

# *First Press*

*December 2023 - Volume 71 - Number 11*



*December*

# Ramblings *from the* Reverend

Friends,

In both the stillness of Advent in winter, and the ebullient joy of Christmas, our hearts turn toward God.

We wait, or we have waited, in anticipation that God will meet us. We hope for God to replace our loneliness and our questions with his active presence. That anticipation and hope has motivated the people of God throughout the years.

Isaiah speaks to our anticipation and its sense of urgency in the Isaiah 64: "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down..." Isaiah is asking for God to come and set things right. In Isaiah's time, God's people were in exile, removed from the land that God had given them, leaving many of them to believe that they had been removed from God's very presence.

Isaiah is calling to God with a certainty of hope that God will not only answer, but that God will be present. What would it mean for the exiled to be met by the God who brings justice and life? Would this God come and make himself present?

As Christians we believe that, in Jesus, God has opened the heavens and come down. That's the Christmas story. It is a truth that demands a response: If God has opened those heavens to come down, what does God look like? Does God come in power? Or does God in Christ come in vulnerability? And how do we respond to God being with us?

It's a question for all of us, but first it was a question for Mary. How would she respond to the coming of God through her physical presence? How does she meet the fully human baby in the time of his birth and vulnerability?

Rachel Held Evans ruminated on this miracle of the incarnation and Mary's role in meeting God's presence with her own presence:

*"It is nearly impossible to believe: God shrinking down to the size of a zygote, implanted in the soft lining of a woman's womb. God growing fingers and toes. God kicking and hiccupping in utero. God inching down the birth canal and entering this world covered in blood, perhaps into the steady, waiting arms of a midwife. God crying out in hunger. God reaching for his mother's breasts. God totally relaxed, eyes closed, his chubby little arms raised over his head in a posture of complete trust. God resting in his mother's lap.*

*On the days and nights when I believe this story that we call Christianity, I cannot entirely make sense of the storyline: God trusted God's very self, totally and completely and in full bodily form, to the care of a woman. God needed women for survival. Before Jesus fed us with the bread and the wine, the body and the blood, Jesus himself needed to be fed, by a woman. He needed a woman to say: 'This is my body, given for you.' - Rachel Held Evans, Wholehearted Faith*

This year we again celebrate the coming of the all-powerful God who made himself vulnerable in his incarnation; fulfilling God's promise, our longing, and the invitation to meet the present Lord in our midst.

Advent Blessings - John

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## ***A Message about High School Ministries at First Pres***

After a process which included consultation and wisdom from elders, we have parted ways with Jessie Keuhner, who was serving us as Director of High School Ministries since early September this year. We ask that you would pray for Jessie and her family... and that you would pray for our high schoolers, their parents, and our volunteers.

Though we return to a time of transition for high school ministries, I am confident in the staff and volunteer team that will lead. We had decided in the last year to embrace a truly “Family Ministries” model for the children of our church. From nursery all the way to the end of high school, our goal is a common trajectory of caring for and nurturing our kids so that they grow in their faith in Jesus, leading to a mature faith of their own.

From an organizational perspective, this means that Ryan Schmall, our Family Ministries Director, gives direct oversight to children’s ministries, and broad oversight to middle school and high school ministries. For the high school program in this interim time, Ryan will be joined by Lydia Halma, who has served First Pres in a variety of children and youth areas. Lydia will provide primary organizational leadership for the program. Kezia Rhodes, our Associate Director of Middle School Ministries, will bring her gifts of worship leadership to our high school Praxis program as well.

Praxis has always had incredible volunteer leaders. Some, like Dan Finney and Jen Sowers, have been leading for decades. Some are Praxis alums who want to invest in the lives of students as they were invested in when they were in high school themselves. I have peace and confidence that between these volunteers and our staff, our high school students will know they are loved by Jesus and encouraged to live into the values of his Kingdom. Thank you for your prayers for this ministry, now and in the new year.

In January, the process of reopening the search will begin.

Blessings – John Sowers

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## ***Stewardship Update***

We have received 188 pledges to date with a goal of receiving 285 pledges in total by the end of the Stewardship drive. Help us beat last year’s total of 275 by pledging today!

If you have not pledged in the past, this would be a great year to start. If you have questions about pledging, we would happily welcome a phone call. Please call the church, 509-747-1058 and ask for Stephanie Coy or David Repp.



