Lent is a season of self-examination and denial. It marks 40 days prior to the celebration of Easter. This year Lent began on February 26, and as I mentioned in a recent sermon, it seems like the season never ended. Thanks to COVID-19, we continue to deny ourselves our full fellowship and ministry. We are wandering in the wilderness with face masks and hand sanitizer.

It would be understandable if we became discouraged. However, I am reminded of the words that the Apostle Paul wrote from a jail cell to a persecuted church:

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.  Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.  Do on with thanksgiving let your requests be made

Although we face uncertainly, the fundamentals have never changed. God has redeemed us in Jesus Christ, and we have a mission to complete. Pandemics will come and go, but God’s faithfulness remains. We can emerge from this long Lent, stronger and more vibrant.

September 2020 marks the second anniversary of my pastorate here, and I am more convinced today than before that I am called to serve with you. Your mission is now my mission. Before my arrival, First Presbyterian Church developed a study to reflect on some of the challenges that continue to face our congregation. Since then, I have used that study as a blueprint for our ministry together. We have begun to address concerns and seized a few opportunities that God has given us.

The mission study outlined five areas of growth for our congregation.

- Focus on Youth and Children.
- Becoming More Generationally Diverse.
- Educational and Spiritual Development.
- Strengthen Worship and Music.
- Focus on Evangelism.

In the last two years, we have seen some dramatic changes. We raised expectations for our youth through the confirmation process incorporating new technology and media. We completely reviewed and rebooted our children’s ministries incorporating ministry to both parents and children. We have brought better organization and offerings to our adult ministries. We have kindled stronger partnerships with other congregations in our community for mission and evangelism. We created a cross ministry which has distributed thousands of wooden crosses along with the message of God’s love both locally and abroad. We have started new mission partnerships including a recent trip to Belize to work with our Christian brothers and sisters there.

Even the pandemic has not deterred our efforts to strengthen our witness. We will emerge from this time with a greater social media presence, better communication, and a wider reach with our worship. We now offer live-streamed services that are archived and can be viewed when convenient. We now have a radio ministry where those without the internet can experience the sermon and our music ministry. The worship team is constantly seeking to innovate and push past our current limitations. God deserves no less.

We are not finished. There is much to be done. Nonetheless, even in the fog of this extended Lent that we call COVID-19, we have much to celebrate. This congregation has acted with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love. We should be confident about the future.

~ Pastor James Hodsden
We are so excited to be starting our Sunday School year once again! It’s been way too long without our Sunday School family, and even though we will be beginning the year in a non-traditional way, we are still committed to providing you and your children with Biblical truth and engaging, applicable lessons!

It was not an easy decision for our Christian Education Committee to resolve how to begin our school year. Change is difficult, even when we know this change is only temporary and will not last. We were coming off of such a great year, and a high of rebooting our children’s ministry entirely just a few months before the coronavirus shut everything down. Now, here we are, reinventing the wheel less than a year later, throwing idea after idea onto the table, thinking we have solutions only to hit another road-block and have to start again. But, in the midst of this, I went back to one of the documents we drafted in our 2019 reboot: “A Vision For Our Children’s Ministry.” In this vision we promised to be committed to the following things:

- **Gospel:** We are committed to the good news of Jesus Christ
- **Application:** We are committed to applying the faith in our lives
- **Church:** We are committed to living the faith in community
- **Encouragement:** We are committed to creating a welcome and encouraging atmosphere where all children feel accepted and free to explore God’s truths surrounded by love
- **Family:** We are committed to equipping and encouraging families to share and practice their faith together
- **Mission:** We are committed to living out our faith in compassion and witness
- **Safety:** We are committed to providing a safe environment for our children
- **Scripture:** We are committed to teaching our children the Bible
- **Wonder:** We are committed to exploring the faith with our children
- **Worship:** We are committed to helping our children participate more fully in worship

The wonderful thing is, we have not strayed from our vision! Things may look different, but we are still actively committed to all of the above. We have built an action-packed virtual experience for all of our children, Preschool through 6th grade, that will explore our foundations of faith, provide a solid framework for their own relationship with Jesus, and teach an understanding of what it means to live a Christian life. Every Sunday at 9:30, your kids will meet their teacher on-line, view video content of that day’s lesson, participate in pre-delivered, to your door, activities, engage in a Pen Pal program with members of our congregation, and be challenged to live out what they are learning in their own community.

We are excited to begin this adventure starting Sunday, September 13th! All you need to do now is register your children so that we can be ready for you. Visit this website: [https://kideventpro.lifeway.com/myEvent/?id=55389](https://kideventpro.lifeway.com/myEvent/?id=55389) to register today. This is also a great opportunity to invite all of your friends to join you right from their own home! Any child, regardless of if they attend our church or not, is welcome to join! If you have any questions please contact me at kwheeler@firstpresbyterian.net. We can’t wait to see you!

~ Kathleen Wheeler, Director of Children & Family Ministries

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**CHURCH FINANCES AS OF JULY 2020**

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<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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Details available from Treasurer
(Pat Babcock)

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**FLOWER INFORMATION**

For all of you who purchased Chancel flowers and Easter flowers we want you to know that we appreciated it.

In light of the fact that we have not been able to use them, the Worship Committee has decided to carry these over to the 2021 calendar.

