Mason First Presbyterian Church

The CORNERSTONE

You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone. Ephesians 2:19-20

December 2024

The Worshipping Assembly

A Royal Priesthood

In Jesus Christ, the Church is called to be a royal priesthood, giving glory to God in worship and devoting itself to God's service in the world. Worship is a collective activity of the people of God and an expression of our common life and ministry. It demands the full, conscious, and active participation of the whole body of Christ, with heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Children and youth bring special gifts and grow in their faith through their regular participation in worship. Those who plan and lead worship should provide for their full participation in the Service for the Lord's Day.

The ordering of worship should reflect the richness of cultural diversity in the congregation and the local context in which it ministers. The order of worship should provide for and encourage the participation of all; no one is to be excluded.

— from The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), "Directory for Worship"

Session Synopsis

Session Elders each had an opportunity to express their concerns on the November 10th election sermon in response to a letter to Session on the issue. Concerns expressed including timing the topic with honoring veterans, why politics are even considered a sermon topic, and the safety to express positive or negative comments.

Session approved the transfer of five Active Roll members to the less active Associates Roll. The Clerk of Session also announced the expectation of a bequest from the Virginia Foy estate.

The Deacons reported efforts for collecting food and gifts for Christmas baskets to include setting up the "giving tree" in the Memorial Room.

Pastor Bill reported that Office Manager Jessica has started updating the church Facebook page with current church activities such as pie sales and rummage sale. The office team, having completed the initial issuance of name tags is now developing a new printed directory. Pastor Bill also reported on possible Presbytery grants to offset upcoming medical coverage cost increases from the Board of Pensions.

The Personnel Committee will be developing a policy addressing general harassment based on similar policies in area businesses. Such policy is considered prudent and best practices. The committee is also reviewing the new State of Michigan labor law on earned sick time that now applies to non-profit organizations. Session approved a position description for Youth Ministry Coordinator with some dissension. Concern was expressed for the need of such a paid position and the impact on existing Spiritual Growth staff duties. The committee presented an alternative to offset the increasing costs of cleaning services, that of the Sexton performing the cleaning tasks. Discussion will continue following research on the impact of time and additional wages to the current Sexton position foreseen has less cost without contractor overhead costs involved. The committee presented Pastor Bill's suggested changes to the 2025 Terms of Call. Session approved forwarding the recommended 2025 Terms of Call for congregational approval at the November 24th Special Congregational meeting .

The Spiritual Growth Committee church youth participated with other area church youth at the November "Friends Giving" event at the ROC. Both high school and middle school youth participated in our church only local Urban Plunge activities, preparing boutonnieres for veterans and shoe box projects for Operation Christmas Child. The children's Christmas pageant will be part of the December 15th worship service with the youth also participating with the Sanctuary Choir at the December 22nd service.

The Administration Committee noted the improved Sanctuary wall sconce lighting resulting from bulb replacement with upgraded new LED bulbs. The enhanced lighting was especially appreciated by Choir and Bell Choir members at the east end of the choir loft no longer having to read music in the shadows. The committee has posted a streetlight out complaint to the City and Consumers Energy to overcome the dark Barnes Street exit ramp.

The Music and Worship committee is preparing for the Advent and Christmas season. Hanging of the greens is scheduled for December 7th at 10 am. Details for December 15th and 22nd are pending with the participation of the youth.

The Mission Committee received no response for an adult mission trip this year to Benton Harbor. Resources are being reallocated for an adult mission trip this coming year to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

The Nominating Committee reported a nearly full slate to nominate for congregational election of Elders, Deacons, and Nominating Committee members at the November 24th Special Congregational meeting.

The Bridge Builders Task Force reported on the 25 attendees to the October viewing of the video "They Even Took the Dirt". Coming soon will be a discussion on the book "The False White Gospel".

The Finance Committee reported on the progress of 2025 pledges, the shortage of total projected income, and the need for committees to again review 2025 budget proposals. Session can, hopefully, approve a balanced 2025 General Fund budget at the December meeting.

Session approved the Parish Life Committee recommendation to amend "Guidelines for Reviewing Active Church Membership". The guideline requires annual review of membership status and making an attempt to contact the member pending any change to status. The committee reported the Rummage sale netted approximately $500 on two weekdays. What if the sale included a Saturday?

