

July 2020

The First Connection

a publication of Mason First United Methodist Church

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Dreaming A Bright Future

Perhaps one of the most discouraging aspects of the impact of the coronavirus has been the withering of the plans we had and were making to open our doors to new people with new events and ministries. I was excited about programs and activities that encouraged invitation and inclusion of new families to our church, but then... well, you know the rest of the story. We hunkered down and hoped that we wouldn't be heading into financial difficulties that would mean it would take us years to recover. But that has not been the case.

Although it might well take months or even a year before we can throw the doors open without reservation, we will be ready. Through the incredible generosity and faithfulness of our congregation, we have paid our apportionments in full for the first six months of the year (and a little extra)! We have paid our staff and the Child Care Center staff so that we did not lose any of our employees during the shutdown, and no one had to suffer undue financial hardship. And perhaps, most exciting of all, we continued to pay on our mortgage and for the first time, we now have a balance below \$200,000! The end is in sight! And just to add a little icing on the cake, we are now building a Rainy Day Fund for anticipated future repairs. Thanks be to our congregation, to the leadership of Glenn Darling and Kim Wolfgang, and most of all – thanks be to God!

Looking ahead... It's hard to look ahead because we still don't know how things will unfold with suppression of the virus. It's likely that we'll have to hunker down again. But in the meantime, it's ok to imagine the day when the lid comes off. One of our greatest priorities is going to need to be creating a ministry for families, youth, and children, and staffing it with leadership. We are going to be stepping up our recruiting efforts in anticipation of that bright day. Our youth room remodel is nearly complete – we're waiting on furniture and a few bright accents to be added and it will be done. We can't wait to have youth meeting in that space!

I share all of that to say – be hopeful. Be optimistic. We are a light to the world, a city on a hill ready to shine God's grace and hope. So dare to dream, and be in prayer about how God is calling you to do the next thing. Better days are ahead.

Blessings,

Pastor Suzanne

Rev. Suzanne Goodwin



Ready to Worship!

I cannot tell you how excited I am to be making plans to worship in the sanctuary once again. The table is set and we're ready to open the doors! But wait! Not so fast there. Even as we prepare to return to our beloved church, we must prepare ourselves for some changes. Our number one goal is to keep you safe. We can worship anywhere anytime, but we cannot replace a single beloved soul of our congregation. So please read the information below very carefully so that you can make the best decisions for you and your family, and so that you can be prepared for the safety measures that have been put in place.

Worship Safely

Please consider your own personal risk level before making your decision to return. We will continue to make worship available in other formats so that you won't miss anything. But please consider your safety first.

Please consider the safety of others. If you have any symptoms of COVID-19, or if you've been exposed to risky circumstances, please stay home. We'll gladly welcome you back when you're symptom free!

Masks will be required when you enter the building. If you don't have one with you, one will be offered to you. If you find it difficult to wear a mask, we ask that you consider waiting until masks are no longer necessary.

Hand sanitizer will be available at each entrance to the building.

The building will open at 9:00 a.m. and all entrances except the door next to the bride room will be open.

No valet service until further notice – Although we will be unable to park your car for you, all entrances will be attended by someone who can assist you and answer your questions.

BYOC – There will be no coffee or food service and no general gathering before or after the service, but please feel free to bring your own coffee to enjoy as you worship!

Ushered seating – Upon entering, please make your way directly to the sanctuary where an usher will assist you in finding a seat at a safe distance from others. If you enter from the front of the sanctuary, you will be seated from the center aisle. If you enter from the back of the sanctuary, you'll be seated from the side aisles.

No hugging! But please express your joy... We absolutely can't hug or shake hands, but we can exuberantly greet one another with a wave and words of welcome. Consider placing your hand over your heart in lieu of a hug, or whatever feels natural to you – at a distance.

No common touch items – You'll notice that all common touch items such as hymnals, prayer cards, etc. have been removed. Even the Caring Table and Hospitality Tables will be empty. Everything will have been cleaned and will be cleaned again following the service.

