

THE NEW CITY JOURNAL

A Publication of First Presbyterian Church Aurora



1 GOD, 1050 KIDS, 84 COUNSELORS, 1 PROGRAM DIRECTOR, LOTS OF HELPERS AND 21 AMAZING YEARS

BY BRENDA BUSTAMANTE

Train up a child in the way he should go teaching him to seek God's wisdom and will for his abilities and talents, even when he is old he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6

At Summer Day Camp we teach each child to seek God's will through bible lessons, recreation, eating, reading and play time. Kids learn the love of our Savior in a very personal way. I have seen how each child had been blessed and changed by God! I have been so encouraged to see so many kids come through the program and learn that with God all things are possible. Kids in our month long program learn to read the Bible, pray, serve, be leaders, build relationships and make new friends.

Each year, we have roughly 50 kids, 4 counselors and lots of middle school age helpers in our gym! This program started in 2003 as a part of the 505 ministry the church had created at

the time which aimed at bringing the love of Jesus to our multi-cultural surroundings (see First Pres Annual Report 2005). Now entering its 21st year of ministry, Summer Day Camp will have seen at least 1,050 kids come through our doors with 4 counselors each year to lead them!

This year's Summer Day Camp, for ages 6 to 11, runs from June 3-14 (session one) and June 17 - 28 (session two) and takes place from 8:30 am - 2:30 pm on Mondays - Fridays in the Harkness Family Center. Most of the kids attend both sessions. We provide lunch through the Northern Illinois Food Bank and a snack. We also take them on 2 field trips (one per session).

Here are some words from Javier (pictured to the right), one of our own Summer Day Camp kids who also worked as a counselor for us!

Javier Serrano says, "Growing up in summer camp was a wonderful experience. It really feels like a giant family there. All of the friends you get to make definitely helped me become more of a social person. As a kid who was always so hesitant to speak, I found it easy to get out my shell when I was in summer camp. I could really feel the love and the dedication to spreading the love of God and the warmth he provides. I found out through summer camp the importance of caring for others which has played a huge role on my ambitions about becoming a fire fighter."

We love to see kids like Javier come back to our program year after year and experience all that Summer Camp has to offer. We are so excited for the ways that God has worked in Javier's life throughout his childhood and now into adulthood.

Daniela works as a counselor for Summer Day Camp. Daniela recounts that "I have been volunteering and working at summer camp for a few years now. It has been a great joy to help the community and make meaningful connections



with the children who are lucky enough to participate in the program.

Daniela continues: "I have seen many children make connections with each other and watch those same connections continue to flourish each year when they get to return. The children love their time there and the adults are always happy to help them and foster their curiosities. Summer camp gives them the chance to explore their beliefs as well as socialize with children of similar ages in a safe environment. They embrace bible time with open hearts and love choosing new books during reading time. Overall, summer camp is a great opportunity for children of the Aurora area to continue nurturing their social skills as well as give them opportunities to grow spiritually."

As a church, meeting together has been a large part of our desire. We believe that Christians need other Christians. So bringing kids from our neighborhood into community with each other and fostering a relationship with God is crucial. Hebrews 10:25 says as Christians we should not be "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

I'm so grateful that it is God who touches the lives of each one of the children who has come and will continue to come to Summer Day Camp because that makes me confident that it will continue, no matter the circumstances. I am excited for summer camp in 2024 and beyond, and I am trusting that God will continue to do greater and greater things at First Pres Summer Day Camp.

Would you be a partner of our church ministry by PRAYING for us, donating snacks, volunteering to read with our kids, and giving to our program? We are asking families to contribute \$100 per child for a full month of camp. As money can be tight for families, especially ones with more than one child coming, we never let that keep kids from coming. So we usually ask families to contribute what they can. This money goes to paying our 4 counselors, 2 field trips, and supplies including curriculum. Please consider providing a scholarship to a child to help offset this cost.