Bruce F. Archer
Clerk of Session

Deacons

Thank you for your generous support of the Coats For Kids project in October. It was the largest, most successful drive in its eleven year history. 1,518 coats, 499 pairs of snow pants, plus hats, gloves, boots, etc. were given to 569 families.

We are now collecting food items for the annual Christmas Basket Project. Our grocery list includes: canned vegetables, canned fruit, stuffing mix, instant potatoes, canned gravy, crackers, cereal, mac & cheese, peanut butter, jelly, spaghetti noodles and sauce, pasta/rice mix, cranberry sauce, apple sauce, canned chicken, tuna, Hershey's miniatures candy, laundry soap, dish soap, liquid hand soap, paper towels, toilet paper. There are copies of the shopping list on the table in the Memorial Room and items can be dropped off there. Thank you for your generosity!

Our church is supporting a local family with ten children, and eight seniors this Christmas and will be filling Christmas baskets with food, gifts, and clothing. We are hoping to add a few more children and families to our list soon. There will be a Deacon Giving Tree in the Memorial Room with paper gift tags, and the Sign-up Genius online application to assign gifts. Please go to: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20F0A45A9AA2CA1FD0-53536867-first/96510242 and make your selection. The deadline for returning gifts is December 13.

Lovely poinsettias will grace our sanctuary for Christmas. If you would like to order a poinsettia in remembrance of loved ones, please complete the order sheet posted outside the office. The final day to order is December 8.

There is still an open Sunday for sanctuary flowers on June 1. Please let us know if you would like to donate flowers. Please continue to pray for those in our church family that are in need of our love, care and support.

- Donna Hujsak, Secretary

Parish Life

Birthdays in December

Le Ji (Claire)	12/01	Jessica Tessman	12/19
Peggy Stolz	12/05	Jay Harkness	12/23
Gerald Woolston	12/05	Susan Blonshine	12/24
Melissa Baker	12/08	Barbara Georgescu	12/25
Andrew Mackey	12/11	Dave Barber	12/27
Rick Cote	12/13	Lisa Castle	12/28
Tim Hammond	12/13	Aimee Cruickshank	12/28
Eric Foster	12/14	Beckett Barber	12/30
Jane Somerville	12/14	Caidra VanDyke	12/30
Mary Lou French	12/17		

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

For 2024 we are pleased to offer an in-person Christmas Eve worship service for all generations, beginning at 6:30 pm. Prelude music will begin at 6:15 pm. The service will include familiar carols, music from the Sanctuary Choir, Bell Choir, pianist Le Ji, and guest organist Laura Johnson, a storytelling time for the children, and a candlelit singing of "Silent Night." The service will be about an hour long. A collection will be taken during the service to benefit Capital Area Community Services and Mason Community Services. Following the service, meet and greet friends, family, and new acquaintances. Children of all ages are welcome at the service. If your little one needs a break you are also welcome to take them to the nursery (which will not be staffed). The service will be broadcast live on our Facebook and YouTube pages. We look forward to seeing you there!

Spiritual Growth

Youth Program

'Tis the season for Celebrating the Birth of Jesus through Lessons, Mission, Fun, and even two Pageant opportunities!

The youth are invited to participate in our traditional pageant, but also in a joint performance with the choir.

Important Dates to Remember

December 7th 11am – "Hanging of the Greens"- All youth are invited to decorate the youth rooms (and assist adults where needed around the church). Soup and hot chocolate will be served. All help is appreciated.

December 8th 12:15pm - (following the worship service) – Youth are invited to practice with the adult choir for the up-coming music and drama event.

December 15th- Traditional Advent Pageant - during the worship service. Please have youth arrive by 9:15am to have them dress-up in costumes.

Pageant Sunday Pot-Luck – Everyone is invited to a pot-luck in the Dining Hall following the worship service.

December 18th – Wonderful Wednesday Hanukkah Lesson and Mission work for the Deacon Baskets.

December 22nd – Choir/Youth Drama – during the worship service. Please have your youth arrive at 9am for practice with the choir.