***Pledges can be made online by going to [www.spokaneipc.org/stewardship](http://www.spokaneipc.org/stewardship)***

# FPC Advent Events



YOU ARE INVITED TO  
LAUNCH KIDS

## Not So Silent Night

Dec 1 | 5:30PM  
\$10 | TO 8:30PM

UGLY SWEATER CONTEST!  
FESTIVE FUN!  
& ALL KINDS OF CHRISTMAS CHEER!



- DEC 1** Not So Silent Night 5:30pm\*
  - DEC 3** Advent Begins
  - DEC 6** Unwrap the Gift 7pm\*
  - DEC 9** Toy Store \*  
Messiah Sing-a-long \*
  - DEC 10** 2nd Sunday of Advent  
The Gathering after Worship
  - DEC 17** 3rd Sunday of Advent
  - DEC 21** Solstice Service 6pm
  - DEC 24** 4th Sunday of Advent  
Christmas Eve Worship 10am  
Christmas Eve Candlelight  
Family Service 4pm  
Traditional Service 7pm
  - DEC 31** New Year's Eve Worship 10am
- \* Please register for this event using the QR code provided here or call 747-1058.



## Unwrap the Gift

Wednesday, December 6 @ 7PM

A special event for women to begin the Advent season with our focus on the gift of Jesus

Music by Catherine Hessler, Heather Parker & Joy York  
Inspiration by Janeen Steer  
Dessert by Feast

Cost: \$8 per person



## Handel's Messiah

### Sing-a-Long

Saturday, December 9 at 3pm



Volunteers Needed  
Greet, bake cookies, and more...




GIVE ONLINE

## ADVENT MISSIONS

ALBERTA HOUSE  
MISSION COMMUNITY OUTREACH  
FPC TOY STORE  
JOY OFFERING

## The Gathering

December 10

### CHRISTMAS COOKIE BAKE-OFF



## Solstice Service

Inviting the Light of Christ into our Darkness

6pm on Thursday  
December 21, 2023

Childcare available by reservation




# Advent 2023

First Presbyterian Church

ADVENT YEAR A	PROPHECY READING	PSALM	EPISTLE READING	GOSPEL
First Week of Advent Sunday, December 3, 2023 <i>Hope</i>	Isaiah 64:1-9	Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19	1 Corinthians 1:3-9	Mark 13:24-37
Second Week of Advent December 10, 2023 <i>Joy</i>	Isaiah 40:1-11	Psalm 85 1-2, 8-13	2 Peter 3:8-15a	Mark 1:1-8
Third Week of Advent Sunday, December 17, 2023 <i>Peace</i>	Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11	<u>Psalm 126</u> or <u>Luke 1:46b-55</u>	1 Thessalonians 5:16-24	John 1:6-8, 19-28
Fourth Week of Advent December 24, 2023 <i>Love</i>	2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16	Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26	Romans 16:25-27	Luke 1:26-38



Worship with Us

CHRISTMAS EVE

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24  
10AM



CANDLELIGHT

Christmas Eve Worship

DECEMBER 24TH

4 PM  
FAMILY SERVICE

7 PM  
TRADITIONAL SERVICE

CHILDCARE AVAILABLE FOR 5 & UNDER

# Congregational Care

## Solstice Service: Honoring the Darkness, Waiting for the light

Each December for many years, we have held a “Solstice Service” at FPC shortly before Christmas.

Scientifically speaking, the winter solstice is the shortest day and longest night of the year, when the northern hemisphere is tilted the furthest from the sun.

Spiritually speaking, it is an opportunity for us to acknowledge and recognize the darkness that so often overshadows our lives: grief and loss, sin, resistance to change, overwhelming affliction and hopelessness. As Christians, we can both acknowledge these dark realities and also seek the hope of Jesus Christ in their midst.

