



First Presbyterian Church Communion - December 2022

Hi Everyone,

A few flurries are falling outside my window today, and the temperature has plummeted compared to last week. It's a bit strange to think I was in shorts and lying in my hammock less than a month ago! The very mild fall didn't feel natural, but the weather today is a reminder that yes, this is Canada after all. And on Facebook there are posts that declare: "Tomorrow is December!" Yep...we all know what that means: the Christmas rush is ON. Or in Biblical terms: Gird your loins, people!

Not surprisingly, I've begun to hear people around town asking each other "Are you ready for Christmas?" Maybe it's because I'm a minister, but every time I hear someone ask that question it triggers a moment of reflection on what I think Christmas is all about. Given that our North American culture tends to blow the meaning of Christmas clear out of the water, that question about "readiness" is a helpful reminder to focus on the profound nature of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ.

Thankfully, even when I get busy, I still appreciate the sense of hope and joy that permeates the entire season. Somehow, this season, despite its crass commercialism at times, is a visual reminder of our faith. Storefronts and houses covered in lights and decorations remind

me of the birth of our saviour Jesus Christ. The prophet Isaiah referred to him as: **"Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."** He is indeed "the reason for the season." I don't know about you, but the pandemic has



worn on me. I yearn to feel the presence of God in the world around me, so any reminder of Christ in our midst is most welcome.

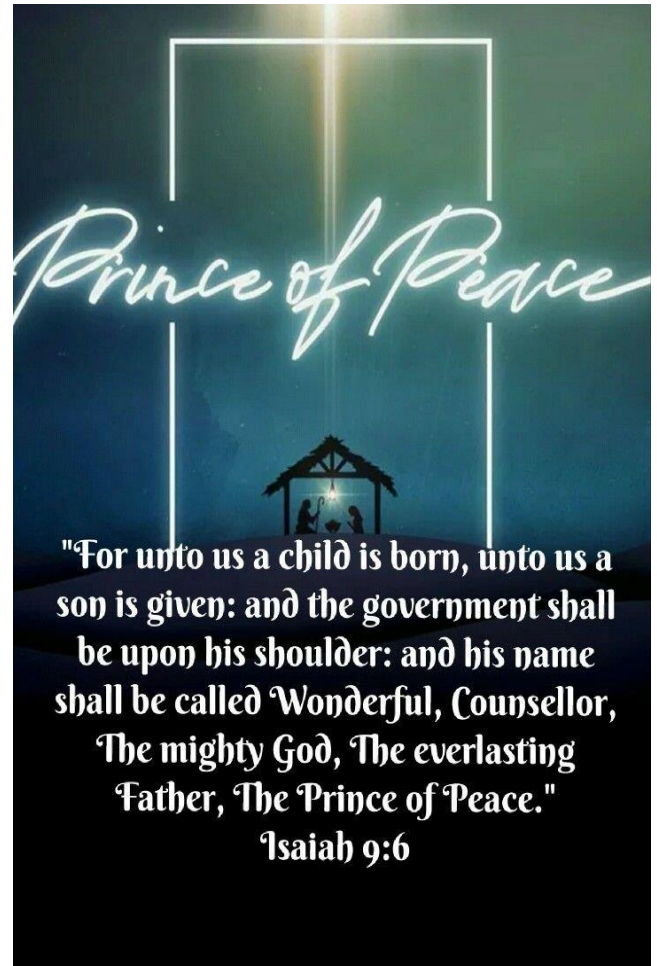
But, no doubt...things will likely get busy. So, it's important to consciously focus on Christ in the weeks to come. There can be so much to do to prepare for Christmas that we can miss the point almost completely. As followers of Jesus, we should, in some form or another, understand and appreciate *why* we celebrate. So, when people ask "Are you ready for Christmas?" we can answer with a confident "Yes!" even if we have not bought a single gift, or baked any goodies.

Answering "Yes" to that question does not happen by accident. It requires intention. First of all, be kind to yourself. Don't exhaust yourself trying to accomplish an impossible list of things to do. Believe it or not, you can say "no" to some of the things you think you have to do, but don't have the time to get done. Second, I encourage you to *give yourself* the time to reflect on what Jesus means to you, and to the world. That *gift*

of personal time will help you experience the joy of Christmas in a more meaningful way. There are many resources and devotionals online to help you with this. You can use the *Our Daily Bread* available here at church, or on the web at www.odb.org. The choice of devotional is not what matters. What matters is to read something daily that reminds you of the real importance and beauty of Christmas, because frankly, the hustle and bustle in December can drain the joy we might otherwise experience.

