

# THE EVANGEL – MARCH 2025

## News and Ministries of the First Presbyterian Church



### A MESSAGE FROM OUR SENIOR PASTOR



#### What's Next?

One of my greatest joys as a pastor is visiting with people in the church. My goal remains to visit everyone who would like a visit within my first year here. There are many reasons why this is important to me, but two stand out above the rest: relationships and vision.

As we get to know each other, we share our stories—our interests, concerns, joys, and challenges. These conversations allow me to pray for you more personally and develop a deeper understanding of both individual and collective needs within our congregation. Learning the history of this church and its members also gives me insight into what has been tried, what has worked, what approaches might be best avoided, and where unresolved tensions might still linger.

Why do I share all of this? Because one of the most common questions I hear is: **“What are your plans for the church?”**

If that question has been on your mind, let me share how I approach ministry, what’s already happening, and what you can expect moving forward.

#### How I Approach Ministry

A friend of mine once had a disheartening interview with a church that asked him, **“How are you going to grow and improve our church?”**

On the surface, it sounds like a reasonable question. But there’s a challenge with that mindset—churches are as unique as people. If I walked into Meadville and simply applied everything I did in Boston, some things might work, but others wouldn’t. Different communities have different needs, histories, and cultures. And trust me—Boston is very different from Meadville!

Instead of offering a one-size-fits-all strategy, my friend reframed the conversation. Rather than answering how he would “fix” the church, he instead shared:

- A time he overcame an obstacle that led to church growth
- How those lessons might be adapted to a new congregation

That’s exactly how I operate. **I listen first, then lead.**

There's an old rule of thumb for pastors entering a new church: **"Don't change anything for a year."** While this isn't a rigid law (let's be honest—even sitting in someone else's car, we instinctively adjust the mirrors and seat), the principle is sound. Before making changes, I need to understand who you are, what your "normal" is, and what the church truly needs.

No church can grow apart from relationships, and no pastor can lead effectively without being deeply connected to the congregation. There is no magic formula for transformation—only the slow, intentional work of loving and serving together. That's the work we've begun.

### **What's Happening Now**

I'm taking notes.

I'm listening to your stories.

I'm paying attention to recurring concerns and themes.

When the same issues arise independently from multiple people, I know I'm uncovering something central to our church's identity. I'm learning what has worked, what hasn't, and why—and from there, I'm beginning to imagine what could be. My goal is to develop a vision **with you**, one that reflects both our church's history and where God is leading us next.

But I can't do it alone. **Your voice matters.**

### **Let's Connect!**

I'd love to meet with you—over coffee, at the church, in your home, or on the phone. I want to hear about what brought you to Meadville, what you love about this church, and what you hope the future holds. Whether you're a longtime member or new to the community, young or old, healthy or struggling—your presence here matters, and I want to get to know you.

If you're eager for change or hoping things stay the same, know this: **our future won't be determined by a pre-written checklist.** We will discern God's plans for First Presbyterian Church of Meadville **together.**

This month, our session will begin laying the groundwork for our vision at our retreat on **March 1st**, where we'll discuss the Mission Study and dream about what's ahead. Every day, countless people walk through our church, serving in different ways, with ideas on how we can do even more. Our confirmation class is in full swing, preparing to welcome new members into our church family. And that's not even mentioning all the incredible work being done for the 225th anniversary year! There is so much happening, and I am incredibly grateful to be here, walking this journey with you.

Let's connect. Let's dream. Let's discover what's next—**together.**

**Joy in Christ,  
Ben**

## Notes from the Director of Music

Have you ever – in the course of browsing our Sunday bulletins – wondered about the origin of those few lines of music that pop up here and there? Perhaps nobody else gives them much thought, but I sure do: I create those myself! Since I've had a few questions about how exactly that process works, I thought I'd use this space to explain. In summary: computers have made music typesetting easier than ever before! The software I use is called *Finale*, which has existed for a long time and is one of the industry standards for music publishing. Here's how:

**Step one:** create a template. I choose the key signature, time signature, number of measures, and other parameters which give me a blank slate to work with.

