



First Presbyterian Church

Communion - December 2017



Hi Everyone,

As I write this, a bit of snow is starting to fall. It looks beautiful, but I don't think it will last. The grass is still very green outside my window, and most of the leaves are still on the trees. It hardly feels like fall, and less so like winter is just around the corner. It's been a weird year in a way. Around town I've overheard a few people say that it doesn't feel like Christmas yet. Mind you, we're still in November, so it is a bit early to begin anticipating the Christmas season. All the same, the sight of snow outside my window did give me a pleasant feeling. The snowflakes were large and soft – they looked beautiful as they fell. It felt, well yes...Christmassy!

Truth is, I am really looking forward to Christmas. It *has* been a weird year in more ways than just the weather. The world experienced a significant shift in its political climate as political parties and nations opted for protectionist and anti-immigration stances. This year witnessed a rise in hate crimes, and in the open expression of intolerance.

I am thankful that our Heavenly Father “so loved the world” that He sent his Son into the world. He did so without resorting to power



and brute force. He did not lay his Son in a palace, but in a rough and humble stable. The prophet Isaiah foresaw that the Messiah would be “acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3), and in a way, that started early in Jesus' life. Within a couple years of Christ's birth, Joseph and Mary had to flee for their life, leaving their homeland to live as refugees in Egypt. In a world that reverts to prejudice in a heartbeat, I am thankful for Jesus who reached out to the rejected and the outcast. He validated those who were discarded by the powerful, and even by some of the religious people of his day.

Is it any wonder that our Lord and Saviour would later say to his followers: **“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was**

hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?’³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?” “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’



A sobering thought comes to mind when I read the accounts of the life of Jesus: Would I welcome Him into my tidy life? Would I allow Him to challenge my assumptions, and my prejudices? Would I see Him as a friend or a stranger? Would I see Him as lovely or crass? For I am reminded that there were those who criticized him as being a “glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” Mind you, the critics got one thing right...Jesus is a FRIEND. I am so thankful for that. I hope you are too!

It is my hope and prayer that we are all strengthened by Christ during the Christmas season, helping us to look past the exhausting hustle and bustle of December to the hope we have in God and His Kingdom here on earth. His rules are different than those followed by the world at large, and for that I am also incredibly thankful. I encourage us all to rest in Jesus Christ to whom “All authority in heaven and on earth” has been given. God is in control, and the birth of Jesus is a reminder of that.

Like I said...I am looking forward to Christmas. There will be many opportunities to share in the Advent and Christmas season. I hope you plug in this next month to life and worship at FPC. This wonderful and holy season kicks off here with the concert “Joy to the World” held at FPC on Saturday, December 2 at 6:45 p.m. We will enjoy great Christmas music and carol singing. A free will offering will be collected to benefit our “Backyard Mission.” Please plan attending – I know it will be a great blessing to you, and a great way to start the Advent season.



Holy Communion will be observed on Sunday, December 3 at our usual worship time. As well, the choir and Sunday School will be presenting “**The Mitten Tree**” on Sunday, December 17. Please see the description Christy Cobb has provided below. As well, we will have two services on Sunday, December 24: our usual morning service at 10:30 a.m. and our **Christmas Eve service** at 7:00 p.m. All these services will be full of joyful carol singing and celebration. Don’t miss out!

“The Mitten Tree” (Submitted by Christy Cobb) Our youth will be performing **“The Mitten Tree”**, at our worship service on Sunday December 17th. This is a very special time of year when we celebrate our Lords birth but also the ability to give to others.

The youth decided at our annual youth retreat at the Lambton Centre to perform **“The Mitten Tree”** again. This is a wonderful opportunity for the youth to come together and share their gifts with others and to also help those in greater need.

Therefore, the youth are asking for your help during this Sunday of celebration. They asked that each family bring in a pair of warm mittens, hat, scarf and/or canned goods to help complete our play.

You will be invited to come onto the platform when the youth collect the mittens and place your donation on the tree yourself. However, if you would like to stay in your seats the youth will come to you and they will place your donation on the tree. The donations collected will be given to the Chatham Goodfellows in time for Christmas.

On behalf of our youth, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.



A Farewell to Dan Lankhof: It is with sadness, but with gratitude for a wonderful year, that we announce that Dan Lankhof, Music Director and Organist at FPC has informed us that he plans to step down from his position at the end of the year

Dan has been happy to serve at FPC, but has found it increasingly difficult to juggle his new full-time job in construction and the responsibilities of his position at FPC. We have been blessed by Dan's musicality, as well as his cheerful attitude. Personally, I have found Dan to be a true team player, adaptable and a delight to work with. I will miss his input into the ministry here at FPC. He is very well liked by our congregation, and we will miss him very much.

