Cindy



Adult Education

Sunday January 9:

You've probably heard about UN COP26—the global climate summit that met in Scotland in November. Did you know that Glen Dowell was there? Glen, the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at Cornell's Graduate School of Management, is an Elder in our church, and was one of Cornell's ten faculty delegates. We will have a chance to hear Glen report on the process of the UN COP meetings, what takes place at those meetings, and what happened at Glasgow. He will also discuss how businesses are responding to climate change.

Sunday January 16:

Tentative plans are for a joint service with St. James AME Zion Church in observation of Dr. King's birthday, but if this doesn't work out, Elder Lorraine Maxwell will lead this class: Dr. King encouraged us to see each other in ways that are not defined solely by physical characteristics such as skin color. We will use Chimamanda Adichie's TED Talk, "The danger of a single story" to explore the consequences of stereotyping individuals and groups with the goal of appreciating both the complexity and uniqueness of each of us.

Sunday January 23: No class, Congregational Meeting

Sunday January 30:

From our New Members Class we welcome Sylvia Reeves to lead us in a roundtable on climate stewardship. In June, 2020 Sylvia joined the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration as the regional drought information coordinator for the Northeast Regional Drought Early Warning System. The organization tracks drought impacts and responses and then provides weekly updates to partners and stakeholders on the status of drought in New York and New England. Based at Cornell, Sylvia works with experts on weather, agriculture, water utilities, state governments, and forestry. She will share how her training and experience influence her faith perspective on the biblical call for stewardship of the earth.

Announcements and Reminders

Welcome, Joe Bocchiaro!

Please welcome our church's new Building Supervisor, Joe Bocchiaro, who started working January 4. This position is for 25 hours a week, Sunday through Thursday.

Joe has spent most of his life in Newark and Nutley, New Jersey. In Newark, he worked for 38 years with the United States Postal Service where he received safe driving awards and recognition for his job performance, customer service, and attendance. He is honorably retired.

In addition, he worked as a live-in caretaker (2000-2012) for the Kingsland Manor Historical Society in Nutley. Here he oversaw the safety, security and maintenance of a 1700s historical building. From 1993-2002, he worked as a gardener on the estate of Silas Mounstier III in Nutley. About seven years ago, Joe moved to Ithaca where he has worked with a local contractor.

Whenever, you see Joe, please greet him and welcome him to this church and to his new position!

Building Supervisor Search Committee:

Sandra Greene, Robert Kohut, Richard Vaughn, Susan Wade, Kirianne Weaver and Charles Woodworth

P.S. Here is a picture of Joe, to the right. He has been described as excellent, honest, friendly, and meticulous. We have also really enjoyed getting to know him and work with him, and we hope you do too!

Birthdays in January



- 2 – Dick Stevenson
- 17 – Annabelle Wood
- 19 – Royal Colle
- 24 – OUR CHURCH, in 1804!
- 27 – Geoffrey Lightfoote
- 28 – Ken White

... We would love to add your birthday and/or your anniversary. If it's not here, please let the office know and we will be happy to add it!



We hold in our daily prayer:

Ann Cedarholm; Bobbie Collyer; Tom Hurst; Betsy Mann; Gayle Park; David Morey; Jean Radice; Connie and Don Scott, and their family; and Bibs Warner.



Our prayer and sympathy to Heather Lane and family, on the loss of her mother, Sarah Snow; and a loving bon voyage to Marianne Weaver on her journey heavenward.

From the Deacons:

Greetings from the Deacons!

The holidays offer no respite for those who need food assistance, so the kitchen cupboard is as important as ever. Your canned food donations are always gratefully appreciated. It helps when we can donate multiples of the same items. This month we're asking folks to donate canned corn and canned vegetables. Of course all donations help and are welcome.

If you know of anyone who could use a visit, call or text from one of the Deacons, please let Kiri or Cindy know. We want to reach out, and always appreciate know where to reach out.

Here's hoping you stay safe, warm and healthy!

MLK Jr. Sunday at home.

It is usually our tradition to join services with St. James AME Zion Church for MLK Jr. Weekend, coming this year on January 16. This year, however, with the threat of the Omicron variant hovering over us, we are still up in the air about how we can remember and celebrate this tradition. Details are ongoing and will be communicated as they are decided. We will start the Sunday, however, here at the church at 10am—but may advise you to dress warmly for a walk!

We are sorry for this lapse in tradition—just another in a long line of things that Covid has made unwise, and another thing we can look forward to resuming once the situation is better.

A special Adult Education class is being prepared if time allows, and other creative minds will be at work to raise up the ongoing work of justice and righteousness for all, in fellowship together.

Art in the Narthex:

Because of Covid, we are not serving coffee and cookies anymore at Fellowship Time in the narthex after services. This isn't because we are afraid to talk to each other, but because food encourages masks to be dropped. Masked gatherings are safe, but unmasked we invite trouble.

But we don't want to lose our church fellowship! To spark our conversation in the narthex, we are asking you if you have any artwork to share. It needn't be your own work - art that you own could be shown, as a reflection of God's creative joy and loving promise.

Contact the church office if you have something to share! office@firstpresithaca.org

Annual Meeting:

As a Presbyterian congregation, we are collectively responsible for the work of the church, its committees and its leaders. The Annual Meeting is a time when we all come together to move the work of the church forward.