Consider inviting a family member or friend to support you by attending this worship service together. The style is simple and contemplative, easy for visitors to enter. Not too much talking, not too much content. There will be prayer stations, candlelight, music and space. The sanctuary takes on a different feel at night! And we will honor one another’s darkness as we honor Jesus “the true light, which enlightens everyone, coming into the world”. (John 1:9)

“People who have come to know the joy of God do not deny the darkness, but they choose not to live in it. They claim that the light that shines in the darkness can be trusted more than the darkness itself and that a little bit of light can dispel a lot of darkness. They point each other to flashes of light here and there, and remind each other that they reveal the hidden but real presence of God.”  
Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*



**Thursday, December 21 at 6pm**  
**Childcare by reservation**

**Joining the Church Triumphant**  
Wally Volwiler died on October 19, 2023  
Jack Arkills died on October 20, 2023  
Charlotte Glouser died on October 24, 2023  
Marian Lehman died on November 5, 2023  
Terry Reed died on November 7, 2023  
**Thanks be to God for the lives of his faithful servants.**

# LAUNCH PAD

## HUGE THANKS TO THESE PEOPLE WHO HELPED LEAD KIDS ON SUNDAYS THIS PAST MONTH...

The Downeys, Julie Loew, The Hubers, The Whittakers, Kezia Rhodes, The Sitters, Kevin Swaim, The Condons, The Kopps, The Largets

## NEW SERIES! CHRISTMAS VACATION

Grab your sandals, sunblock, and swim gear because it's time for a Christmas Vacation! We'll be making sand angels and roasting chestnuts around an open bonfire on our tropical getaway. You've never experienced Christmas like this! In this series, we'll focus on the birth of Jesus and the way God had been planning things from the very beginning. We'll see how God sent Jesus for a reason, learn to trust God's timing, understand why God gives us what's best, and see how Jesus is why we celebrate because Jesus is God's gift to the world!



## NOT SO SILENT NIGHT! FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1ST 5:30-8:30PM

Hey kids!!! It's the most wonderful time of year, and we want to celebrate as we kick off the Christmas season!!! We've got a fun-filled night full of games, food, and holiday shenanigans that will never be forgotten! For parents, take a few hours off and grab a nice dinner, go Christmas shopping, or just take a nap! Let us take care of the kids for the night as we kick off the season with some festive fun!



## SCENES FROM AN AWESOME AUTUMN WITH LAUNCH KIDS



# Serve.

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

## Advent Missions 2023

Each Christmas is a joyful season, but what we are celebrating is bigger than one day of the year: the mystery of the incarnation: the ongoing, embodied movement of God transforming our world through Jesus, who came into our broken world in the flesh.

So as we move into this season, be thinking: how will you and your family creatively find ways to serve and love and celebrate the goodness of Christmas this year? As always, we are offering chances to participate in FPC’s Advent Missions, still modified by the pandemic this year.

**Participate in the annual FPC Community Toy Store** through the donation of new toys or volunteering to make this toy store a wonderful gift to our neighbors. Through local schools and mission partners, we invite families to shop for new toys for their kids. By allowing shoppers to make their own toy choices and purchase the toys (at 20% of retail price), our hope is that the parents feel a sense of pride and dignity in providing for their families during what can be a challenging time. Drop off new, unwrapped gifts for ages 2-12 at the giving tree in the FPC Reception Room. The Toy Store itself will be, Dec. 9 so sign up to volunteer via the FPC website or First Word!

**Get a gift for our neighbors who live at the Alberta House**, low-income transitional apartments that are part of our mission partner The City Gate. We will have tags with gift ideas from the residents at the giving tree — take one, and then bring the wrapped, tagged gifts back by Sunday, Dec 10! This is a great way to bless our neighbors! As is our long tradition, Santa will be making a visit to the Alberta House thanks to your generosity!

**Support our local mission partner, the Mission Community Outreach Center** in their annual “Children’s Christmas Joy” collection. For over 25 years the Center has provided free clothing bank services, personal hygiene items and basic household goods to Spokane families living in poverty. Our donations of new jeans, shirts (long sleeve preferred), gloves, and underwear for boys and girls ages infant- 6th grade will make this a joyful Christmas for many children! On a typical year over 1,000 children in need receive these gifts from MCOC — a small organization with one paid staff member (and many FPC volunteers)! Monetary donations are also accepted through MCOC’s website - just click the donate button at the top of their website at [www.4mission.org](http://www.4mission.org) and the gifts they receive during this season will help provide for even more children! Or simply bring your donation of these items to the bin in the FPC Reception Room by Dec. 4th!



