

THE EVANGEL – APRIL 2026

News and Ministry of the First Presbyterian Church

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PASTOR



Without a Paddle

A few years ago I read *Canoeing the Mountains* by Tod Bolsinger, and one image from that book has stayed with me.

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark set out on their journey west with canoes. Canoes made sense. Rivers were their map, their method, their confidence. And for a long time, those canoes carried them exactly where they needed to go.

Until they reached the Rocky Mountains.

At that moment, everything that had worked stopped working. The canoes that once meant progress suddenly became a burden. If they were going to move forward, they would have to leave behind what had once served them so well and learn an entirely new way to travel.

They had to trade their canoes for snowshoes.

Bolsinger uses that moment as a picture of leadership in changing times, but it also describes something deeply personal for each of us. We often move through life assuming that if we just try harder, double down, or become more disciplined in the same patterns, things will finally change. Yet many of us quietly know the frustration of ending up in the same place again and again.

We carry habits, reactions, and rhythms that once helped us cope or succeed, but now leave us feeling stuck. We wrestle with anxiety, frustration, anger, or shame. We want peace, but our souls feel unsettled. We want joy, but something always seems to drain it away.

And so we try harder at the same approach.

We tell ourselves we will think differently, do better, push through. But rarely do we stop to ask whether the very approach we are using is part of the problem. Like explorers gripping their canoes in the mountains, we keep holding onto what no longer carries us forward.

If we are honest, many of us have not invested much in our spiritual lives. Prayer becomes occasional. Scripture is something we hear on Sundays but rarely open during the week. Our identity as disciples of Jesus does not always shape our schedules, our conversations, or our decisions in any consistent way.

Then we wonder why things are not changing.

Growth, especially spiritual growth, does not happen by accident. It requires intention. It requires new pathways. It requires, at times, leaving the canoe behind.

This is where the wisdom of Dallas Willard becomes so helpful. In *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, he reminds us that real transformation does not come by sheer willpower. We cannot simply decide to be more patient, more loving, or more at peace and expect it to happen.

Instead, we train for it.

Willard describes spiritual disciplines as practices that help us do what we cannot do by direct effort. In other words, they are like exercises for the soul. Just as physical training develops muscles we did not have before, spiritual disciplines form in us a kind of life with God that we could not produce on our own.

He speaks of two broad kinds of disciplines.

There are disciplines of abstinence, like solitude, silence, and fasting, which create space in our lives by removing noise and distraction. And there are disciplines of engagement, like prayer, study, worship, and service, which actively draw us into the life of God.

These practices may seem simple, even small. But over time, they reshape us. They retrain our hearts. They quiet what is restless and strengthen what is weak. They open us to the work God has been ready to do in us all along.

If we want something different in our lives, we will have to do something different in our lives.

So here is a simple invitation for our church.

For the next four weeks, choose one thing. Just one.

Maybe it is setting aside ten minutes each morning for prayer before anything else begins. Maybe it is reading a chapter of Scripture each day. Maybe it is practicing silence for a few minutes in the evening. Maybe it is gathering your family for a short time in the Word together.

Do not try to change everything. Just one thing.

And as you begin each day, bring that commitment before the Lord. Ask Him to meet you in it. Ask Him to use it to shape you, to steady you, to draw you closer to Himself.

The mountains may still be ahead. But God has not left you without a way forward.

It may simply be time to step out of the canoe.

-Pastor Ben

START DATE ELEVATORPROJECT:



We expect the mechanical upgrades on our elevator to begin on the Monday after Easter.

- **April 12**, there will only be one service at 11:00 AM in the sanctuary.
- **Starting April 19**, the 8:30 AM service will be temporarily moved to the downstairs chapel. We encourage those with mobility restrictions to attend the 8:30 AM service in the chapel, as there will be no stair-free access to the main sanctuary.
- We will keep you advised as to the progress of this project, which we expect will take about four weeks to complete. Thank you in advance for your patience!



The Mission Committee will host the **April 12 congregation lunch** following the 11:00 a.m. worship service (There will not be an 8:30 a.m. service this day). The menu is pulled pork with buns. The congregation is asked to bring sides and desserts to share.