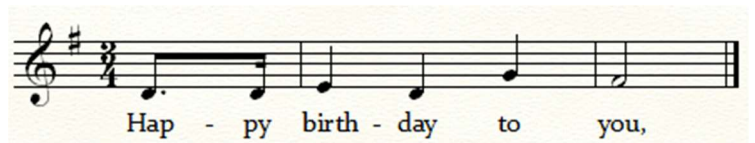


**Step two:** insert the notes. Some users with an electronic keyboard attached to computer via MIDI cable, but I prefer computer's number pad. (4=eighth note, 5=quarter note, and so on.)



do this  
the  
using the

**Step three:** add the text. This is just a matter of typing words in, being sure to press the space bar after each syllable in order to jump to the next note. *Finale* offers a whole array of fonts: my go-to is Constantia, which strikes a nice balance between elegance and legibility.



**Step four:** cleanup. I make sure the line breaks are in the right place, shift around any misaligned syllables, and make other aesthetic adjustments. Then I can save the finished product as a PDF file, convert it to a JPG, crop the margins, and paste it directly into the bulletin. Voila!

Having gone through several iterations of *Finale* over the past 15 years, I've reached a point where I can navigate the interface fairly quickly. I use it not only to create music for the congregation, but also the original compositions and arrangements I inflict on the Choir and the Liberty Bells. The software makers have recently discontinued support for the program, however, and many users are moving to a newer product called *Dorico*. I think I'll wait to hear the opinions of my colleagues who have made the switch before deciding whether to do so myself!

Until next time,  
Kevin

# Christian Education News

## Elementary Sunday School

Our Sunday school hour will continue with the unit entitled "Emotions." We started on February 23rd with the story "Hannah's Joyful Surprise" found in 1 Samuel 1:1-20. This lesson emphasized the JOY we feel when we trust in Jesus. The other lessons will take a close look at FEAR, TRUST, and ANGER. These stories will grow our awareness of the emotions God has given to all of us and how we should take them to Him.



**SAVE  
THE  
DATE:  
APRIL 12  
EASTER  
EGG  
HUNT**

BLAST has been busy:

1. Serving P.R.A.Y. dinner
2. Helping with the Winter Carnival on February 22<sup>nd</sup>  
**AND WILL**
3. Be making Easter Cards in March.



## P.R.A.Y.

The afterschool program met on February 12<sup>th</sup> to celebrate Valentine's Day. Everyone attending created Valentine cards that have been sent to members of our church and other church friends who are not able to get out to church. We hope these cards brightened their Valentine's Day weekend.

Our afternoon always includes dinner. With the assistants of B.L.A.S.T., we had one of our favorites: toasted cheese and tomato soup. The highlight was dessert – CHOCOLATE Fondue. It was awesome!



*P.R.A.Y. will meet again on March 19<sup>th</sup>.*

## Confirmation Class Update

We continued with our lessons in January and February. The lessons focused on what it means to be a Disciple of Jesus Christ, what it means to show Christ's love, and devoting yourself to prayers. In addition, we took a Sunday to deviate from the curriculum and focus on what it means to be a Presbyterian. A quiz we gave to the kids during our lesson is on the next page. Test your knowledge when you see it. The kids are doing great and staying focused on the material.

Our year is winding down. We are asking the kids' mentors to join us this Sunday as we talk about devoting ourselves to fellowship in the church. We will be discussing the many ways active members of FPC give of their time and talents to not only serve this church and congregation, but to also show Christ's love in the community.

The kids will be helping the Deacons serve our simple supper on Ash Wednesday and will be assisting Chris Lafferty and I as we prepare the communion for Sunday March 9th. We will be presenting the lesson about devoting yourself to the Breaking of Bread. Pastor Ben is looking to host a lock-in in March for the confirmands to help them ready themselves to "crossover" on Confirmation Sunday in April.

-Chuck Claspy



Henry Fischer -10  
Levi Miller - 25

Irish Blessings ~Vickie

The confirmands recently had a class on Presbyterianism. During the class we created a quiz for the kids. I thought it might be fun to share this with the congregation. - Chuck Clasp