So, it is bittersweet that we must say goodbye, but we wish Dan all the very best in the years ahead. I will say, though, what many people have remarked: “Please Dan, watch those musical fingers around all those tools and saws!!!” If you are a regular at FPC, we encourage you to thank Dan in person in the next few weeks for the tremendous job he's done this last year.

The Music and Worship Team will begin work to find a new Music Director and Organist. Our last search was not easy, and took some time. We expect that the process will be no different

this time around. We ask for your prayerful patience as we look for our next director and organist at FPC. I cannot say what our worship services will look like come January. We will do our very best to ensure the best worship environment we can, but again, I ask for your patience. We are not going to rush by hiring the first applicant we get. Unfortunately, even that will be hard to do, because music candidates are not all that plentiful. Yet, I am confident we will find the next person to lead us in music worship.



Join our Bible Studies: There is always room for YOU in our Bible studies. Please call the office for information on any of our study groups. Everyone is most welcome to attend!

Men's Bible Study - Tuesdays 9:30 a.m coffee; study 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday Bible Studies – 10:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity:

Please mark your calendars for the upcoming Week of Prayer for Christian Unity running January 22-28, 2017. The theme is: **“Your Right Hand, O Lord, Glorious in Power”** based on Exodus 15:6. As always, we will host noonday services with guest preachers from our city churches, followed by a sandwich lunch served in the lower hall. A free will offering will be taken at each lunch and the proceeds will go to benefit a local charity.



The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Once again, we've teamed up with **Evangel Community Church** for the WPCU. We are still discussing details, but our noonday services continue at FPC. As well, we will be inviting all churches to join with us at City Hall on Friday, Jan 26 to pray for the well-being of our community, and for unity among Christians. Plans so far include a final service for the WPCU on Sunday, Jan 28 at 2:00 p.m. here at FPC. Our tentative speaker will be Pastor Chris Couper of Evangel Community Church. There will also be a concert at Evangel at 7 p.m. which everyone is invited to attend.

I hope that many of you will join us at our weekday services at noon and on the Sunday concluding service. This is after all, an event that FPC been hosting for over 90 years. It is important to join with other Christians, and to set aside our denominational and doctrinal differences for the good of the church at large. This is more needed than ever, because too many Christians today are divided along theological and political lines. Please join us!

One last thing: I will be looking to our congregation to provide sandwiches for many of the lunches following our weekday services. It has become increasingly difficult to get commitments

from other churches to provide the food for our lunches, because their number of volunteers has declined over the last few years. So, please keep in mind that we will begin calling to ask you to provide loaves for the week. Remember...many hands make light work. And in this case...sandwiches!

A thank you to Bob Fletcher: A church cannot exist without the dedicated work of its members and volunteers. First Church has a good number of them, and I am very thankful for them. I also know that no one can lead a team or ministry forever – leaders eventually must hand off the baton to the next set of volunteers.

This is the case for **Bob Fletcher** who informed me earlier this year that he intends to step down from leading several areas of our church ministry. Bob dedicates his life to FPC, and I am immensely grateful for his tireless service to our congregation, and to the outreach of our ministries. Any amount of recognition seems insufficient to adequately give thanks for the ways in which Bob serves at FPC. I will say thank you in the most practical way I can – by accepting Bob’s request to step down with gratitude and no coercion to stay on as leader!

So, that being said, I am looking for leaders in the following areas:

1. **Chair of the Property and Finance Committee.**
2. **Volunteer Coordinator for the Saturday Breakfast.**
3. **Lead volunteer for Bob’s cooking team for the Saturday Breakfast.**

Please understand that I intend to honour Bob’s request for a well-deserved rest from the responsibilities of leadership in these areas. That means these volunteer positions need to be filled immediately. I am counting on **YOU** to step up to serve this church in these very important capacities. Please do not expect others to take on these responsibilities. We will make every effort to transition new volunteers into these leadership roles.

I trust that God will speak to your heart, and I know he will bless you by serving in a new capacity here at FPC. It’s no wonder that Jesus says, “Well done, good and faithful servant” when he speaks of ministry. It is hard work, but it is also a blessing to us, and to the people we serve.



Which brings me to our **Saturday Outreach Breakfast**. Every Saturday morning, we serve a hot, delicious and nutritious breakfast free of charge to people in our city. This is an ongoing ministry at FPC now into its 16th year. At last count we have served over 85,000 free breakfasts at a cost of \$195,000.

Although we are blessed with many people who give of their time and energy to this ministry, we need to increase our number of

volunteers. It is not always easy to fill the roster for each Saturday given that many people travel, and illness can keep people from helping on a Saturday.

