

First Press

February 2024 - Volume 72 - Number 2



February

Ramblings *from the* Reverend

First Pres folks,

The word “Wilderness” is used 266 times in the bible. Almost every major Old Testament character spends time in the wilderness. It is in the wilderness that Abraham is tested, where Hagar nearly dies and is rescued, it is where Jacob wrestles, where David is shaped. It is in the wilderness that the freed Hebrew nation bumbles and stumbles and wanders and exasperates their liberator, Moses. It is during that forty-year unwanted pilgrimage that God shows up for his people and disciplines them. It is there that God feeds his people daily, he sustains them and keeps them from death.

The liberation from Egypt, followed by the forty-years in the wilderness becomes the seminal story of the Jewish people. The Psalmist say in Psalm 78:

In the sight of their ancestors God worked marvels
in the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan.
He divided the sea and let them pass through it
and made the waters stand like a heap.
In the daytime he led them with a cloud
and all night long with a fiery light.
He split rocks open in the wilderness
and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep.
He made streams come out of the rock
and caused waters to flow down like rivers.

The power of God, the ongoing deliverance of God in the wilderness is the great story of Israel. For the Christian, that power and that deliverance out of the wilderness is read into the cosmos-altering ministry of Jesus. We live in the wilderness, who will save us while we are there and who will lead us out? As Christians, we believe that Jesus joins us in the wilderness, and through his cross, leads us to the Promised Land.

Indeed, the New Testament picks up on the reality and importance of the wilderness. The gospels begin with John the Baptist defining and being defined by his presence in the wilderness. Intentionally, people flock into the wilderness to hear from John and to receive God’s gift of repenting baptism through John. John is a creature of the wilderness, someone whose life has been crafted by the spareness of the desert, someone who has honed his experience of God by living in dependence on God in an otherwise bleak environment.

Jesus, of course, goes out to meet his cousin John in that wilderness, in order, Jesus insists, to undergo those same waters of baptism that those seeking repentance have undergone. Rising out of those waters, the voice from the heavens affirms Jesus as the beloved Son... *but then the Holy Spirit “casts Jesus out into the wilderness in order to be tempted.”* Jesus spends forty days in that wilderness, fasting, praying, learning the fullness of what it will mean to fulfill his role in being our Lord and Savior.

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In almost all the accounts of wilderness in scripture it is referring to a literal place. But the spiritual lessons learned in the wilderness are greater than the actual geographical reality. Let me offer what I intend to be a spiritual definition of wilderness: "It is that place and that time, where comforts are stripped away, and one must contend with God, and one's dependence on God. For most of us the

wilderness (literal and metaphorical) is not a place we would choose to go – but the truth is it is there where so many of us have experienced our greatest spiritual growth and matured more deeply in our faith in Christ."

This year, for the season of Lent, let's use these wilderness stories to ask God how he might be shaping us in our own time in the wilderness. Let's make ourselves vulnerable enough to enter into that place where everything else is stripped away and we rely on God... and God is sure to meet us!

Blessings,
John

As part of an ongoing conversation and process, the Session invites you to take part in these two meetings. It's our hope that these two books, though certainly not exhaustive to the question of how the church and gay/lesbian Christians interact, will give us some common language, and help us to have conversations that represent the grace of Christ with each other.

Here are some other options to participate as well:

Sunday, February 4 at 11am - A time of prayer together

We are in a time of conversation about how we relate to our LGBTQ+ siblings in Christ. So, we have set aside a time to talk with God together... to seek God's guidance ... to share with God our desire to be empathetic, to build trust with one another and protect the vulnerable ... to express our hope to be a witness to our neighbors in how we have conversation with each other and ways we are welcoming to all.

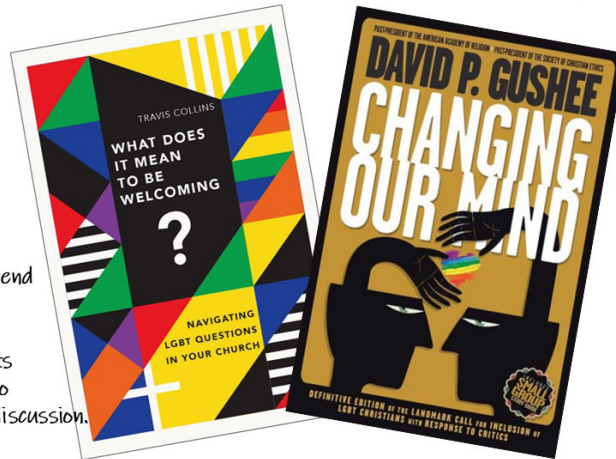
Sunday, March 24 at 11am – Conversations (Option 2)

If you aren't able to participate in the conversations on the 2 books we read together, you are invited to join us for this conversation. It would be helpful for you to watch some videos we recommend on the topic before this Sunday. We hope these will help us come into the conversation with some understanding of different perspectives so we are able to listen well to one another. Watch for the link in FirstWord to get to a list of links for a variety of video resources.