Mission Community Outreach Center's  
**Children's Christmas Joy  
Clothing Drive**

We are collecting **NEW** clothing  
for kids infant-6th grade

**New Items Needed:**

- Jeans/ Leggings ~ Shirts (long sleeve preferred)
- Girls & Boys Underwear ~ Winter Gloves
- Children's Books

Drop off Donations at MCOC  
Monday 1-4pm ~ Wednesday 10am-1pm ~ Thursday 1-4pm  
Contact us to set up alternative drop off time

Monetary donations accepted - [www.4mission.org](http://www.4mission.org)

509-536-1084 [mcoc.spokane@gmail.com](mailto:mcoc.spokane@gmail.com)  
1906 E. Mission Ave - Spokane 99202



# Huber Family in Ecuador

My family and I lived in Quito, Ecuador from 2020 through much of 2022. My work as a communications manager with World Vision's 7-country humanitarian response to the Venezuela refugee and migration crisis took us there. But our long-term ministry partnership with Inca Link Global also afforded us opportunities to serve in other capacities while there.

My wife, Julie, and I grew up in Bothell, Wash., just north of Seattle. We met when we were 11, went to college together at Western Washington University, and got married when we were 21. We caught the travel bug early, studying in Peru, working in Costa Rica, and eventually taking Spanish students to various Latin American countries. My family had traveled to Peru when I was 8 to adopt my little sister. God used that experience to spark a vision in me, in which I would spend my life serving people around the world. Julie came alive when experiencing new places and people and cultures. We were natural travel companions. As our family grew, we purposefully cultivated a vibrant church and community life in Issaquah, Wash. We had a really good thing going. Good jobs—she as a Spanish teacher and I as a humanitarian photographer and writer—freshly renovated house, deep friendships and family in the area.



Huber family photo in the street outside of their apartment in Quito, Ecuador.

When the opportunity came to move to South America, we had been praying if and how this might come about. We were ready, even if it would be painful to uproot our family. Little did we know that when we landed in Ecuador on February 16, 2020, the world would close down 30 days later and life everywhere would be thrown into disarray. And while the pandemic hit Ecuador hard and certainly made life more difficult for us, it constantly reminded us what living with courage and fearless love can look like when we follow Jesus out of our comfort zone and into the hard places of the world. My lockdown memories involve assisting with emergency food distributions in head-to-toe PPE and navigating empty cities with extra police checkpoints.

Living abroad during the pandemic, daily surrounded by the human toll of Latin America's greatest mass-migration in recent history, caused Julie and me to reflect on many aspects of personal life, vocation, mission



Chris and some coworkers at the Berlin Migrant Attention Center in northern Colombia.

and calling, and living in Christ-centered community. Since returning to the U.S., slowing down, and settling in a new city, I have found it easy to simply focus on whatever makes me the most comfortable the fastest, or ignoring problems I see in the city. But the Lord has consistently reminded me of two things: 1) Sometimes God calls us to leave something good to follow his direction — and he blesses us in ways we couldn't have imagined; and 2) We have been given so much, spiritually and materially — Jesus calls us to have compassion for and selflessly serve the most vulnerable among us, no matter where we are.

So often, I want to just close up and ignore the plight of the poor and oppressed around me — here in Spokane, in the U.S., and around the world. With all of the suffering I see in the news, it's too painful or depressing to try and care for people on my street, let alone on another continent. But these "soul nudges" keep me humble. They keep me dependent on Jesus, who is the only one who gives us the strength to live his Good News to those around us.

— Chris Huber

# First Presbyterian Christian School

## Scholarship Fund

Dear First Pres Family,

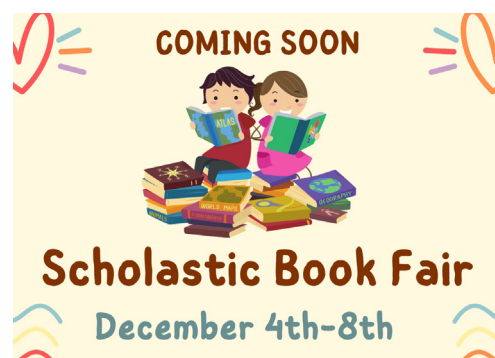
As you come to the end of the year, please prayerfully consider donating the First Presbyterian Christian School Scholarship Fund. As an essential ministry of First Presbyterian Church and a thriving reflection of God's family, our school serves families from a wide variety of economic, social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. God continues to grow this school in the heart of Spokane as a reflection His love for every family, of every language, of every culture, of every financial background – a gorgeous picture of His creativity and delight in His children! Some of our families in need are refugees, some have children they are adopting out of foster care, and some have had their children in our school, but are experiencing unexpected life situations. Your scholarship support enables us to continue serving all of our families with open hands and generous hearts. With gratitude,

Tracy Blue and Shawna Harris  
Co-principals, FPCS



## Book Fair

We all know it's true: one of the most magical weeks of the year growing up was when the book fair came! Experience the joy of new books with the children in your life by visiting our Scholastic Book Fair in the Quad from December 4-8, or visit it after church service on Sunday, December 10. If you'd rather shop online, visit our virtual book fair at <https://www.scholastic.com/bf/fpcsspokane>.