We are making progress in recruiting new volunteers, but we are still in need of people to help in the dishwashing crews. We also need people to help serve food and clean up tables. And finally, we could use a few people to join our cooking teams. Volunteers are called, on average, one Saturday a month. If you've never volunteered at the breakfast, I strongly invite you to do so. Being a part of this church means taking part in its vital ministries, and the Saturday Breakfast requires many people to run smoothly.

Volunteering at our breakfast is not only a very practical way to respond to the teaching of Jesus, but is also satisfying and fun. Working at the breakfast is the perfect place to get to know your church family members, as well as the people from our community who help in this ministry. All in all, the Saturday Breakfast is an important ministry that we want to see continued for many years to come! Won't you join us?



Pastoral Care Team: I am thankful for Sue Easun and Pastoral Care volunteers who lovingly serve our church members in hospital, or who cannot make it to our worship services. Just recently Sue told me that she has found volunteers to visit at every nursing home in town where our members reside. I am so thankful for the team's dedication in helping me with the burden of caring for people in our congregation. God bless you for what you do!

Elders for Session: A call to our elders! We are looking for two elders to serve on session to bring our number to eleven. Please talk to me or to Joan Fletcher if you'd be interested in rejoining the session at this time.

Opportunities to serve: There are many ministries at First Church which would benefit from your involvement. Our Saturday Outreach Breakfast is always in need of volunteers, as is our Pastoral Care Team and Mission Team. Other ministries include our sound and audiovisual teams, Sunday coffee hour, Decorating Team, Sunday School, Choir, Women's Missionary Society, and Prayer Shawl Ministry, to name just a few. Please call the office for contact information on these and other groups in our church. Many hands make light work!



UPCOMING MESSAGE SERIES:

Getting into the Christmas Spirit: For months people have been posting online how many days are left until Christmas. Such posts are both exciting and maddening. They are exciting, because most of us love Christmas! And yet, they are also maddening, because we know there is so much to do during December, or due to circumstances in life we don't feel up to celebrating this year. Is there a way to avoid the rush or the heartbreak many of us feel at this time of year? The

best place to start is to remember that Christmas is ultimately not about us, but what God has accomplished through his Son Jesus Christ. Join us as we “Get into the Christmas Spirit” during Advent, acknowledging that the world is infinitely better thanks to the coming of our Lord.

Dec 3 “Ready or Not” Luke 1:26-38 **Communion Sunday and welcoming new members.**

Dec 10 “Drop Everything!” Luke 3:1-18

Dec 17 **Sunday School and Choir Christmas Presentation**

Dec 24 “Heaven Can’t Wait” Luke 1:39-55 10:30 a.m.

Dec 24 “Baby Steps.” Luke 2:1-20 **Christmas Eve Service 7:00 p.m.**

Overtures to General Assembly on Human Sexuality: The session at FPC has read the reports on human sexuality referred by this year’s General Assembly, and will be discussing its response due in January 2018. We recognize that not everyone will agree with our response regardless of the outcome, and we will make sure that we communicate this to our national office.

This will be a decision that I, as minister, cannot make on my own, but do so in conjunction with our session elders. As our denominational polity states: no minister can “usurp a negative voice over the members of session, or hinder the reasoning or voicing over anything to which the majority of the elders on session incline.” That is, ministers can speak their minds on issues being discussed and debated, but cannot influence a vote one way or another.

We are still in the early stages of this denominational conversation. Although congregations were made to understand that this process might be two years away from a final decision either for or against same-sex marriage and ordination, now we’re starting to informally hear from our head office that the process may take another five to seven years. Personally, I don’t know whether this is based in fact, but regardless, the conversation continues.

If you have not done so already, the pertinent reports on the issue of human sexuality can be found and downloaded at: <http://presbyterian.ca/sexuality/>



Building Restoration and Ongoing

Maintenance: Our beautiful sanctuary and church facilities are in constant need of maintenance and repair. There’s no way around it - this always costs money. I am reminding everyone that we continue paying down our debt incurred from the restoration to the outside of the building begun in 2005. Presently we still owe \$112,000, and though we are making steady progress we would like to eliminate this amount as quickly as possible. Jodi and I contribute monthly to the building restoration fund on top of our regular offering, and I invite you to do the same.

The Property and Finance Committee undertakes ongoing and necessary maintenance projects to our sanctuary, church building and equipment so that we are not faced with greater problems in the future. Many congregations across Canada have had to permanently move out of their sanctuaries due to structural issues that worsened over time. The only way around it is to raise the money

necessary to make ongoing maintenance and repairs. Point in fact, we recently had asbestos insulation removed from pipes in the basement. The asbestos was deemed mandatory to remove following inspections during the work being done in the lower hall following the flood last December.