CONVERSATIONS

6pm Thursdays, February 29 & March 14

We've heard from you ...
Dates changed to allow
more time for reading.



Please plan to attend both evenings.

Reading both books is a requirement to take part in the discussion.

Please sign up!





You BELONG Here: New Member Class

This is a class for folks who want to join, or explore joining, First Presbyterian Church.

First Meeting: Dinner & Concert
on **Sunday, February 25.**

Meetings 2 & 3: after worship during Act II
(11:00-12:15) on **Sundays, March 3 & 17.**

There will be an opportunity at the conclusion of this 2-week series to officially become a member or deepen your involvement in other ways. If you choose to join, you will do so in worship on Sunday, March 24.

We ask that you pre-register. Please sign up with this QR code, follow the link in FirstWord or call the church at 757-1058.



Childcare is provided. Please let us know if you need it when you sign up.

If you have questions contact Sue Reidt (suer@spokanefpc.org) or Brenda Norton (brendan@spokanefpc.org) or call the church.

With you, we continue being shaped into the people God is inviting us to be together; living out expressions of Jesus Christ that are guided by our Spirit-inspired vision, mission and values.

Because Jesus chose to identify with us, we choose to leave behind our individualism and belong to him and one another as the church; the body of Christ. In our commitment to one another we are a representation of the Gospel ... glorifying God through our worship, caring for one another in our fellowship, and giving ourselves in service to God's mission as we spread love and justice in the world.

Act II Community: How do we Interpret the Bible?

Sundays, February 25 & March 3, 17, 24 at 11am

This is an opportunity to discuss and share how we have been biblically disciplined in the past and how we interpret and allow scripture to be internalized and directive in our lives.

This is an Initiative 2 Building Block; an outgrowth of Phase 2 with the consultant in which we are seeking ways to live more fully into our charism of hospitality.

Initiative 2: *How might we strengthen FPC Spokane's biblical discipleship to develop a common spiritual language, including over issues that divide us, leading to a greater hospitality commitment towards each other and our community?*



EVENTS

in February

WORSHIP NIGHT *at First Pres*

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 2ND AT 6:30PM

CHILDCARE AVAILABLE FOR 3 & UNDER

Join us after worship for intergenerational fellowship and fun together...

The Gathering

February 11



THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO

MARK

Men's Bible Study

1st & 3rd Thursdays, 9:30-10:30am

Led by Pastor John Sowers

TRIVIA NIGHT!



FEBRUARY 8 • DINNER @5:30

SIGN UP TODAY

ASH WEDNESDAY

FEBRUARY 14TH 7PM



SONG: A CELEBRATION OF COMPOSERS OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

FEATURING:

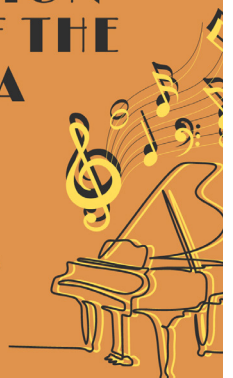
DERRICK PARKER, BASS-BARITONE

JADRIAN TARVER - BARITONE

BONNIE ROBINSON - PIANO

FEBRUARY 25TH AT 6PM

CHILDCARE AVAILABLE FOR 5 AND UNDER. EMAIL RYANC@SPOKANEFPC.ORG TO REGISTER.



EPHESIANS FOR YOU

Monday Evening Women's Bible Study

Mondays @ 6pm

online & in-person

February 26 - May 20



Congregational Care

Caring for One Another: prayer partners, meals ministry, and more

We asked some of our Deacons about their participation in the after-worship prayer ministry as prayer partners. Here's what they said...

Why did you want to be part of the prayer ministry?

Steve Baird: "Praying is mutually building up each other. We are reinforcing the work of the Holy Spirit in us. It is humbling when someone asks you to pray for them."

Sidoney Barth: "This deep and abiding love of God through prayer has been a blessing to me personally over the years as I learned to turn to prayer in times of heartbreak. Prayer was a lifeline for me in the past. I humbly ask the Lord to help me share that learned light with others as part of the prayer ministry at First Pres."

Cynthia Geraghty: "James 5:16 says, 'Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.' For many years, I knew God had forgiven me for mistakes I'd made, but I continued to not forgive myself and felt guilt for letting God down. It was when I openly admitted to fellow believers my weakness and asked for prayer that my healing finally began. I want to be part of a ministry that helps people be healed, and don't all of us need healing!"

Isn't it hard to be a prayer partner?

Steve Baird: "No! I just need to get my head clear of distractions. When someone comes and asks for prayer, God helps me focus and the Holy Spirit guides me in how to pray for them."