## PRESBYTERIAN QUIZ

- 1. The Presbyterian Church originated when?**
  - a. 16<sup>th</sup> century
  - b. 33 BC
  - c. 18<sup>th</sup> century
  - d. At the end of WWI
- 2. The formation of the Presbyterian Church can be traced back to what event?**
  - a. Rise of Catholicism in Rome
  - b. Pilgrims arriving here to escape religious persecution in England
  - c. Protestant Reformation
- 3. Reformation Day occurs in what month?**
  - a. January
  - b. March
  - c. July
  - d. October
- 4. Before the reformation what was the only Christian Church?**
- 5. The men mostly identified with the formation of the Presbyterian faith are who?**
  - a. Jesus and Peter
  - b. Paul and John
  - c. Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Knox
- 6. The very first Presbyterian Church was founded where?**
  - a. England
  - b. Germany
  - c. Scotland
  - d. USA
- 7. True or False: The Presbyterian Church had a major role in the Revolutionary War?**
- 8. Have any US Presidents been Presbyterian?**
- 9. First Presbyterian Church in Meadville was founded when?**
  - a. 1800
  - b. 1900
  - c. 1940
  - d. 1776
- 10. What officers at FPC Meadville act as the governing body of the church?**
  - a. Deacons
  - b. Trustees
  - c. Elders

Answers: 1 (a) 2 (c) 3 (d) 4 Roman Catholic 5 (c) 6 (c) 7 True (Presbyterian ministers preached on fighting tyranny and served as Chaplain's in the Army. The British often called the war the Presbyterian Revolution)

8 Yes ( 8 US Presidents were Presbyterian. This is 2<sup>nd</sup> highest number to Episcopalians. Most recent was Ronald Reagan) 9 (a) 10 (c).

## ASH WEDNESDAY *worship*

Please plan to attend the Ash Wednesday Simple Supper Service on Wednesday, March 5.

Our Deacons will begin serving the soup at 6:00 p.m., followed by the Sacrament of Holy Communion and the imposition of ashes (for those who choose). Hope to see you and your family at this service held in Fellowship Hall. **Note: Please bring your own table service. Extra bowls and silverware will be available for those that need them.**



**PER CAPITA** connects PC(U.S.A.) congregations and mid councils with the work of the wider church.

Per capita is how Presbyterians mutually and equitably share the costs of moving the church forward in the 21st century. The work of the PC(USA), and in particular the work of the General Assembly, is only possible because members of the church have said they are “all in” and committed to connection through per capita support. It is about joining together as a community and being one body, the body that is Christ’s church in the world.

**Per capita for 2025 is \$35.00 per member.** Per capita letters and giving envelopes should arrive in your mailbox soon. Thank you for joining us in ministry. Thank you for answering the call. Thank you for your support of per capita. ([www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org))



**EASTER FLOWERS:** The Deacons will be driving to Clarion to pick up spring flowers directly from the grower on Good Friday. Be assured that the plants will be in great shape for Easter Sunday. We purchased from this grower in the past when we had the church van for transport. We have multiple drivers volunteering to make this pick up. More details to come.



**Daylight Savings Time** begins on Sunday, March 9<sup>th</sup>. Remember to spring forward.



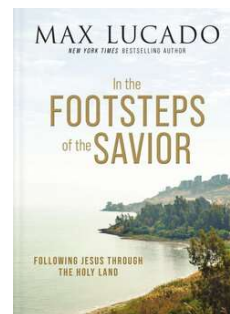
**"Souper Bowl Sunday":** On February 9, our young disciples were at the church entrances collecting soup and other non-perishable items for our church

food pantry that is managed by the Board of Deacons. We received \$300 in monetary donations and four large carts of food! A **special thank you** to everyone who donated to this mission. Our food pantry typically hands out 50 bags of groceries each month and relies on donations from the congregation to keep the shelves stocked. We appreciate these delightful young people who collected the food and the Deacons who put all the donations away in the food pantry!



**Our Soulstice gatherings** will be every Wednesday evening during the season of Lent (March 12 - April 26). We invite you to join us in the downstairs

chapel at 7:15 PM as we immerse ourselves in candlelight, music, prayer, and silence.



**ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL –**  
**March 2<sup>nd</sup> through April 6<sup>th</sup>**  
*In the Footsteps of the Savior-  
Following Jesus Through the Holy Land*

Join Max Lucado on an inspirational journey through the Holy Land. Discover God’s

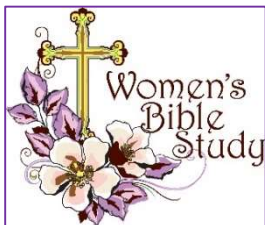
heart for his people and his deep love for you. As Max weaves together insights from his own travels to Israel, he will guide you to walk where Jesus walked and ponder the promises he made. This video Bible study will provide you an encounter with the life-changing Holy One as you follow in the footsteps of the Savior through the Holy Land. Please join us on Sunday mornings at 9:30 a.m. in the Culbertson Theater.