December 22nd – "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever" movie at Celebration Cinema. Lunch will be served prior to carpooling to the theater. Exact time of the movie TBD.

December 29th and January 5th – no Sunday school - related to winter break. Kid's Church in the youth room will continue.

December 25th and January 1st – no Wonderful Wednesday – related to winter break.

Adult Program

Adults will be starting our Advent study December 1st, and continuing the 8th, and the 22nd. We'll be using the book "Calling All Angels: An Advent Study of Fearlessness and Strength" by Erin Wathen. This study takes a look at the question "What would you do if you weren't afraid?" through the Advent stories of Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds.

All are invited to the annual "Hanging of the Greens" on Saturday, December 7, 2024 at 10 am. Come help us prepare our church for the joyous Advent and Christmas season. Light refreshments will be provided. Hope to see you there.

Worship & Music

December 2024 Worship Calendar

December 1	First Sunday of Advent	~ Sacrament of the Lord's Supper ~ Rev. Dr. Jim Hegedus preaching
December 8	Second Sunday of Advent	
December 15	Third Sunday of Advent	~ Children's Christmas Presentation
December 22	Fourth Sunday of Advent	~ Special Choral Presentation
December 24	The Nativity of Jesus Christ (Christmas Eve)	~ Worship at 6:30 pm (the service should last about an hour)
December 29	First Sunday of Christmas	~ Two-Cents-a-Meal Hunger Offering ~ Rev. Dr. Jim Hegedus preaching

Finance

Financial Report through October 31, 2024

General Fund Balance: January 1, 2024	0
Income through October 31, 2024	$ 325,757
Expenses through October 31, 2024	$ 289,920
Ending Balance (10/31/24)	$ 35,837

General Fund Balance 10/31/24	$ 35,837
Revolving Accounts Balance	59,526
Reserve Accounts Balance	68,731
Investments as of 9/30/24 (end of 3rd quarter 2024)	555,758
Net Financial Position (10/31/24)	$719,852

Anticipated pledged income through October $238,233

Actual pledged income through October $246,970

Preparing for 2025 continues!

THANKS to the 71 members, families, and friends who by the end of October made their financial commitment to the church for 2025! Hopefully we will receive additional pledges over the next two weeks, as financial planning for 2025 is underway, with your Session scheduled to adopt the 2025 budget at its meeting on December 19.

We currently estimate that $394,002 is necessary in 2025 to continue what we are currently doing. However, based on the pledges currently received, as well as projections from other sources of income supporting our operations, there is a gap of nearly $40,000 between total projected income and requested expenses for 2025.

Unfortunately, while the number of pledges has increased from 67 in 2024 to currently 71 for 2025, the total amount currently pledged is nearly $19,000 or 7% less than the current year. Pledges provide nearly 80% of the income supporting our Operating Budget.

Our projected expenses for 2025 are approximately 7% or nearly $27,000 greater than budgeted, due primarily to inflationary pressures as well as some need for additional funding to maintain our level of service. Approximately 65% of what we spend goes to support the dedicated individuals who have been chosen to direct and assist us; 22% goes to keeping our church building open and functioning; and the remaining 13% – in addition to the donations to the many projects spearheaded by our Board of Deacons – goes to support our youth and help those in need in our community and elsewhere.

Arriving at the projected $354, 157 to be used for budget income in 2025 will require using $37,000 from our financial reserves. So doing is projected to reduce our Contingency reserve from 15% or the current budget to 10% of the requested 2025 budget.

It is our life in and our commitment to our church which will be of immense help in following the two commandments which guide our life – LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART and LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF!

It is not too late to make a financial commitment for 2025 to our church! Pledges can be returned by mail to the church at 131 East Maple Street, Mason 48854 or by email to jess@masonpresbyterian.org. Pease contact the church office at (517) 676-9333 if you would like a pledge form. If you have any questions about the financial aspects of your church, or the importance of your financial commitment, please contact Finance Chair Jerry Ambrose, any member of the Finance Committee, any member of the Session, or Pastor Bill Pinches.