## Priority Registration

It's already time to be thinking about your student's next learning year! First Presbyterian Christian School invites your incoming preschooler or kindergarten through 4th grader to join our loving, small classroom learning community. Priority registration opens online at our website ([www.fpchristianschool.org](http://www.fpchristianschool.org)) on January 17, 2023. And did you know that priority registration includes not only current and returning families, but also alumni families, congregants, and families actively involved in a FPC ministry like MOPS or the Barton School? WOW!



## FPCS Substitutes

FPCS is growing! This means that it's time to grow our substitute pool alongside the class offerings. We are looking for **Elementary substitutes, Preschool substitutes and Teacher assistants**. This is an especially wonderful opportunity for childcare workers, retired classroom teachers, and aspiring teachers looking to gain experience with a Christ-centered teaching staff. Give us a call at 509-747-9192 or email [fpcsoffice@spokaneipc.org](mailto:fpcsoffice@spokaneipc.org) for more information.





**TOY STORE  
OVERNIGHTER**

**SHIFT COMMUNITY  
FRIDAY 12/8 6:00PM**

GO ON THE ULTIMATE TOY SHOPPING SPREE, STAY FOR A JOLLY CHRISTMAS OVERNIGHTER, THEN WAKE UP AND SERVE AT THE TOY STORE IN THE MORNING



**Praxis Winter Calendar**

**DECEMBER**

- 6 Toy Store Shopping + Praxis (arrive at 6:30 for shopping)
- 13 Praxis 7-9
- 20 Christmas Party 7-8:30
- 27 Break

**JANUARY**

- 3 Break
- 10 Praxis is Back! 7-9pm

Questions?  
Contact Lydia Halma  
lydiap@spokanefpc.org



**BARTON ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE SCHOOL**

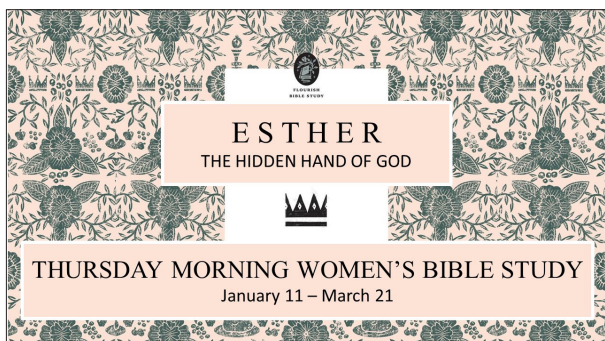
*Winter  
Break*

CLOSED FROM  
DEC 25TH-JAN 5TH



PRAXIS SERVES AT  
**TOY STORE**

Shopping! December 6 Before Praxis (6:30)  
Setting Up! December 8 After School  
Serving! December 9 9:45am-11:45/11:30-1:30 pm



**ESTHER**  
THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD

**THURSDAY MORNING WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY**  
January 11 – March 21



Calling all High School Students + Alumni!

**Praxis  
Christmas  
Party with a  
Purpose**

December 20 7-8:30 PM  
Bring \$5 for Blood:Water Mission!

# Coming Up

- Dec. 1**      **Not So Silent Night**
- Dec. 4-8**    **FPCS Book Fair**
- Dec. 6**      **Unwrap the Gift**
- Dec. 9**      **Toy Store**  
**Messiah**
- Dec. 10**     **The Gathering: Cookie Bake-Off**
- Dec. 21**     **Solstice Service**
- Dec. 24**     **Christmas Eve Sunday Worship**  
**Candlelight Christmas Eve**
- Dec. 31**     **New Year's Eve Sunday Worship**

## Contacts

(509) 747-1058

### Pastoral Team

John Sowers (250)  
Betsy Wynne (253)

### Administration

Stephanie Coy (244)

### Finance

David Repp (242)

### 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

Office will be closed Dec. 25th - Jan. 1st

### 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](http://www.spokanefpc.org) or pick up a brochure at the church