### KNIT UNTO OTHERS

*Get your needles and yarn out. . . . .*

Knit Unto Others will meet Wednesday, March 12<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m. in the church library. Anyone interested in the fellowship of knitting, crocheting or cross stitching is welcome. We make prayer shawls for those in need of the warmth of God’s love; and the comfort, prayers, and support from their friends of faith. If you have any questions, you can contact Kandy Davis at [kdsdavis70@zoominternet.net](mailto:kdsdavis70@zoominternet.net) or 814-807-0156.



**Grace** will meet at 9:30 a.m. on Thursday, March 13<sup>th</sup> in the Church Library.

**Hope** will meet at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 13<sup>th</sup> in the Church Library.



**Stephen Ministry’s Mission Statement:** Stephen Ministry will strive to equip and support caring relationships with those experiencing life crisis or transitions. These relationships will be marked by confidential, compassionate listening and by being a consistent presence in another’s life. We will also use our gifts in shorter-term relationships that will help people at their point of need and will help others see Stephen Ministry in practice. If you would like to talk with a Stephen Minister or make a referral, please contact Pastor Ben at 814-333-2161.



### Praying for Children ([momsinprayer.org](http://momsinprayer.org))

March prayer focus for our children: **Father, we pray that the little mustard seed of faith in our children grows!**

Praying for Children will not meet during the winter months, but we will be continuously praying for children via email using prepared prayer sheets. If you would like to receive these guides to use during your private devotional time, please contact **Laurel Porter** at [hlporter20@yahoo.com](mailto:hlporter20@yahoo.com). Copies of the prayer guide are also available in the church office.



1. Dana DeArment
- Julie Miller
- Marlene Braham
3. Doris Foster
6. Mary Zahora
7. Lucy Nesbitt
- Miles O’Shea
10. Henry Fischer
11. Jon Grzegorzewski
12. John Kerr
14. Sam Fischer
17. Lois Kafferlin
18. Leslie Jensen
20. Sue Kidd
23. Barbara Lodge
25. Levi Miller
27. Jordan Wetherbee
- Beth Greenleaf
31. Ellen Douglass
- Susan Abbondanza



**Called Home to Heaven**

Paul  
“Crocket”  
Jones

February 11



The theme for the Friday, March 7, 2025 World Day of Prayer is **“I Made You Wonderful,”** based on **Psalm 139: 1-18** which invites us to recognize that God created each one of us with great attention and loving care. God knows us intimately and created each of us in His image. Reflect on how God guides us through difficulties and darkness because He knows us so well. Remember that God has designed us perfectly with unique gifts and abilities to spread God’s love. **Offer prayers of thanksgiving to our Creator as well as prayers of intercession asking God for wisdom, courage and healing, that our world would come to treat all people as “fearfully and wonderfully made.”** God is our Creator, God made us wonderful, God knows us, and God is with us. ([www.worlddayofprayer.net](http://www.worlddayofprayer.net))



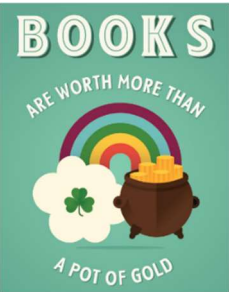
**IT'S A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD:**

Mr. Fred Rogers' birthday is **MARCH 20** and the day that the PC(USA) has chosen to highlight all we can learn from his work.

Fred Rogers was an ordained minister of word and sacrament for the PC(USA) and is a notable public figure whose work around peace and reconciliation are worth remembering. Mr. Rogers was also a pioneer in the world of Christian education and formation of young children.

LET US PRAY.....Jesus, teach us to be neighbors living, loving side by side. Hands for helping one another, arms for welcome open wide, ever learning, ever growing. Jesus, teach us all to be children of the new creation joined in true community. Amen.