PLEASE HELP US CARE FOR OUR CHURCH BUILDING by checking the doors when you leave. If you are using the church in the evening, take a moment before you go to make sure all exterior doors are securely locked. This simple step helps keep our church safe and secure for everyone. Thank you for your help and attention.



AN EVENING WITH JASON GRAY

Looking for the perfect way to honor Mom and recharge your soul? Mark your calendars! We are thrilled to announce that contemporary Christian artist Jason Gray will be joining us for a special night of music and storytelling.

First Presbyterian Church, Meadville
Sunday, May 10th (Mother's Day!)
6:00 PM in the Sanctuary
\$15.00 per person


Why You Can't Miss This: This will be a special evening for everyone in the family to enjoy hit songs like "Remind Me Who I AM" and "With Every Act of Love."

Renew your Spirit: Jason is known for his raw, honest songwriting and unique wit. It's more than a concert; it's a chance to find encouragement and spiritual refreshment.



Tickets



Playlist 

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/jason-gray-concert-tickets-1985727699002?aff=oddtcreator>



CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL

April's Big Idea: "Because Jesus loves me, He equips me with His armor to face any spiritual battle!"

This curriculum highlights how our personal relationship with Jesus and salvation through faith in Him are mirrored in the Armor of God. Each piece symbolizes aspects of Jesus' love and sacrifice, reinforcing our faith and helping us stand strong against spiritual challenges. We'll talk about the Belt of Truth, Breastplate of Righteousness, Shield of Faith, Helmet of Salvation & Shoes of Peace.

"Rejoice as He is Risen." Have a blessed Easter!

- The Sunday School Staff.



COMPASSION SUNDAY IS

APRIL 26. Our Sunday school

class supports two Compassion children from Haiti, Mimine and Darlyn, through their weekly donations and pen pal letters. Our young disciples are accepting a special offering on April 26 before and after services to support these Haitian children.



Children's Message If you have a heart for our children and would be willing to occasionally lead the children's message, please let Pastor Ben know. Thank you for supporting this important ministry and caring so deeply about the faith of our children.



Blast Meets Sunday Mornings at 9:45

AM in the Youth Room. All junior high and senior high students are welcome.

In April, the youth will be learning how to navigate and read the Bible effectively. They will be reflecting on the Easter season and renewed/new life in Jesus.



DID YOU KNOW?

The talented teens of our Youth Group hand designed and painted Easter Cards for our members in nursing homes.



EVERY BUNNY LOVES A GOOD BOOK, and we have so many for you! Stop in the Library and Check Them Out

APRIL YOUTH SPOTLIGHT



CARSON HILBURN

15 years old

Cambridge Springs High School

9th Grade

1.) If you could instantly learn any skill (like an instrument, sport, or art), what would you choose?

I would choose basketball. I'm not very good but I'm sure I'd enjoy it if I was good at it.

2.) What's the best snack to eat during a movie or game night?

If I could choose, I'd choose Twizzlers.

3.) Which subject would you make more fun and how would you do it?

I would make history more fun by adding videos rather than book work.

4.) If you could make one big difference in the world, what problem would you want to help solve?

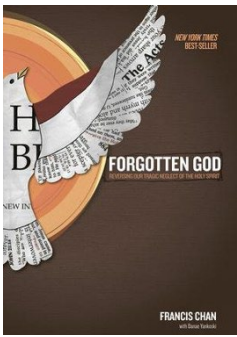
If I could solve any problem, I would try to help with climate change.

5.) If you could ask Jesus one question face-to-face, what would it be?

I would ask him why the Universe is so vast and complex assuming there is no other life out there.

6.) What do you hope that the church will be known for?

I hope the church will be known for its friendliness and accessibility.



“The Forgotten God” by Francis Chan

April 12, 19, 26, May 3, 10, 17

The Adult Sunday School will be exploring Francis Chan’s THE FORGOTTEN GOD. This study offers us a compelling invitation to understand, embrace, and

follow the Holy Spirit’s guidance in our lives. Through solid scripture and a lively narrative, Chan returns us to the Holy Spirit as the Bible described Him. Chan reminds us that we were not created and saved merely to survive our time on earth. In this season following Easter, we will expand our understanding of how the Lord intends for us to live a Spirit-filled life.