Cynthia Geraghty: "I used to be afraid to pray for others because I wouldn't know what to say. Now I know the Holy Spirit gives me the words. I sometimes just restate what the person said and ask God to hear their plea. It's also rewarding. One person has come to me twice to say thank you for praying with her mother. She said it really meant a lot to both of them."

Meals Ministry makes a difference

Can you cook? Would you like to deliver an occasional meal to a family or individual in our church family? The Meals Ministry is now recruiting new meal deliverers.

Some of the many people who have been blessed with meals in a tough time have told us what it meant to them...



Joining the Church Triumphant

Connie Williams died January 6, 2024

Don Huddleston died, January 21, 2024

Thanks be to God for the lives of his faithful servants.



To sign up to become a prayer partner, or to sign up to make and deliver meals, get in touch! We'd love to hear your questions. All training, support and info is provided by those experienced in ministry, to help you serve with joy.

renef@spokanefpc.org 509-747-1058 x251 or sign up Sunday Feb. 11 after worship

GriefShare begins February 28, Wednesday evenings 6-7:30pm. Participant books are \$20; scholarships available. To register, visit griefshare.org/findagroup or call Rene at the church office.



LAUNCH PAD

NEW SERIES - WOW!

Whether it's a rocket car powered by soda and mints or a tornado in a water bottle, there's so much in our world that can fill us with awe. The world of STEM is full of things that look like little miracles, but they're nothing compared to the miracles God can perform. In this series, kids will take a look at some of the miracles that Jesus performed during his ministry. Through stories showing the power of Jesus, they'll no doubt go, "Wow!" Jesus has the power to heal, to calm our fears, to provide, and to save!



Serve.

“The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.” — John 1:14, The Message

Updates From FPC Funded Mission Partners:

Thrive International

In 2023, FPC’s Mission Team approved a funding request from Thrive International to donate money to a “Cultural Integration Program” for their Ukrainian Refugees. As you can see below, the program has been a great success!



Happy and blessed New Year!

During the 2023 period I was able to provide Cultural Integration trips, events and activities that include, but are not limited to concerts, sport tournaments, hikes, bike rides, lake days, Seattle trip tour, Leavenworth, Grand Coulee visit and much more. Throughout these events I was able to serve recent refugees from the Ukraine.

During the year we had a total of 38 events prepared and around 1,255 people attended these organized programs and events that were offered.

For comparison in 2022 we had around 700 people attending our events and activities, and we had only 17 events. In addition, approximately 2,800 miles were driven in the Great Pacific NW while exploring our region with our residents.

In 2023 Cultural Integration Program was able to almost double the number of people participating in our activities as well as increase the number of activities offered. It was a productive year of serving needy refugees and observing how they are moving from surviving to thriving.

Thank you management for supporting the Cultural Integration Program. Looking forward to 2024 adventures in serving our refugee community.

- Vladimir Kronin , Cultural Integration Coordinator

To Learn more about Thrive International head to their website, www.thriveint.org.



DOXA

FPC was honored to provide the funding for DOXA (our long-time partner for home building in Tijuana) to hire Ángeles to fulfill the much-needed roll of Education Administrator and Tutor for their East Tijuana after school programs. You'll see that her reach proved far beyond the scope of her original job description. What a blessing!



From DOXA Executive Director, Alex Knopes:

Doxa's education program provides scholarships and resources to children in Tijuana. Education empowers youth to break the cycle and mindset of poverty. As Doxa has expanded its education program to East Tijuana, we used the blue print from our 10+ years of experience in West Tijuana.

First, relationally equipping students to succeed by surrounding them with competent tutors and coaching their parents to be a positive voice when it comes to education. Second, materially equipping students to succeed by simply providing school supplies, uniforms, tuition, and other necessities.

A few years after starting an education program, Doxa realized that an after-school program was needed. Recognizing that most schools in Mexico are only half-day and almost all parents work a full day; the after-school program fills the niche of the other half. In 2019, Doxa helped build a classroom addition onto Unidos por Siempre, which serves as the education home base for East Tijuana.



Earlier this year, Maria and Angeles noticed another need: food insecurity. Erika, whose children are scholarship recipients and live in East Tijuana, shared that for many families "sometimes there is enough to eat and sometimes not. There isn't always something constant, that you can depend on."

We brainstormed solutions. It quickly became clear that a soup kitchen operated at Unidos por Siempre was the best answer. All the tools we needed were lying right in front of us: using the existing kitchen facilities, Panchita as the cook, and Angeles to help organize. A nutritious and healthy lunch is prepared every day.

Panchita's menu is diverse and well-balanced: tacos, enchiladas, beans, rice, fruits, soups, sandwiches, and vegetables. Panchita says that "my heart is filled when stomachs are filled and people eat my food with pleasure.