(www.pcusa.org)



Stop in the Church Library or check out the display at the top of the stairs for some great reads! **COME IN and CHECK THEM OUT!**



**The Medical Benevolence Foundation:**

Dedicated to equipping and fortifying the medical ministries of local churches in underserved regions worldwide, the Medical Benevolence Foundation (MBF) works in partnership with its international partners as they take on the responsibility of overseeing mission hospitals, clinics, and medical schools. MBF is a validated mission working in partnership with PC(USA). MBF's unwavering commitment is to provide these medical ministries with the necessary support to enhance healthcare services within their communities and lay the foundation for sustainable growth, ultimately enabling individuals to break free from the cycle of poverty. (www.mbf.org) Our church donates \$1,200 a year to this vital mission.



**DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU CAN MAKE AN ONLINE DONATION TO THE CHURCH?**

Go to our website at [www.meadvillefpc.org](http://www.meadvillefpc.org) and click on the "ONLINE GIVING" tab at the bottom right corner of the front page. From there, follow the prompts. If you have any questions, please call the church office.

**FAIRVIEW FAIRMONT FAMILY CENTER**



Several highlights from January included **Messy Church**, which fell on Epiphany, and Tuesday **Youth Nights**. The teens have been obsessed with playing Uno with Ms. Emily and our faithful youth night volunteer, Mr. Cordell. It's so fun to watch their joy in interacting with each other and the staff through a simple game.

We are thankful to welcome back our **Bonner students**, Niyah, Jasmine, and Azalia after winter break. We are delighted that Azalia has returned from studying abroad this past semester!



**The Grown-Up and Me Program** for younger children and the **Afterschool Program** for school age children continue to blossom. We

are blessed to be able to serve this community and the families that live here. We are blessed that Meadville First supports us!





SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1 9:00 -1:00 Session Retreat
2 <b>Transfiguration of the Lord</b> 8:30 Worship/Communion 9:30 Sunday School, Confirmation Class 11:00 Worship <b>Dr. Suess' Birthday</b>	3	4	5 <b>Ash Wednesday</b> 6:00 Ash Wednesday Simple Meal, Worship, Communion & Imposition of Ashes	6	7 <b>World Day of Prayer</b>	8 9:00 Confirmation Class Communion Preparation
9 <b>First Sunday of Lent</b> 8:30 Worship/Communion 9:30 Sunday School, Youth Group & Choir 11:00 Worship/Communion <b>Daylight Savings Time Begins</b>	10  6:30 Deacons Meeting	11  5:30 Bells Rehearsal	12  1:00 Knit Unto Others 3:45 P.R.A.Y. 7:15 Soulstice	13  9:30 Grace Bible Study 1:30 Hope Bible Study	14	15
16 <b>Second Sunday of Lent</b> 8:30 Worship 9:30 Sunday School, Confirmation Class & Choir 11:00 Worship	17  <b>HAPPY St. Patrick's Day</b>	18  5:30 Bells Rehearsal	19 11:00 225 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee Meeting 4:00 Mission Committee Meeting 4:15 CE Committee Meeting 7:15 Soulstice 7:45 Worship & Music Committee Meeting	20 3:30 Stephen Ministry Leadership Meting 4:00 Stephen Ministry Meeting  <b>Mr. Roger's Day Spring Begins</b>	21  Confirmation Class Retreat	22  Confirmation Class Retreat
23 <b>Third Sunday of Lent</b> 8:30 Worship 9:30 Sunday School, Youth Group & Choir 11:00 Worship	24	25  5:30 Bells Rehearsal	26  7:15 Soulstice	27  5:00 Trustees Meeting	28	29
30 <b>Fourth Sunday of Lent</b> 8:30 Worship 9:30 Sunday School, Confirmation Class & Choir 11:00 Worship	31					



**First Presbyterian Church**  
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**ASH WEDNESDAY**  
6:00 PM in Fellowship Hall  
Simple Supper and Worship

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

SUNDAY WORSHIP - 8:30 AM & 11:00 AM

(11:00 AM service is available on YouTube)

SUNDAY SCHOOL - 9:30 AM

YOUTH GROUP - March 9 & 23 at 9:30 AM

CONFIRMATION CLASS

March 2, 16 & 30 at 9:30 AM

CHURCH STAFF

Senior Pastor: Rev. Ben Black

Minister of Music: Kevin Dill

Children's Ministry Coordinator: Vickie Fischer

Administrative Assistant: Mary Zahora

Financial Secretary: Kris Lubomski

Custodian: Elijah Boyd

Evening Custodian: Chris Wade

Email: [firstchurch@meadvillefpc.org](mailto:firstchurch@meadvillefpc.org)

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