HOPE BIBLE STUDY will meet the second Thursday of each month (except June, July and August) in the library at 1:30 PM. All women of the church are invited to attend. The next Bible study is

Thursday, April 9.



PRAYING FOR CHILDREN
(momsinprayer.org)

You are invited to come and lift your children and their schools in prayer and experience the comfort and power of prayer. We will meet on April 14, 21, and 28 at 1:00 p.m. in the church library.



SOULSTICE will return to the first Wednesday of each month at 7:15 p.m. There will be no Soulstice gatherings in July or August.



KNIT UNTO OTHERS will meet on Wednesday, April 8 at 1:00 p.m. in the church library. Anyone

interested in knitting, crocheting or cross stitching is welcome. We make prayer squares and shawls for members and friends who are struggling.



LEPW SPRING GATHERING

Church: Eastminster Presbyterian

Date: Saturday, April 25

Time: 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Topic: Compassion and Connection: Illuminating God’s Presence through Spiritual Care

Keynote Speaker: Chaplain (Major) Mel Baars O’Malley, currently stationed at Walter Reed Medical Center in Bethesda, MD.

To Register: Please call 814-455-7819 or send an email to office@eastminstererie.com.

Deadline: April 13

Dearest FPC Friends and Family,



Thank you for welcoming my mom into our church family with open arms. Your prayers, visits, calls and cards meant the world to my mom and my family. Please continue to pray for myself and my family as we navigate a new life without our Matriarch. I know God is with us and will give us strength and courage to face whatever is ahead.

With a grateful heart. - **Kris Lubomski and Family**



The Mission Committee

Focus for April is

The Meadville Free Clinic.

We’re collecting small packets of Band-Aids, Neosporin, alcohol wipes, small note pads, short pens and any other small items for first aid kits. The donated items will be packaged into sandwich size zip-lock bags. Larger personal hygiene items can be donated as also. A box of free items is kept in the waiting room of the clinic for those in need. Thank you for your support.

EASTER SEASON

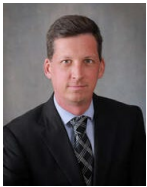


EASTER ISN’T JUST A SUNDAY;

IT IS A SEASON. One day out of 365 is hardly sufficient to celebrate

BEGINS the great mystery of our faith – that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Accordingly, the season of Easter lasts seven weeks (a “week of weeks”), spanning the 50 days from the Sunday of the Resurrection to Pentecost Sunday and encompassing the festival of the Ascension of the Lord. The season of Easter is intended to be a joyful time for celebrating the presence of the risen Christ in the church. (pcusa.org)

NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR OF MUSIC



Before I say anything else, I want to express my sincere appreciation to the many people pitching in to make our Holy Week observances so meaningful: singers, instrumentalists, liturgists, ushers, audio-visual technicians, and those who help beautify our sanctuary with banners and flowers. Thank you, everyone, for your dedication to our worship and witness!

In the week following Easter, the long-awaited mechanical improvements to our elevator are expected to commence. At that time the 8:30 service will be temporarily relocated to the downstairs chapel. Those with mobility restrictions are encouraged to attend the 8:30 service once the project is underway, as there will be no stair-free access to the main sanctuary. We expect this work to take about four weeks to complete.

I also want to draw your attention to Allegheny College's spring choral showcase, taking place at Shafer Auditorium at 3:15 PM on Saturday the 18th. All the college students who sing in our choir are participating in this concert (as well as two members of our Session); once again I'll be the piano accompanist for the afternoon.

The following weekend, on Sunday the 26th, we'll have an opportunity to acknowledge our choir at the 11:00 service on what will be their last Sunday with us before their summer break. (Normally the choir sings through the beginning of May, but this year my own vacation plans require us to shorten the season a bit.) In particular, we'll recognize four singers whose time with us is coming to an end as they prepare to graduate from Allegheny College. I encourage you to join us on the 26th to wish those students well as they head off into the world!

Finally, you've probably heard the buzz by now that Christian singer-songwriter Jason Gray will be performing in our sanctuary on Sunday, May 10th. Jason records and performs his music all over the country, and so we're quite fortunate that we were able to secure a date on his calendar. Details of the concert are on page 6 of this newsletter. Mark your calendars and buy your tickets now for what will be a remarkable evening of music!