As I thought about what it means to be "**ready for Christmas,**" I reflected on how much our world needs Jesus, the "Prince of Peace." We are in a period of great upheaval, polarization, and disinformation. Nations, neighbours, and even families, are divided along political, national, racial, economic and religious lines. Too many people are falling for baseless conspiracy theories, and looking at others with suspicion. It is a miserable way to live. What a gift it would be to all humanity if the world accepted the gifts of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love that Jesus has to offer!

We may not be able to address all the problems in the world, but we can live in the hope, peace, joy and love of God no matter what is happening around us. Jesus lives in you and me, and all of us can work together to share the love of God in our



community, and extend justice and inclusion to all. That, to me, is the true wonder of Christmas. For we believe that **“God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”** God loves you and me, and calls us to love others in the same way.

Even though Covid still has a tenuous grip on our activities, there will be opportunities at FPC to focus on the true meaning of Christmas, and I invite you to join us. I have started my advent series **“God’s Christmas Carol,”** and I encourage you to join us at worship in the sanctuary through the Advent season. If you’ve been worshiping with us online, the Christmas Season is a good time to take your first steps in returning to worship in person. We miss you, and I think you likely miss our company too. And of course, attending worship in person means you will experience the joy of singing Christmas carols with your church family. Adam Shaw and the praise band are leading us in this season’s special music. You don’t really want to miss that, do you?

The church is wonderfully decorated for Christmas, and that makes coming to church even more special. I extend a huge thank you to **Judy McCarthy and Judi Aitken** and their group of volunteers who worked hard to make our church look so beautiful and inviting. It is a blessing to step into our sanctuary when it looks so beautiful! By the time you get this newsletter, poinsettias will have been placed in the sanctuary, adding that last special touch to our Christmas decorations.



We will be celebrating **Holy Communion** this **Sunday, December 4 at 10:30 a.m.** We continue with our partial Covid protocols, so we will be using the disposable wafer/juice packets. As before, you can bring bread and juice from home if you wish. I hope you can join us in the sanctuary to share in this important sacrament.



To help you get into an Advent frame of mind, the **CK Singers will be presenting a Christmas concert at FPC at 2 p.m** that same day. I hope you can join us in the sanctuary for the concert, to help you kick off the month of December with a strong reminder of what this amazing season is all about. Unfortunately, we will not be livestreaming this concert, so you will have to attend in person to enjoy it. And remember that masks will be mandatory for people in the audience.

Bible Study: Our Wednesday evening Zoom Bible study group is reading through the Gospel of Matthew, though we will be focusing on Advent until the new year. It's simple to participate in this friendly group. I send a weekly Zoom link by email to all participants. All you need to do is click on the link on Wednesdays at 7 p.m., and I will admit you into the Bible study. Please let me know or call the office if you'd be interested in joining this group, and I will add you to the Bible Study email list.



Sunday School: Our Sunday School continues online under the direction of our C.E. Coordinator Allison Shaw. Our teens participate in a Zoom meeting every Thursday, and Sunday School supplies have been delivered to our younger children at home.

The Sunday School families at First Church and Knox Presbyterian Church in Wallaceburg are once again busy filming a Christmas video presentation which will be shown during one of our services in December. The play is called **“The Nativity,”** and we look forward to the way in which our church kids will share the Christmas message with our two congregations!

It is my hope that within the coming year we can reintroduce our Sunday School program on Sunday mornings. For the time being, we do not have the students, or the volunteers able to commit to this ministry on a weekly basis. Please know that we will restart our classes on Sundays as soon as it is feasible, and safe, to do so. One thing for sure, should you care to help with Sunday School in the future, please talk to Allison. She will be glad to have you on her team.

Saturday Breakfast: We continue with our take-out breakfast ministry every Saturday from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. More people are relying on food assistance ministries and organizations in the city, as overall inflation, rent and the price of food are steadily increasing. We rarely have any food left on Saturdays, as we regularly serve 180 meals every week. Our guests come to the door on Fifth Street, and are given the number of meals they need for their family. As I have written to you before, I am humbled by the gratitude expressed by our guests, even though we are not changing their overall situation. And yet, our guests often say thank you and “God bless you!” as we hand out the breakfasts. We are glad to be able to bless people in this manner.



I am very thankful to announce that **Rebecca Ladd** is now coordinating our breakfast volunteers, following Mike Currie’s shockingly untimely death. We could not keep this ministry going without people who make sure everything is running smoothly every week. And this of course is true for all our volunteer cooks, servers and dishwashers who make it possible for guests to receive a hot and nutritious meal every Saturday morning.

It is very easy to serve our guests, or wash dishes on Saturday mornings. I encourage you to get in touch with Rebecca, the office, or me if you'd like to join our pool of volunteers. Rest assured that you will be paired with a seasoned pro, and you'll quickly find out how simple these jobs really are. And you will have the satisfaction of knowing you are helping individuals and families in need in our city.