The Annual Meeting is scheduled this year for **Sunday, January 23, at 7pm by Zoom.**

The Zoom link will be available on the website and in the emailed Annual Meeting Packet. Packets will be available in church the week before too, so you can read them in advance. They will be distributed onsite and by email on Sunday, Jan. 16 (MLK Jr. weekend!), and will be available on our website. (Password: "calvinlovesyou")

Reports are not only from boards and committees. If you are the leader of a group in the church and would like to submit a report, we would be glad to include it, but the deadline is coming fast! Reports are due Sunday, January 9.

Photos: a Pageant Rehearsal, and the Journey to Bethlehem!



Mary and Joseph rest from their journey.



The angel Gabriel appears to the shepherds...



...and, having been heard, angels dance with joy!

A Multitude of Angels Appeared. Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God!

Youth and Children

January 2022 Schedule with Godly Play

Date	Acolyte	GP Story/Activity	Storyteller	Doorperson
January 2	Mike George	Work time and Feast	Suzanne	
9	Liam	Epiphany	Suzanne	Kate
16	Ben	MLK Sunday	Laura	Suzanne
23		The Ark and the Tent	Suzanne	Ben
30	Rose Mary M	The Ark and the Temple	Ben	Kristie

Here is a sneak peak at our January and February youth group schedule.

All middle school and high school students are welcome.

We meet on the second floor in the Youth room from 9am—9:50am.

Youth Group Activities and Discussion For Middle School & High School Students		
January 9	Epiphany Sunday (story of the three wise men)	Tavie and Suzanne
16	Work Time (what is our calling)	Suzanne & Laura
23	Creation and 10 Best Ways (GP story)	Laura/Suzanne/Ben
30	How do we serve ourselves and others with intention	Tavie
February 6	Service: Baskets for college students	Laura/Suzanne/Tavie
13	Guest Speakers	
20	Mid-Winter Recess, No Youth Group	

Stations of the Nativity!

We had our first (maybe annual) Journey To Bethlehem - Stations of the Nativity. It was a perfect winter day. The actors, actresses and helpers enjoyed a lovely backdrop of light snow. The hot cocoa, toe warmers, and the spirit of happiness were our helpers in keeping warm. We had about fifteen people who walked through and enjoyed the scenes and the Christmas Story scriptures read to them. See photos on page 3. The participants shared that they had a great time and many look forward to doing this again next year!

Our community of participants gives thanks for the opportunity to host this community event and all those that walked through!

Hector Aguilar-Carreno	Ben Flanagan	and Jonah Minas	Joseph Tonzola
Jacob and Joseph	Tavie Flanagan	Armando Pacheco	Zoe Vesco
Aguilar-Pacheco	Grace Htoo	Shiloh Riehl	Cindy Weaver
David Brown	Deborah and Jonah	Nico Schwartz	Kirianne Weaver
Phil and Suzy Courtney	Justice	Elizabeth and Satre	Jason Wilson
Marilyn Ewing	James, Rebecca, Dory	Stuelke	

A Letter about our Church's Covid Protocols and Worship

This is the text of a letter that was sent out previously by email. We are reprinting it here to continue sharing our thinking concerning how we should worship in these strange times. Every worshiping community is distinct in its context, both geographically and socially, so other solutions may be best in different contexts.

Dear church and friends,

December 22, 2021

We join all who grieve at the new wave of infections from the Omicron variant. It is hard for us all to feel that our progress is being erased, and that we may be reverting to a difficult time, whose aftereffects and stresses we are only beginning to process.

We have been watching the facts and carefully weighing what to do as a church. We have decided, at present, to remain in-person, and we want to explain why so that you can also make your own decisions about personal risk and comfort. Here are some facts that have helped to guide our thinking:

- **Like most emerging viruses, the new variants become better at spreading, but tend to be less dangerous.** As viruses evolve, they generally become more infectious to communities and simultaneously less damaging to their hosts. The data show this is true for Omicron.
- **Contact tracing shows that positive cases have spread in unmasked gatherings.** From TCHD: "The spread of COVID-19 is still primarily occurring in settings where people are gathering and not wearing a mask or distancing."^[1] When we gather as a church, we remain fully masked at all times.
- **Our active cases are up, but our hospitalizations are down.** Compared to last year at this time, our active cases are *10 times higher* - but our hospitalizations are lower, thanks to vaccination rates. Vaccines are proving themselves to be effective in limiting some spread and, more importantly now, in significantly reducing severe symptoms.
- **We are a highly vaccinated population.** In fact, in the most vulnerable age groups, vaccination rates are over 99%.

Are we taking any steps to curb spread? We have taken some new precautions to help ensure that our practices are safe.

- **We are encouraging and providing surgical masks.** Paper surgical masks have a better fit and prevent spread more than cloth masks. We are offering free surgical masks to all who enter.
- **We are suspending food in fellowship time.** Because eating and drinking generally cause us to lower our masks, we are discontinuing food and drink in the narthex (water is still available at any time). We are working instead to bring art and other items of interest to the narthex to spur us to remain social and communal - both important to good health.
- **We are roping off alternate pews.** It's natural that we were diligent at first about spreading out in the sanctuary, and then started to return to our most comfortable habits. The ropes are just a help to remind us to be our best selves.

We know that not everyone will feel comfortable meeting in-person, and that is okay. We encourage personal decision-making and will continue livestreaming and doing our best to reach out to the remote congregation as well as we can. Our love is for and with you all.

In Christ, Kirianne for the Reopening Committee,
First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca.

[1] Frank Kruppa, TCHD press release 12/17/21.