STORIES FROM THE MISSION FIELD: JEFFREY LANCASTER



Jeffrey Lancaster is working as a Chicago Work/Life Community Chaplain. Here is an update on what he's doing:

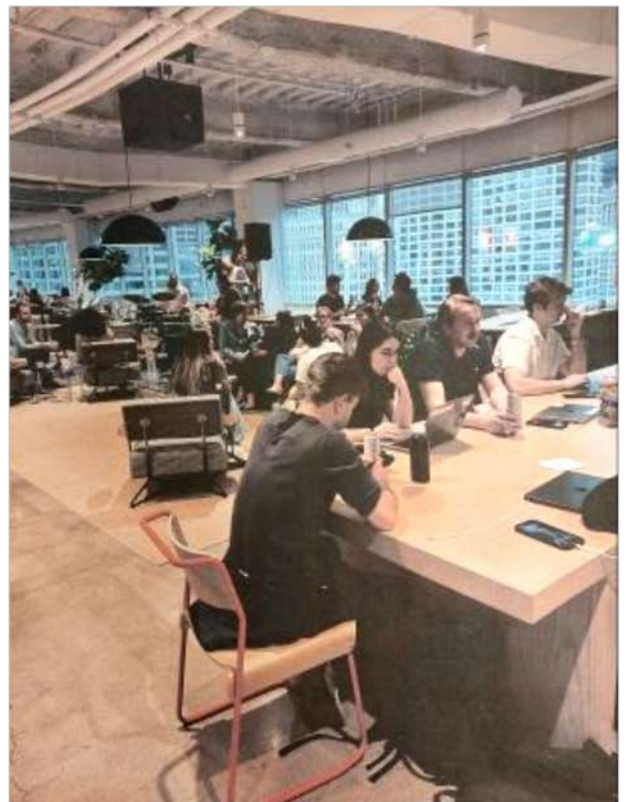
The *WeWork* Jazz Happy Hour we sponsored last week went really well. About 125 people showed up and stayed for most of the time from 4:00–6:30 pm. We received enormous approbation for the event. The jazz trio did a fabulous job. Our food and drink spread was beautiful and enjoyed by all. People seemed very engaged when I offered myself up as a chaplain willing to help them do life. Quite a number of people told me they think this is a great idea that addresses a big need in society.

Things went so well that we're going to try to run with the momentum and sponsor another *WeWork* Happy Hour on May 30th.

Additionally, I'm offering some lunch seminars at *WeWork* hoping to address felt need topics and argue for Christ being the ultimate answer to all human needs and longings. Please pray for the Lord to draw people to these lunch seminars.

Remember, my chaplain work (<https://www.chicagoworklifechaplain.com/>) is a part of my overall church planting strategy. Pray for the Lord to give me favor in people's minds and hearts, and ask the Spirit to bless my efforts by having people reach out and set up times to meet with me. Pray for the Lord to give me the wisdom necessary to counsel and coach people. Pray for the Lord to bring fruit from my labors and for the Lord to create a real stirring in people's hearts.

God is at work. Please keep praying.



~ Jeffrey Lancaster

A VIEW ON CHILDREN IN WORSHIP

Having children in worship is hard. I'm a parent of 4 wiggly kids, and I worry that they're distracting. I wonder how much they're getting out of the service, and if they're truly engaging. These questions have been even more on my mind this spring, as we've been walking this transitional journey. I also firmly believe that having children in worship is a joy that we do not want to miss!

When we baptize infants, we welcome them into the family of God. We show them, through word and action, they belong here, and their belonging is not contingent on their behavior, or their consent. We as a congregation commit to helping them experience this belonging, to understanding the story of the gospel, and to praying they will come to know God for themselves.

The best way to keep this promise is by having them in worship—as full “belonging” members of the body. There is research to support the long-term positive effects of having children in worship, but the gist is: 1) they need to see people worshipping God, 2) they need to build real connections with all ages in their church family,

and 3) they need to hear God's word proclaimed in the context of congregational worship.

The rest of us need children in worship to remind us what childlike faith looks like. There is nothing sweeter than hearing a little voice proclaim God's truth. My greatest joy is hearing my kids shout the “Sanctus”. Often when I think they're not listening, they'll say something that proves they were. They have a lot to teach us, if we're willing to listen.

Is it hard? Yes. Is it worth it? Yes. We're going to have a workshop in the fall on this topic, because it's a topic that could use some discussion and brainstorming. How can we work together to welcome our children in worship? How can we also love our older members well? How can we support single parents? How can we ensure everyone feels like they belongs? I look forward to having this discussion with you. In the meantime, please know I am grateful for the grace you show our families, and I am grateful that this is a church that has always welcomed children in worship.

~ Britta Wallbaum

FINAL THOUGHTS ON SPIRITUAL FORMATION

So how do we go about our spiritual formation? I believe that it begins by recognizing that it is God who does it all! It is the work of the Spirit to bring transformation of mind, heart, and will. Our job is to yield...and even the ability to yield is a grace received. However, God DOES invite us to participate! When we open ourselves by entering the Word and expanding our life of prayer, we place ourselves in the place where we will be transformed more and more into the image of Jesus Christ.