Until next time,

Kevin



STEPHEN MINISTRY

is a lay caring ministry being used by more than 13,000

congregations worldwide to increase care and outreach to hurting people. Through Stephen Ministry, congregations are able to equip and empower a team of laypeople, Stephen Ministers—who provide one-to-one, Christ-centered care to people experiencing grief, health issues, divorce, spiritual crisis, job loss, infertility, or other life difficulties. Since Stephen Ministry began in 1975, millions of people have received care from a Stephen Minister. Visit stephenministries.org to see stories about the difference Stephen Ministers are making in people's lives. If you, a friend or family member are going through a difficult time and would like to receive care from one of First Presbyterian Church's Stephen Ministers please contact the church office at 814-333-2161.



1. Owen Dill
2. Marilyn Stallard
3. Addilynn Mumau
10. Logan Luce
11. Bob Engels
12. Doris Edinger
13. Kate Chapel
17. Shirley Nossokoff
Annie Stoner
23. Kendra Fischer
24. Sonya Eagles-Dill
Sylvia Bridge
Maggie Chapel
26. Linda Bennett
27. Vickie Fischer
30. Bill DeArment



Wednesday of Holy Week

7:15 PM - *Soulstice*

Maundy Thursday

7:30 PM - *Tenebrae with Holy Communion*

Good Friday

12 Noon - *Musical Reflections on the Seven Last Words of Christ*

Easter Sunday

8:30 AM & 11:00 AM - *Festive Worship*
(choir & brass at 11:00 AM only)



THE JOY OF RESURECTION

We Christians simply cannot get over the reality of the Resurrection. For us, the fact that God raised Christ from the dead proves that Christ's way alone is God's answer to the sins and horrors of the world. The truths Christ taught when he walked on earth stand solid and irrefutable. The light he brought is the only light that never goes out, for it is the eternal light of God's glory. Christ's life is the clearest example of how God intends for us to live. His way is the way that makes the most sense for our lives on this earth. The saints throughout history have shown that again and again. (ChurchArt.com)



A SPECIAL THANK YOU to everyone who donated Easter candy for the Easter Egg

Hunt! Thank you to all the volunteers who made this year's Easter Egg Hunt a special event for the children and their families.



Church Picnic **SAVE THE DATE:** Our church picnic will be on Sunday, July 12th starting at 11:30 a.m. at the Kenneth A. Beers Jr, Bicentennial Park. We encourage able bodied church members to invite/bring church members to the picnic that are homebound and/or living in care facilities. The picnic is enjoyable for all ages.



A PRAYER FOR OPEN HEARTS AND MINDS

O Lord, our heavenly Father, in you is the fullness of light and wisdom. We ask that you enlighten our minds through the work of your Holy Spirit. Clear away distraction and doubt. Help us turn our full attention to you.

Give us grace to receive your Word with reverence and humility. Shape our hearts so we may listen not only with our ears, but with willing spirits, ready to be taught and transformed. Remind us that true understanding does not come from our own insight or effort, but from your truth revealed to us in love.

As we hear and reflect on Scripture today, draw us closer to you. Strengthen our faith, deepen our trust and guide us in the way we should go. May your Word take root within us and bear fruit in our lives, bringing honor to your name.

We offer this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, through whom all wisdom and grace are given. Amen.
(ChurchArt.com)



PASTORAL VISITS AND MINISTERIAL CARE.

If you or a loved one have been hospitalized, have undergone a large life change, or need spiritual guidance and would like a visit from your pastor, please contact Rev. Ben Black or the church office. Additionally, The Stephen Ministry has 6 people who are available to pray with you and render spiritual support.



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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

CHURCH STAFF

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Minister of Music: Kevin Dill
Administrative Assistant: Mary Zahora
Financial Secretary: Kris Lubomski
Custodian: Chris Wade

Email: firstchurch@meadvillefpc.org
Find us: www.meadvillefpc.org and
www.facebook.com/FPCMeadville

*Easter Sunday - No Sunday School or Youth Group,
April 12 - 11 AM Service Only*



SUNDAY WORSHIP

8:30 & 11:00 AM

(11:00 AM Service is available on YouTube)

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Adult Sunday School - 9:30 AM
Children's Sunday School - 9:45 AM
Youth Group - 9:45 AM