To learn about the many FPC mission partners we proudly support, go to www.spokanefpc.org/mission-partners.

First Pres Christian School

Spokane might still be in the Long Dark Night we get every winter, but downstairs in First Pres Christian School, we've been seeing a lot of joy and light! Priority Registration opened mid-January, and we are thrilled to be seeing the names for next year come rolling in. We are praying already for these sweet students that will be joining us in 2024-2025. (Maybe that will include your shining student as well!) **We will be adding a half-day kindergarten and a fourth grade in September.**

Please give us a call at 509-747-9192 if you'd like to learn more about joining our learning community.

We had a phenomenal Family STEM Night on January 18th! Nearly 100 attendees from our school, church, and wider community joined us to dive into the joys of science. Adult volunteers from various STEM fields led stations with robotics, Keva Plank engineering, giant octoflakes, and (a crowd favorite!) the homemade claw machine. Mobius brought their incredible planetarium show and even taught us how to make dry ice bubbles! Thank you to everyone who participated in the fun. We had such a blast discovering the delightful, creative, astonishing

intricacies of God's design for the world. We will have another free STEM night coming up next month called Community Mad Science Night, on March 7th at 6:30pm. Join us!

MAD SCIENCE NIGHT
THURSDAY, MARCH 7
6:30PM
FPCS ANNUAL AUCTION
SATURDAY, APRIL 27
AT THE CONVENTION CENTER



Financial Update

- Pledged income was \$37,859 unfavorable to budget. Non-Pledged income is \$77,696 favorable to budget.
- The expenses were \$18,238 favorable to budget.
- Church operations is \$121,663 favorable to budget.

Financial Update - 2023 Operating Budget		
Dec-23		
	YTD Actuals	YTD Budget
Church Only		
Pledged Income	1,237,141	1,275,000
Non-Pledged Income	222,696	145,000
Other Income	173,388	109,799
Total Income	1,633,225	1,529,799
Total Expense	1,692,114	1,710,352
Income over (under) Expenses	(\$58,890)	(\$180,553)

PRAXIS WINTER CALENDAR

2024

EASTER PROJECT DATES

1/7 Prep Meeting #1

1/21 Prep Meeting #2

1/28 Pancake Breakfast

2/11 Bake Sale

2/19 Prep Meeting #3

3/10 Auction

3/23 Building Day

3/30-4/6 In Tijuana!

Watch for Report Sunday Dates in April!

> FEBRUARY

7: D-GROUPS IN HOMES

14: ASH WEDNESDAY
PRAXIS 7-9

21: SPAGHETTI NIGHT
6:30-9

28: PRAXIS 7-9

CONTACT INFO

LYDIA
509-747-1058 EX 161
CELL: 619-458-5304
LYDIAP@SPOKANEFPC.ORG

KEZIA:
509-747-1058 EX 173
CELL: 509-844-2579
KEZIAR@SPOKANEFPC.ORG

Shift Calendar

February

2/6 Shift 6:30-8:30

2/13 S.N.O. Night! (meet off campus with small groups)

2/20 Spaghetti Night
6:30-8:30

2/27 Shift 6:30-8:30

Contact Kezia:
email: keziar@spokanefpc.org
phone: (509) 747-1058 ext 173



Coming Up

- Feb. 2** *Night Worship*
- Feb. 4** *A Time of Prayer Together*
- Feb. 8** *Trivia Night & Dinner*
- Feb. 11** *The Gathering*
EP Bake Sale
- Feb. 14** *Ash Wednesday*
- Feb. 18** *Annual Meeting*
- Feb. 25** *You Belong Here*
Song: A Celebration
- Feb. 29** *Conversations Pt. 1*

Contacts (509) 747-1058

Pastoral Team

John Sowers (250)
Betsy Wynne (253)

Administration

Stephanie Coy (244)

Worship/Music

Derrick Parker (307)

FPC Christian School

Tracy Blue & Shawna Harris (120)

Family Ministries

Ryan Schmall (163)

Childcare/Nursery

Ryan Childers (164)

Middle School Ministries

Kezia Rhodes (173)

Intergenerational Ministries

Brad Hauge (252)

Preteen Ministries

Lydia Halma (161)

Young Adult Ministries

Jourdan Cornell

Adult Ministries

Brenda Norton (243)

Newcomers Ministry

Sue Reidt (241)

Communications

April Egly (245)

Barton English Language School

Becky Rempe (212)

Deacon Prayer Line: 747-1050

Office Hours

M-Th 8:30am-4pm and Fridays 8:30am-1pm

Sunday Worship Services

Online and In-person Sundays at 10am



First Presbyterian
Church of Spokane

For more information about ongoing programs, visit our website
at www.spokanefpc.org or pick up a brochure at the church