Breakfast Grocery Coordinators and Shoppers: As you can well imagine, the food and supplies needed to serve 180 guests every Saturday do not appear magically on our shelves. They are ordered and bought by a group of volunteers who make sure everything is in stock for Saturday morning. This is a vitally important job that now could use several more volunteers, for as the saying goes “many hands make light work!”

These jobs are not as complicated and time consuming as you might think. For the moment, **Jodi Maroney** is organizing this group, and she will be glad to talk to you about what is involved in helping in this aspect of our Saturday Breakfast. Please prayerfully consider whether you could help in this very important team. Remember that God blesses us with his love, so that we can return that love to others. That love can be shown by the simple act of offering a meal to people in need. Won't you help?

Current Message Series:

God's Christmas Carol: (An Advent Series.) Many of us are familiar with Charles Dickens' story, “A Christmas Carol” in which miserly (and miserable!) Ebenezer Scrooge is visited by the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future. These three spirits lead Scrooge on a journey through time that transforms him into a better human being. This is a story about redemption and of new beginnings, ending in a high note of joy. Do you know that our God has provided the same redemption and new start for our lives no matter what we've been through? And unlike a novella, this story is true! Join us as we examine our past, present, and future to see what God has to say in, and for, our lives.

Nov 27 “A True Classic” Isaiah 9:1-7

Dec 4 “Free from the past.” Psalm 103:1-22

Dec 11 “Be present.” 1 John 1:1-10

Dec 18 “Living in the yet-to-come.” Rev 22:1-17

Dec 24 “All I want for Christmas.” Luke 2:1-21 **Christmas Eve Service 7 p.m.**

Dec 25 “A new beginning.” Luke 2:22-40

Upcoming Message Series:

“**Love letters from God.**” This series will start in January, and will run until the beginning of Lent. Stay tuned for info in further bulletins.

Your financial support:

Our offerings currently are not keeping up with our expenses. I am concerned about this, but not worried, because I know you care about this church and its ministry. So, I simply encourage you to continue with your prayerful and steady financial support of FPC. We run a very tight ship at FPC, so rest assured that your offerings are used in the wisest and most prudent way possible. I thank you for your ongoing generosity, because despite tough times, we can afford the staff



and facilities necessary to deliver the quality of ministry you love and count on.

One of the simplest ways to contribute financially to the church is to join our **Pre-Authorized Remittance** plan, in which your offering will be automatically withdrawn from your bank account every month. Jodi and I use this method as do many people at FPC. Please leave a message at the office if you'd like to find out more about PAR, and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

If you are not on PAR, but would like to continue your offerings, we have set up and auto deposit to FPC's bank account using the email office@firstchatham.org. You can e-transfer funds using that email. In the memo line please include your envelope number and where you want your funds designated (general operations, building fund, etc.).

Finally, if you are not comfortable with the above two methods, you can mail a cheque made out to “First Presbyterian Church” to Barb Capeling, our church treasurer,

who will deposit your cheque. Please do not send cash by mail! Barb's address is: Mrs. Barb Capeling, 30 O'Brien Drive, Chatham, ON., N7M 2E7

Urgent Need!!! Serve on the Property & Finance Committee: First Church is in special need of people to serve on this vitally important committee. Our ministry relies on the work of the P&F committee to oversee our financial obligations and church maintenance. Although everything looks "in place" when we gather for worship in person or online, nothing of what you expect from FPC happens by wishful thinking or by accident. It is the direct result of the work of people who serve behind the scenes, and who make sure every aspect of our ministry is in place and functions properly.



This team needs YOU! Covid has shrunk our volunteer base dramatically, and I worry that our remaining volunteers will burn out if no one steps in to help them. I am asking you again to prayerfully consider joining this committee to ensure that FPC can continue its ministry to our church family and to our community. This is a critical time in the life of this congregation which requires your service to ensure our church ministry will continue for years to come. Feel free to talk to me if you think you'd be able to serve in this capacity. And please, don't assume someone else is going to do it. So far, that has not happened!



Serve at First Church: These are ministries at FPC that would gladly welcome new volunteers. Covid has hit us hard, and I am quite concerned that people have stepped back from serving in person. Unfortunately, that means that the few people serving on these teams are working far harder than they should be. It is not fair to assume they will continue to carry the load indefinitely. I am asking you to prayerfully consider serving in any of the

teams listed below. All these teams need you! You can contact me, or Linda in the office, or speak directly to the people leading each team.