Mission Committee

The Mission Committee is once again planning an adult mission trip to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. The trip is through the Re-Member Organization and takes place during Senior Week which is September 13-19, 2025. As of now the total cost per person is $800. This cost includes lodging, meals, and transportation while on the reservation. The Mission Committee will be responsible for all travel expenses, including hotel rooms, meals, and gas money for the trip there and back. Individuals are responsible for the $800 fee.

This will be our third adult mission trip to Pine Ridge. While on the Rez, we will be building outhouses, ramps, and beds for families who need these things. We also may be skirting trailer homes to provide better protection against the winter conditions or working at Feather II to harvest and care for the gardens that provide fresh vegetables for families. The most important things we will be doing are interacting with the Lakota people, learning about their culture, and recognizing how the injustices of the past affect the lives of the Lakota people today.

If you are interested in going on this mission trip, feel free to contact Debbie Markiewicz or any member of the mission committee.

Thank you!

To our church family:

Many thanks for the prayers, cards and calls to John and I over the past few weeks. And a huge thank you to the Deacons, Kathy Oesterle, and Kate Barber for all the wonderful food. It all served to help get us through a rough few weeks. It is such a blessing to be part of such a great group of Christians.

Sincerely, Sandy and John Diehl

Bridge Builders

Review of "Waking Up White" by Debby Irving

For twenty-five years, Debby Irving sensed inexplicable racial tensions in her personal and professional relationships. As a colleague and neighbor, she worried about offending people she dearly wanted to befriend. As an arts administrator, she didn't understand why her diversity efforts lacked traction. As a teacher, she found her best efforts to reach out to students and families of color left her wondering what she was missing. Then, in 2009, one "aha!" moment launched an adventure of discovery and insight that drastically shifted her worldview and upended her life plan.

I found this book to be easily readable and I identified often with the author as she began to recognize her un-asked-for and unearned privilege as a white, middle (or upper-middle) class person growing up and going out into the world shaped, dominated and controlled by people just like her (and me). Each chapter ends with questions for self-reflection and examination, which can be particularly useful in discovering things about yourself you may not have considered before.

Monte Shuck

Find the latest, up-to-date church calendar at masonpresbyterian.org

WORSHIP AT
MASON FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

In-Person and Livestreaming at 10:00am each Sunday

Bulletin Submissions are due by 9:00am every Monday. Submissions for *The Cornerstone* are due by noon on the 15th day of every month.
Please be prompt. Late submissions may not be honored. We are now attempting to publish the newsletter the week following Session.

The CORNERSTONE

Mason First Presbyterian Church
MINISTERS - All Members
PASTOR - Rev. Bill Pinches
PARISH ASSOCIATE - Rev. Dr. Jim Hegedus
PASTOR EMERITUS - Rev. Charlie Herrick
SPIRITUAL GROWTH DIRECTOR - Lori Filka
SANCTUARY CHOIR DIRECTOR & BELL CHOIR DIRECTOR - Deb Melse
OFFICE MANAGER - Jessica Tessman
FINANCIAL SECRETARY - Jess Weber
CHORAL MUSIC ACCOMPANIST - Le Ji ("Claire")
OFFICE ASSISTANT - Nancy Sue MacDonald
SEXTON - Eric VanDyke
ADULT SPIRITUAL GROWTH COORDINATOR - Michelle Mackey

ELDERS:
2024 - Jerry Ambrose, Lucinda Davenport, Loren Harkness, Tonya Seely.
2025 - Doreen Chapman, Mary Garland Jackson, Monte Shuck (*Recording Clerk*).
2026 - Bruce Archer (*Clerk of Session*), Ginnie Gibson, Jane Hamelink, Tim Hammond.

DEACONS:
2024 - Donna Hujsak, Issie Nielsen, Camille Subject.
2025 - Marge Clarke, Julie Dart, Timothy Pinches, Tom Seely (*Moderator*).
2026 - Ron Dlouhy, Bill Leutscher, Sandy Leutscher, Nancy Sue MacDonald, Laurie McGonigal.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.
Numbers 6.24-26

From The Bridge Builders For Racial Atonement Task Force:

If you were unable to join us for the viewing of the video "They Even Took The Dirt" and would like to watch it, it is available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5LXCcEes2c&t=43s