If you've taken any classes that I've taught, you know I almost always bring up the ancient spiritual practice of lectio divina. To put it into plain language, we follow this 4-fold journey: Read & study -> Reflect & listen to God -> Respond to God in prayer & action -> Rest in & Receive from Jesus.

Too often we can find ourselves just reading and perhaps studying. The reality is that this can short circuit the work of the Spirit in our lives! We must take time to actually listen to God, to wait on His

voice, and to settle for nothing less. This four-fold practice doesn't need to be done all at once. It can be spaced throughout a day. Lectio can even move back and forth between the different pieces. It is adaptable to all personality types.

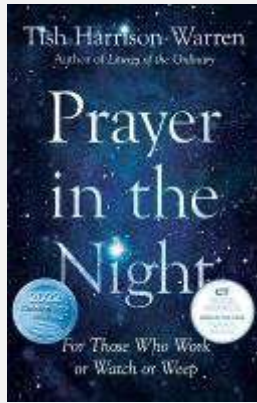
I have come to see lectio divina as the most essential spiritual practice for all Christians, whatever their background and whatever their maturity level. It allows us to participate with God in our spiritual formation such that our time in the Word is deepened and our prayer life is increasingly richer. We open ourselves to actually encountering Jesus! Most importantly it helps to more fully experience our Union with Christ (which as many of you know is my favorite theological truth).

I leave you with this prayer from Richard of Chichester (1197-1253): *O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may I know Thee more clearly, love Thee more dearly, and follow Thee more nearly, day by day. Amen.*

~ Keith Scherer

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Over the past several months, I've been working my way through the book *Prayer in the Night: For Those Who Work or Watch or Weep*. Framed around a nighttime prayer of Compline, Tish Harrison Warren, author of *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, explores themes of human vulnerability, suffering, and God's seeming absence. When she navigated a time of doubt and loss, the prayer was grounding for her. She writes that practices of prayer "gave words to my anxiety and grief and allowed me to reenounter the doctrines of the church not as tidy little antidotes for pain, but as a light in darkness, as good news." This book has provided some encouragement and comfort on nights when I find myself lying awake at night, worrying or weeping. I appreciate the prayerful and frank approach to the difficulties in our ordinary lives at work, at home, and in a world filled with uncertainty.



~ Elizabeth Kapitaniuk

STEWARDSHIP REPORT

Average Weekly Need: \$ 14,239.00

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|-------------------------|--------------|
| Received March 3, 2024 | \$ 13,560.00 |
| Total Attendance | 225 |
| Received March 10, 2024 | \$ 3,985.70 |
| Total Attendance | 188 |
| Received March 17, 2024 | \$ 17,660.00 |
| Total Attendance | 201 |
| Received March 24, 2024 | \$ 7,953.00 |
| Total Attendance | 208 |
| Received March 31, 2024 | \$ 15,139.00 |
| Total Attendance | 273 |

*Total includes online. Average online worship: 47

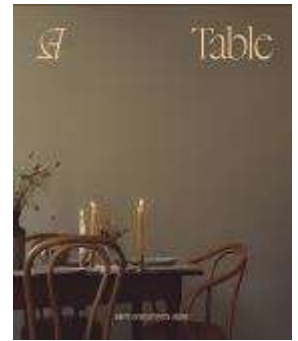
Financial Report - March 2024

Actual income/expenses for year to date, including surplus funds of \$28,276, and "Faith Giving above Pledges" of \$152,280.

| | |
|-------------|----------------------|
| Income | \$ 533,386.75 |
| Expenses | \$ <u>583,386.75</u> |
| Net Deficit | \$ 49,587.55 |

MEDIA OF THE MONTH

A Table - EP
by Saint Augustine's Music



Saint Augustine's Music hails from New Zealand and have offered this recording with a selection of 4 worship songs. I have found myself listening to these over and over. I suspect you will, too.

Saint Augustine's Music says this about the concept of their album:

When we were thinking about what to call this EP we noticed a common thread of references to Tables in a few of the songs. In "You Are Good"; you've got the table imagery from Psalm 23—that God prepares a table for us right in the very presence of our enemies - a beautiful symbol of protection and provision. In the song "To Be Like You"; we have the lyrics like "You have laid a table for a feast" and "You have shared a table with a thief".