Limited building access – In order to minimize exposure, we are limiting widespread access to the building. The lower level and library level will be off-limits, and bathrooms will be limited to the ones outside the office and the family bathroom next to the chapel.



No singing – experts have determined that singing causes a greater release of aerosolized breath to enter the air at a higher concentration and with greater projection. Sadly, congregational singing will be on hold for a while. We can't even risk a choir. But we intend to offer special music offerings where the soloist or instrumentalist is behind a Plexiglass shield. And of course, we can enjoy Ruben's beautiful music!

As for children... At least initially, we will not have nursery service available. Nor will there be Sunday School during church. However, we will have activity bags available that have been prepared by Ms. Brittany for the kids and those will be in Ziploc bags that will not need to be returned. If the weather is good, Ms. Brittany may take the kids outside for activities on the lot adjacent to the parking lot. Activities will be no-touch activities designed to help kids keep their distance while working off a little energy!

Offerings – We will not be passing a collection plate. However, we will have a basket at each exit so that you can drop your offering into the basket as you exit the sanctuary.

Ushered dismissal – At the end of the service, ushers will dismiss rows to help maintain safe distancing. Pastor Suzanne will stand at the front of the church on the chancel level to offer greetings as you depart. Please be careful to maintain your distancing, and please exit the building directly after the service. You may wish to visit with people you haven't seen in a while, but that is done most safely outdoors. Hand sanitizer will be available as you exit, and we plan to have the doors open for you so that you don't have to touch the handles as you exit.

Whew! That sounds like a lot, but it's not even close to the detail of the written Safe Return Policy that we created and which was reviewed by the members of Church Council. We hope we can diminish this degree of vigilance over time, but for now, an abundance of caution is worth the effort if it keeps our family safe.

God bless you for your patience, your compassion, and your faithfulness. See you on July 12!

Our Child Care Center is Open!

We are open again! We were allowed to reopen on June 8 by executive order. There are some differences

to keep everyone healthy. We take the temperature of staff and students before they enter the classrooms. All of our staff now wear face masks at all times inside the center—we are able to take them off when we are outside. Mr. Jeff made some Plexiglass shields we have put up between the rooms to help limit

exposure. We are washing our hands more often and have hand sanitizer available throughout the center. We are also cleaning more often and more thoroughly.

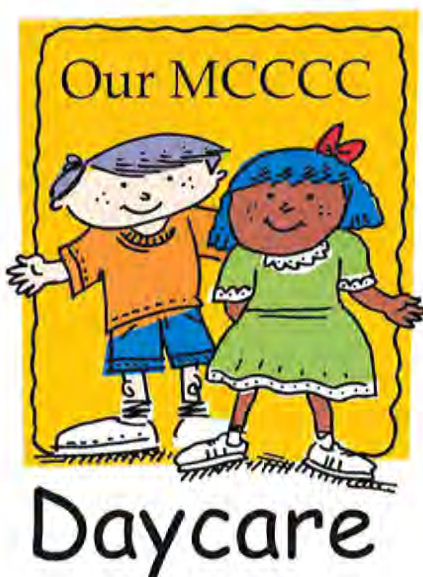
We were excited to see so many of our students return and we have a few that will be out until fall when their parents return to work.

We are beginning our summer curriculum which is more relaxed with a focus on nature and lots of reviewing. The toddlers will work on colors and shapes and the preschoolers will take "trips" to learn about new places and countries.

The toddlers say the same prayer before lunch each day. That prayer is: *"God our Father, we thank you, for our many blessings. Amen."* They really enjoy this prayer because it is sung instead of recited. The preschoolers are learning the prayer, *"Thank you God for our happy hearts in _____ and _____ weather. We're thankful for the food we eat and that we are together."* The special student of the day gets to fill in the kind of weather for the day.

We are so glad to be back serving our families and students during these difficult times!

Tami Boyic, Director



News of Our Church Family

Recovering at home following recent hospitalizations are Jim Goodwin and Diana Baker. Elaine Ferris is at home following rehabilitation at the Ingham County Medical Care Facility.