I am not necessarily a fan of undertaking expensive restoration and maintenance projects like we do here at FPC unless there is a spiritually compelling reason for doing so. That is, I believe we only make repairs to our facilities if the church is truly doing the work of God, and sharing the Gospel of Christ in every way possible. I am thankful to serve this congregation which does not see our sanctuary and building as the only reason why we exist as a church. You, the people of FPC see Jesus first, and do His bidding in many ways. I LOVE you all for that. I am also very thankful for the Property and Finance Committee members who work diligently maintaining our facilities, knowing that they are important to our continued ministry.

Lower Hall and Kitchen Renovation:

Speaking of diligence...It has taken almost a year to get the go-ahead to repair the damage in the lower hall and kitchen resulting from the flood in December of 2016. This has been a difficult, and incredibly time-consuming process. Without a doubt, the repairs would not have taken place were it not for the incredible work done by our Property and Finance Committee. I extend heartfelt thanks to them, and to **Bob Fletcher and Brian Wright** for the enormous amount of time and energy they have dedicated to the work done to the lower hall and kitchen.



And wait...did I mention the P&F Committee??? Did you know this committee would gladly welcome committed individuals to join their essential and hardworking team? I encourage you to join them if you feel led by God to do so. Remember that you will be helping our ministry flourish as well as maintain our beautiful church building. Please speak to me, or call the office for more information.

UNSUNG HEROES

Unsung Hero: FPC could not function without the incredible dedication of its volunteers and staff. Though I normally choose my “Unsung Hero” from our list of volunteers, in this newsletter I want to recognize and thank **Christy Cobb** for the work she does on behalf of our congregation in ministering to our youth.

I am very thankful for Christy, because she gives her very best to our youth at FPC, making sure they are welcomed, included and enriched by the many activities of the Sunday School. I work with Christy on a weekly basis, and I am aware of how single-mindedly Christy applies herself to the

tasks she is given. Christy also oversees the implementation of the PCC's 'Leading with Care' policy for the protection of children and vulnerable adults. In every way, Christy makes sure that our kids know they are a priority, and not simply "seen, but not heard." Please take the time to thank Christy for what she does here at FPC!



Welcome to our Newcomers! We are so blessed at First Church as we continue to welcome new people into our church family. Please feel free to contact me, either in person or by calling the office. I'd be delighted to meet with you at the church, or at my "second office" located at the Tim Hortons down the street from FPC, and get to know you better. We'd love you to join our church family, so don't be shy. Contact us!

If you are new to our church family, we hope you have begun taking your first steps in the life of this church. A growing and active church congregation is a blessing in many ways. We encourage one another, and work together for the good of others. I hope and pray that you will connect with the many ministries at FPC. Working together for the Kingdom of God is the best way to share in the joy of being a Christian. God can use your talents and dedication here at FPC, so dive in!

Mark Your Calendar:

- Nov 25** Saturday Breakfasts resume after downstairs restoration.
- Dec 2** "Joy to the World" Christmas Concert at FPC at 6:45 p.m.
- Dec 3** Mike featured on "Pastoral Perspective" CFCO 7:30-9:30 a.m.
- Dec 3** **Communion Sunday and welcoming of new members.** Advent begins.
- Dec 17** "The Mitten Tree" presented by the choir and Sunday School 10:30 a.m.
- Dec 24** Sunday morning carol service 10:30 a.m.
- Dec 24** **Christmas Eve service** 7:00 p.m.
- Jan 22-28** Week of Prayer for Christian Unity @ FPC



FPC Website: Please check out our church website at www.firstchatham.org. It's a great place to catch up with what's going on at First Church. I post my messages online, and you can listen to them by clicking on the "Current Message Series" link. You can also view photographs and descriptions of the different groups and ministries in our church. Please feel free to share this website with family, friends and neighbours. It is a great resource for anyone thinking about joining our church family.

First Church is also on **Facebook!** Go to First Church's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/FirstPresbyterianChatham and click "Like" on our main page. You will receive announcements, updates and articles of interest delivered right to your newsfeed.



As always, I invite you to participate in the worship and service life here at church. As we enter the season of Advent, I encourage you to plug in to Jesus who is the "reason for the season." Don't let the manic pace of the month ahead swallow you up, and extinguish the Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace in your soul.

Join us for Holy Communion, fellowship, service, worship and carol singing as a way of highlighting what is truly important in life – that God Almighty **"so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."**

Jesus is the
REASON
for the
Season

Blessings always,

Mike



His joy * His love * His peace
Our Hope! Merry Christmas!