A table is a beautiful symbol that points to the reality of Gods great welcome. That because of Jesus, we have been welcomed up into the great fellowship and friendship of the trinity. We have been given a place at the table - a place of intimate relationship and nourishment. Whenever we participate in the act of communion at church - this coming to the table - we can't help but think of how amazing it is the way Jesus welcomes beggars and billionaires alike. It's the great leveler. All are welcome in the great welcome of God.

~ Keith Scherer

DATES TO REMEMBER

| | | |
|----------------------------|------|----|
| Pray at Planned Parenthood | May | 10 |
| Celebration Sunday | May | 12 |
| Pentecost Party | May | 19 |
| Communion | May | 19 |
| Youth Chicago Trip | May | 25 |
| Summer Day Camp Starts | June | 3 |

SESSION MINUTES HIGHLIGHTS—MARCH 12, 2024

REPORT OF THE CLERK: ANNE MILLER

- Anne Miller shared the February 27 minutes. A motion was made and seconded. A vote was taken, and it was approved unanimously. Anne then shared highlights from the Deacon's minutes.
- Anne introduced a discussion on the updating of membership records with some members being moved to inactive and others dismissed. A letter is being sent to those members.
- How to handle communication when it comes to concerns, questions, etc.... from the congregation was discussed. Individuals can send emails or notes to be shared with the Session via the Clerk.

MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS:

- Pastor David Goetz shared a request from the Deacons to change serving homebound communion to Sunday, March 17. A motion was made, seconded, a vote was taken, and it was approved unanimously.
- Mary Faye Vasen gave an update on Leadership Facilitation. There was a motion made and seconded to appoint Mary Faye as the chair of the LFC. A vote was taken, and it was approved unanimously.
- Pastor David Goetz then shared about the upcoming New Members Class that will be held during the adult education time from April 7 - May 12. Pastor David also gave an update on Summer Camp. It will take place June 3 - June 28 in two sessions. There will be a special session during the first week of July for the helpers and counselors.
- James Kinnard then led a discussion about the pros and cons of disbanding the IATF. Any action on this was decided to be on hold for now.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE: JAMES KINNARD

- James Kinnard and Kathy Russell shared steps the Personnel Committee has taken in follow up with Pastor Tony Hinchliff and the staff since receiving letters that expressed concerns. Discussion occurred around the steps that have been taken, the concerns addressed from the congregation and staff, and potential actions. No actions were taken at this time due to a desire to have full Session attendance to move forward on anything.

~ Anne Miller, Clerk of Session

SESSION MINUTES HIGHLIGHTS—SPECIAL MEETING ON MARCH 23, 2024

Pastor David Goetz introduced the purpose of the meeting to be to evaluate Tony Hinchliff's role as Transitional Pastor and consider the modification or termination of our current contract with IPM. James Kinnard was appointed as moderator and Pastor David excused himself from the meeting.

EVALUATION

James Kinnard gave a brief summary of the current situation and provided context for session members. The Session engaged in discussion around all options. Two Session members would need to leave prior to the call for a motion, but agreed to cast a vote electronically.

All remaining Elders participated in the discussion. A motion was made to disengage Tony Hinchliff of IPM Ministries as Transitional Pastor. The motion was seconded. The Session prayed. A vote was taken. It was approved unanimously with seven voting during the Zoom meeting and two casting votes electronically.

~ Anne Miller, Clerk of Session & Kathy Russell, Clerk Pro Tem

ADMINISTRATIVE NOTES

2024/2025 Budget Underway

We are wrapping up our Stewardship Campaign with the collection of Financial and Talent Commitments to the church Sunday, May 5.

If you have not turned in your commitment card or committed through Realm at this time, please do so as soon as possible. Once we have these, we have what's needed for the Finance Commission to begin the process of preparing the budget for the new fiscal year beginning July 1. When completed, the budget will go to Session for final approval.

This summer and fall will be our first full new fiscal year end, and will come with some additional firsts: July - our new timing of our annual report preparation, and September - the annual meeting of both Congregation and Corporation. Let us know if you have any questions or need further clarification on this new scheduling.

2024/2025 Scholarships

If you or a family member will be attending college this fall, you should be aware of our church's college scholarship program. By completing a two-page application form and accompanying information, and submitting by July 15, you may be eligible. Please pick up your application in the church office. Requirements that must be met are:

- ◇ A copy of your acceptance letter from the college or university, submitted along with the application.
- ◇ Applicant must be an FPC active member in good standing for a minimum of 6 months.