Christian sympathy is expressed to Phil Workman on the loss of his wife, Sharon; to Brian and Julie Spyke and their family on the loss of Julie's mother; and to Kim Sperry and his family on the loss of his mother.

Please note: The hospitals do not notify the church when someone from our church family is admitted. Please ask a family member or a friend to let us know!

Our members or friends who are in assisted living, nursing homes, or hospice care:

Grand Haven Living Center, Lansing:

Gayle Gunns

Green Acres, Mason

Bev Eccleston

Beth Grosshans

Holt Senior Care, Holt

George Dunivon

Ingham County Medical Care Facility, Okemos:

Char Bush

John Dodge

The Willows of Okemos:

Lew Tibbits

Vista Springs Edgewood, Lansing:

Garrett and Barbara Wheaton

Vic Whipple



Congratulations to our 2020 Scholarship Recipients

The 2020 scholarship recipients have been announced. Recipients of the *Schuyler Smith Scholarship*: Sam Calhoun, Brooke Hedglen, Kirstin Kribs, Matthew Kribs, and Lydia Whipple. *Keith L. Hayes Memorial Scholarship* recipients: Bailey Akers, Lillian Droscha, and Conor Whipple. *Hartley and Maryella Hanes Scholarship* recipient: Ben Hedglen. Congratulations!!

Memorial Bricks

Commemorative bricks in the walkway of our Prayer Garden are a fitting tribute to loved ones, either in memory of or in honor of someone you would like to remember. If you would like to purchase a Commemorative Brick for the Prayer Garden, you may call the church office to have a form emailed or mailed to you. The cost is \$85 for a 4" x 8" brick which can include up to three lines of copy (14 characters per line). Double bricks (8" x 8") cost \$150 and can include up to five lines of copy (14 characters per line).



Mortgage Milestone

As Pastor Suzanne mentioned in her June 21 worship video, the church has reached a milestone in paying off our mortgage. When we paid our June 2020 mortgage payment, we brought the principal due balance below \$200,000. In addition, the Finance committee has authorized sending \$10,000 towards our mortgage payment in July which will bring the principal due to just over \$190,000. If this level of giving towards our "Path-to-Promise" mortgage fund continues, we will pay off this debt in just about two years. This is indeed a milestone to celebrate!



Financial Update

What would you have thought if someone told you some time in 2019 that the church would have to close its doors for months in 2020? You would probably have told them an emphatic “no way”! And if they asked you what would be the financial impact of such a closing? You would have probably speculated that we “might not make it.” It turns out that 2020 has already proven to be a year of remarkable events. Most of our congregation is aware that the church received a loan as part of the PPP (Paycheck Protection Program). Thanks to this loan, all our staff as well as all the employees of our Mason Christian Child Care Center continued to receive their normal paychecks during the shutdown.

Now during the shutdown, we still had to heat the building and pay the water and trash bills. While the heating and water bills were lower, other bills like insurance and phone/internet were not reduced. But our congregation has remained incredibly faithful in sending in their tithes and offerings during the

shutdown period. We have been able to easily pay both the mortgage and other bills from the continuing offerings that we have been receiving. Thank you all for your faithfulness during this pandemic.

I can assure you that financially, the church is “just fine.” I am sure it will take us a long time to adjust to all the changes that will be required due to the distancing requirements and new protocols to minimize the spread of the virus. I don’t think we will ever just be able to return to the way things were before this all hit; but I think our challenge is to keep our focus on making disciples of Jesus Christ as we slowly adjust to a new “normal” way of being the church together.

Glenn Darling, Financial Administrator



Pastor Suzanne’s Faithchat Zoom meetings are on summer break until further notice!

Ministry Shares Update

In 2015 and 2016, our church struggled to pay our United Methodist conference ministry shares in full. We paid only 23.77% of them in 2016. At that time, the church committed to tithing – sending ten percent of our weekly offering to the conference as our ministry shares. This resulted in us paying about 70% of these shares in both 2017 and 2018. In 2019, we improved this to 83%, but were still not paying our full obligation to the Michigan conference. The Finance committee voted in December of 2019 to increase the percentage of our weekly offering

dedicated to Ministry Shares from 10% to 15%. So far in 2020, this has resulted in us paying 111% of what is owed year-to-date. (We owed \$18,730.85 and have paid \$20,953.92.) At this rate, we will pay this obligation in full by November, and will have extra funds left for other local missions in December. A big thanks to our congregation whose faithful giving has helped us ride through this rocky COVID pandemic and come out healthy and strong.