If you would like to change your dates, please contact Lorri at the church office. Also, if you have any questions, please contact Barb Fries at 419-668-9432.

Thank you for your understanding.

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**UNSTOPPABLE GOSPEL**

This fall, all of our small groups will be studying Unstopable Gospel, a curriculum by Gregg Matte. The study provides snapshots of the Book of Acts. Pastor James will also be preaching from the same texts. God does amazing things when his church reads the Scriptures together. Join a small group today!

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**OCTOBER 2020**

**Messenger**

**Deadline is Tuesday, September 15, 2020**
We are looking for God-loving, energetic, friendly people who have a devotion to children to come partner alongside us this academic school year! Just because we have to do things differently this year doesn’t mean we are stopping our programming! We need teachers for our virtual Sunday School classes (preschool - 6th grade), Fusion (our Sunday evening 4th - 6th grade youth group) and Catalyst (our Sunday evening 7th - 12th grade youth group). As of right now, we are planning to have Fusion and Catalyst meet in-person on our church campus with restrictions, while our Sunday School year is going to start off virtually. Don’t let the “virtual technology” aspect scare you off, though! This program is extremely user friendly and requires very little teacher prep. You can learn how to be a virtual teacher within an hour! If you are more interested in being a Fusion or Catalyst helper, this requires no prep on your part as those programs are managed and run by our Youth Director, Don Renninger. We are just in need of adult leadership to come alongside him on Sunday evenings. If you are being led to help in any of these programs, please contact Kathleen Wheeler by e-mail at kwheeler@firstpresbyterian.net.

To better accommodate our families that are attending in-person worship, we have been working to re-open our nursery facilities. If you would like to utilize the nursery in the coming months, here is what you need to know:

1. Nursery care will only be available under Level 1 or 2 of Ohio’s Health Advisory System.  
2. The nursery will only be open at the second service.  
3. Nursery care will only be provided for children preschool age and younger.  
4. Our nursery caregiver, Tasha, will wear a mask while children are in the nursery. Children are not required to wear face masks.  
5. Children will be dropped off at the nursery door. Parents will not be allowed to enter the nursery area.  
6. Children will have their temperature taken at the door. As long as they are under 100 degrees and exhibiting no signs of COVID, they are welcome to utilize the nursery.  
7. There has been a thorough cleaning of all items in the nursery. Any toys handled in the nursery will be washed with bleach after the service ends.  

All kids from Preschool - 6th grade are welcome to join us for our August Bible Challenge! Last month, kids were sent a weekly challenge from our Director of Children & Families, inviting them to complete an activity centered around a Bible story. Some of last month’s challenges included, making their own Bible-based game, and cooking up something delicious in the kitchen centered around a favorite Bible story. If the kids completed their challenge by midnight on Saturday, they were sent a prize in the mail the following week! We had so much fun that we are doing it again! If your kiddo was not involved last month but would like to be this month, please let Kathleen Wheeler know (kwheeler@firstpresbyterian.net) and we will be glad to add you to the fun!

NEWS FROM THE SESSION  
JULY 2020

Session updated the FPC Guidelines for Reopening Church Campus in August, approved the Nursery Guidelines, and approved the Rummage Sale Guidelines.

Pastor James continues to work with Dawson Strong and WLKR to have worship services on the radio and to develop the radio show as a podcast.

Projects completed:
- Replaced kitchen garbage disposal
- Swapped Fellowship Hall vestibules lights with LEDs
- Removed broken maple tree on west end of CE wing
- Reviewed the church Insurance Policy. The Session provides for the care of church property by obtaining property and liability insurance coverage to protect facilities, programs, staff, and officers.

Marrett Excavating was hired to correct the courtyard drainage issues.

Pastor James has prepared the fall adult class schedule for both in-person and virtual attendees. Kathleen’s “Just Give Me Jesus” children programs end at the end of July.

FPC crosses will be distributed by Pastor James at the Love Norwalk event on August 8 from 6-8 P.M.

Pastor Clair will remain an active staff member but has scaled back his hours.

Worship, Outreach and CE Committees need Ushers, Greeters and Sunday School teachers.

Plans are underway for youth Sunday School reopening with combined classes, no group opening, masks, and social distancing.

A New Photo Directory  
Portraits will be taken on October 15, 16, & 17

Register now at www.ucdir.com Use church code oh2390 and password “photos”
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**September 2020**

**SEPTEMBER STUFF**

**SEPT 13 (Time TBA)**

**PAINTBALL!**

**SEPT 20 (7:00-8:00 PM)**

"THE POWER OF A QUESTION"

**SEPT 27 (7:00-8:00 PM)**

"QUESTIONS FROM A RICH YOUNG MAN"

The lesson series to start the Fall is called "The Questions of Jesus", and takes a look at the way that Jesus would interact with people through asking simple questions. He would often leave people with profound insight, which some accepted and other didn’t. Join us as we explore Jesus’ teachings!

In the downtimes of school, we will be planning some projects for our students to work on to help the community. Contact Don if you would be interested in helping out around the church and the area.

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**Don’s Contact Information**

(419) 554-9482

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
21 FIRELANDS BLVD. NORWALK, OH 44857. (440) 668-4173