If the above criteria are met, a student will receive a one-time scholarship, which will range from \$250 to \$1,000 depending on the institution, and whether the student course of study is in ministry. Applications cannot be accepted after July 15, so get your application in soon.

~ Dan Wegehaupt

LAST WORD FROM PASTOR KAREN—THE GREAT FIFTY DAYS

We are in the season of Eastertide known as the "Great Fifty Days." Easter is the first of fifty days that lead up to Pentecost. Each Sunday during this season our worship begins with the Easter Acclamation: "Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!" Liturgical words that remind us of the power of the resurrection and the joy of our union with Christ. Sometimes liturgy can be seen as repetitive. But it can also be seen as participation, engaging in worship through words that are familiar yet heartfelt and become the "work of the people." I love to hear our congregation proclaiming the Easter Acclamation.

Our sermon series "Meeting the Risen One" continues until Pentecost. I'm wondering how the Lord has been meeting you during this season. Has the Lord met you in worship through Word and Sacrament? Has He met you in quiet moments of prayer? Has He met you in places of doubt or pain? Has He met you as you gathered for a meal? Has He revealed Himself to you in a new way? Have there been times of confession? Are you spending time in prayer and in the Word? Are there areas of your life that you need to surrender? Are you responding to Him by telling others the good news that Christ is risen?

The Great Fifty Days includes Ascension Sunday on May 12. Christ's ascension means that in heaven there is one who, knowing firsthand the experience of suffering and temptation, intercedes for us. Christ ascended and reigns over all things in heaven and earth. That is good news to our hearts!

May 19, we celebrate Pentecost. It is going to be a wonderful service to celebrate the unleashing of the Holy Spirit and the empowering of the church to reach the world with the Gospel.

Grateful to be on this journey with you!

SPRING FORUM ON AI

We hosted our first-ever forum on the last Sunday of April down in Graham Hall on the topic of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Thanks to those who came! We had a great group and a fruitful conversation.

Have you wondered about artificial intelligence? It's been in the news almost constantly for the last year or so. Some writers and public figures extol its capacities and highlight the opportunities it creates; other writers are more wary of new kinds of AI. How should Christians think about artificial intelligence? There's no Bible verse that tells us straightforwardly how to use or resist AI, so what we need is biblical wisdom—the application of divine teaching to new technologies.

Hence the forum! The discussion featured four panelists: James Kinnard (Founder and CEO of Useful Group), Casey Solgos (Chair of the English Language Arts Department at Metea Valley High School), Annie Rose (Director of Ministerial Support and Development for the EPC), and Bob Stevenson (Lead Pastor at Village Baptist Church). These four addressed a wide variety of questions—some from the moderator and some from the audience.

We introduced the event by giving ten minutes to the history and development of AI and by reviewing the different kinds of AI (narrow, general, generative, etc.). Much of the crowd had no previous experience with “generative AI,” so we brought up ChatGPT on a shared screen in real time and asked it to “Write a 300-word devotion on Luke 24:36-49 in the Reformed tradition”—a task it completed in about four seconds. Amazing and a little frightening!



The panelists were asked, “What are the uses and potential benefits of artificial intelligence?” One panelist said it’s helped her edit her own writing. Another panelist said it’s useful for large-scale quantitative analysis. Another panelist said he’s seen it enrich and diversify his classroom instruction. Can you think of other positive uses of AI?

Eventually we transitioned to talking about possible risks. “What,” I asked, “are the potential drawbacks and dangers of AI?” One panelist warned that the efficiency of AI seems at odds with the slow nature of human spiritual growth. Another panelist expressed concern that human intelligence and imagination might atrophy as we become dependent on technology. A third panelist worried that inequities in schools and in society at large might increase as the wealthy leverage new technologies to help their kids and the poor get left behind. A fourth panelist worried about the weakening of embodied human communities as we live increasingly in a mediated world. What dangers or drawbacks do you see to these new technologies?

The forum concluded, appropriately, with a reminder that Jesus is Lord and that nothing surprises or threatens him. We can therefore wrestle with these questions cheerfully and faithfully, knowing that our God is working all things according to the counsel of his will.

Why do these forums, though? Well, we want to do them because we live in this world! Even if this world is not our home, it is the place to which God has called us. As long as our Lord tarries, we need to wrestle with how to live faithfully in this world. And to live faithfully here means to apply the wisdom of God to the questions of our day. These forums are a place to do just that. We’re planning the next one for this fall, so stay tuned!

~ Pastor David’ Goetz