Glenn Darling,
Financial Administrator





Birthdays

Thank you notes are posted on the bulletin board outside the church office. Thank you notes have been received from Bailey Akers, Lillian Droscha, Sam Calhoun, and Kim Sperry.

Gordon Karlake	1
Karen Page.....	1
Devon Ireland	3
Lucas Barnes	6
Terry Zanger	7
Bruce Fillmore	8
Bruce Hedglen	10
Pete Stid	11
Craig Barnes.....	11
Kaleigh VerHage	12
Janice Rogers.....	12
Pat Mentzer.....	12
Phyllis Armstrong	13
Betty Engle.....	14
Howard Becker	14
Peggy Riggs.....	14

Ken Carlson.....	16
Char Bush	16
Curtis VerHage.....	16
Carole Bosshart	17
Kathy Brown	18
Angie Banister	19
Judy Lamphere	19
Steve Baker.....	23
Colleen Ireland	23
Claudia Ireland	24
Cailin Ireland.....	24
Lois Smith	24
Abigail Lautzenheiser	25
Cameron Etzel	25
Deanna Bartlett	26
Bonnie Stalnaker	29
Colleen Sutberry.....	31

and Anniversaries

Dick & Jan Magsig.....	7
Mark & Linda Carmer	7
John & Jennifer Richard.....	8
Mark & Karen Page.....	10
John & Darla Whitmyer.....	10
Dave & Lyndsay Aldrich.....	12
Ken & Ella LoVette	18

Brian & Carol Whipple.....	18
Michael & Dorothy Stebleton	19
Tim & Lori Colby.....	25
Luke & Carrie Thorburn.....	26
Glenn & Deb Darling	28
Bill & Judy Husband.....	28
Bob & Betty Beaune	31

If your birthday or anniversary is not on file, please let us know so we can add you to our list to be published in the newsletter.



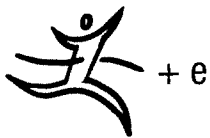
Kid's Page



WATER WORKS!

The gospels record Jesus' miracles, many of which involve water.

Directions: Using the illustrated equations, fill in the blanks to describe each miracle. Use the Bible references for help.



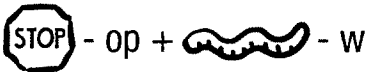
Water changes to _____

JOHN 2:1-11



Heals a man born _____

JOHN 9



Calms a _____

MATTHEW 8:23-27



Catch of _____

LUKE 5:1-11



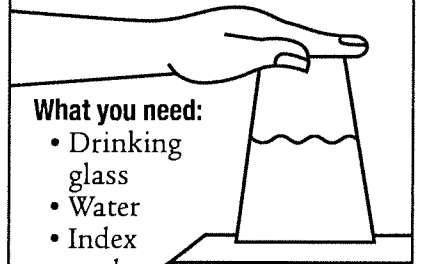
Walks on _____

MATTHEW 14:22-33

Answer: wine, blind, storm, fish, water

UNSEEN BUT active

This experiment illustrates that although God is invisible, we can see his work all around us.



What you need:

- Drinking glass
- Water
- Index card

What you do:

1. Practicing over a sink, fill the glass halfway with water. Then press the index card snugly atop the glass with one hand.
2. With the other hand, hold the base of the glass and carefully flip it over.
3. Remove your hand from the card. It should stay on the glass, without spilling the water! The invisible air in the glass creates a suction with the card, preventing the water from spilling out. Research air pressure to learn more.
4. After perfecting the trick, amaze others with it. Then talk about how God, like the air in the glass, is unseen but active.

First United Methodist Church

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Whoever **WELCOMES** one such child
IN MY NAME welcomes me.

MATTHEW 18:5, NRSV