Property and Finance Committee – contact Rev. Mike

Pastoral Care team – contact Sue Easun

Audiovisual team – contact Barb Capeling

Livestreaming team – contact Rev. Mike

Saturday Breakfast – contact Rebecca Ladd

Greeters on Sunday – contact Mike Bennett

Breakfast grocery coordinators and shoppers – contact Jodi Maroney

Decorating team – Contact Judy McCarthy

Session Elder (see below)



Session Elder: In the Presbyterian Church in Canada, churches are run by a “Session” of elders. Session elders have final say in the decisions made by the church. They make their decisions based on the information, and needs, conveyed to them by the different teams and committees in the church. I have always found that the session at First Church has been open and transparent, and that decisions made by the elders reflect the call to serve

Jesus Christ, while also keeping the needs of the congregation in focus. The Session meets on the second Tuesday of every month, except for July and August.

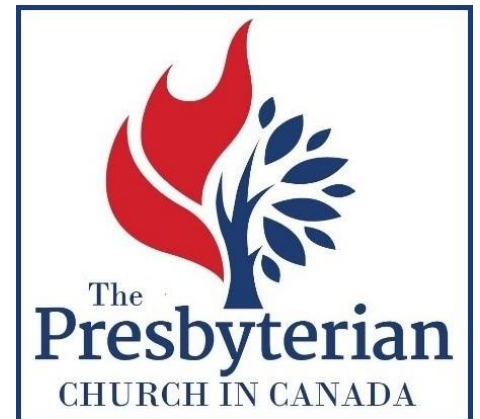
For the second time in my 18 years of ordained ministry, we need to elect new elders to serve on Session. Many of our elders have served faithfully for decades, and for various reasons, are no longer able to serve in this capacity. As well, Covid has made it difficult to ordain new elders, because we experienced long shut-downs in the early stages of the pandemic. Ideally, we require eleven elders on Session, yet we are currently only at seven elders.

Any full member of First Presbyterian Church can be nominated and ordained as an elder. Members must be nominated by others in the congregation, and after

approval by the Session are ordained by me at a worship service. I wish to start this process in the new year, and more information will follow.

Please be in prayer for this important milestone in our church life. I cannot stress enough how important it is to revitalize our eldership. In fact, I think it will determine whether we can weather the storm brought on by Covid, and the general decline of church affiliation which has been happening for many years now. Our faithful and hard-working Session elders will be thrilled to have new elders join their ranks. Again, my friends...PRAY, and be open to the possibility that the Holy Spirit may call you to serve in this capacity.

Presbytery Duties: I continue as Interim Moderator for New St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Dover, and St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Amherstburg. An Interim Moderator looks after a church which has no minister in the pulpit, and makes sure all administrative tasks are looked after. It is my hope that the church in Amherstburg can call a minister sometime in the following year, after which I can relinquish that role.



I am also leading a visitation team to Lakeshore St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Tecumseh as they sort through some recent challenges. This assignment should be wrapped up by the end of the year, but will require time to meet with the congregation, staff and minister. I will then present a report to Presbytery, which I hope to have finished by mid to late January.

As I have said to you previously, First Church is my primary focus, but my responsibilities as Interim Moderator and convener of a visitation team are mandated by the Presbyterian Church in Canada. These responsibilities will use up some of the time I would normally use for visitation in our congregation. Nonetheless, you are my greatest priority, and I will do my best to respond to your pastoral needs in a timely fashion. Please don't hesitate to call me if you are in need of pastoral care, or know of someone who does. I am never too busy for the needs of the people here at FPC.



I am looking forward to spending the Advent Season with you. I love you all dearly, and my deepest wish is that you might experience the presence of God as we anticipate and celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

I truly hope you can join us for **Holy Communion** this Sunday, and all our Advent worship services. We will be celebrating both **Christmas Eve (7 p.m.)** and **Christmas Sunday (10:30 a.m.)** in the sanctuary. As always, all our services will be brimming with the Christmas carols and music that you love.

Once again, if you've been watching us online, this is the perfect time to renew your commitment to your church by returning to worship in person, and by volunteering in the teams and committees I have mentioned above. We really need you all to step back into the full life here at FPC.

Regardless, I wish you God's deep Hope, Peace, Joy and Love as we journey through the Advent Season. May God's presence be with you and guide you in this month and the year to come.

Blessings,

Mike



FPC Website: Please check out our new church website at www.firstchatham.org You can view videos of our worship services by clicking on the “Current Message Series” link. You can also find about the groups, Bible studies 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.



Email List: By now you should be receiving an email church bulletin every week which has news and the link to our service. Please call Linda Weeks in the office at 519-352-2313 to us know if you are not receiving emails from the office or from me, and wish to do so.