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## From the Pastor

“Change” has been on my mind a lot lately, and it finally occurred to me to check out where it came from: the root is about changing one thing for another, more like what we now call an exchange.

It’s pretty fitting, isn’t it? For whatever change we have going on in our lives? Because whether or not we want things to change, and even if we’re doing all we can to make them stay the same, everything is always changing.

Sometimes, of course, the changes are miniscule. It can take a long while to notice the accumulation of miniscule changes of when the sun sets or rises. Sometimes they are huge changes: like divorce or marriage, the wind knocking down an old tree, or winning the lottery.

Changes are sudden and slow, pleasing or distressing. Changes come with grief, and sometimes also with possibility and liberation. Some changes are chosen and some happen anyway. Most changes, of course, are a mixture of all these things.

As people of the Reformed theological tradition, we stand in a whole history of ongoing change. The Reformation, of course, was a pretty big change.

I’ve been listening to a podcast called *Revolutions*, where this guy walks listeners through various revolutions, rebellions, and civil wars in history, and season one (of 12 so far) is the civil wars in England. It is a roller coaster of ride, and religion was a major factor, especially in light of the recent reformation (late 16th/early 17th century). Catholics and Church of England folks and Scots Presbyterians all wanting either to be the state church while allowing folks to worship in other traditions, or to be the only church allowed, with persecution and prison for all who worshiped another way.



Charming.

It wasn’t just religion of course: all the parties involved – Catholics, Church of England, and Scots Presbyterians – wanted power. They wanted to be the party that by legal means controlled the people to live the way they thought wanted them to live.

Which isn’t very Reformation-y.

In the late 17th century, Jodocus van Lodenstein finally put it this way, in describing the gist of being Reformed: “the church reformed, ever being reformed, according to the word of God.” Or, for you Latin fans out there, *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda, secundum verbum dei*. The church is always – or always in need of – being reformed by God. In other words, the reforming never stops as the living God speaks and acts.

But like so many folks in the Reformed tradition, the functional meaning was “the church reformed and always reforming.” I put it starkly and many Presbyterians would take issue with me here: it’s the difference between reforming the church apart from God and the church being reformed by God, according to what God speaks and does. It might remind you of this passage from Isaiah 55:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven  
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose  
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

We can certainly understand why human beings err on the side of coming up with the reforming themselves, right? We want things to be good and right and for all to be well. Our restlessness with things not being exactly right, at its best, turns us toward what God wants to do with us.

What does it mean for us – First Presbyterian Church of Rensselaer, IN – to be reformed, and always being reformed, according to the word of God? What’s the future we’ll change our past for?

Our past has always been changing and what is now wasn’t before. Like women elders, for one thing. The church traded in men-only for a diversity, so that no matter one’s gender, one can be an elder, called by the voice of the congregation and elected to sit on session.

In the days when the Underground Railroad moved through this part of Indiana, folks in the church and in Rensselaer traded in apathy for supporting people who sought freedom.

Oddly enough, change also comes from resisting change – there were plenty of times this congregation could have dropped its commitment to serving others in our community, country, and world. It would have been easier. Instead, you built more and more years of this commitment, and are generous in time, donations, and funds.

All of which is to say is that the history of this congregation began way before it was founded. Change is coming our way, we know that: we will be dealing with big changes as we seek God’s reformation in us to continue as a vital ministry in Rensselaer. But generation after generation our forebears have lived in such a way that they opened themselves to be reformed by God, according to the word of God. Romans 12:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God’s mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Michelle



## SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

### February 8, 2024

The meeting was called to order in the pastor's study at 4:00 p.m. CST. The moderator opened the meeting with prayer and devotion. **Kristi Slaby was elected Clerk of Session.**

Linda Comingore, Suzanne Jordan, Kristi Slaby, Julie Williams, and Vanessa Jefferson were present. Kathy O'Neill attended the meeting via Zoom. Clerk declared a quorum.

#### Actions taken by Session:

- ◇ Minutes of the stated meeting January 11, 2024 were approved
- ◇ Correspondence included a donation from Women's Bridge Club and Karen Craig has provided funding for Bill Craig Youth Scholarship
- ◇ Rev. Bartel's Pastor's report included:
  - Development The Fruit of the Spirit curriculum for VBS..
  - Officer training is on Sunday, February 25, at 11:00 a.m.
  - Procedure for email voting was discussed and approved.
- ⇒ Rick Comingore was elected Treasurer for 2024.
- ⇒ The Clerk's Annual Statistical report was approved
- ⇒ A combined Ash Wednesday service with First Christian Church will be held in our sanctuary on February 14, 2024.
- ⇒ Assignment of Ministries (committees) for 2024:
  - Christian Education and Youth: Linda Comingore
  - Stewardship: Finance, Personnel & Property: Vanessa Jefferson
  - Discipleship: Mission/Outreach & Fellowship: Julie Williams
  - Worship/Music: Suzie Jordan
- ⇒ Next meeting of Mission will be February 19 at 1:30 in Pastor's office.
- ⇒ Office Administrator job description was approved as written.
- ⇒ Christian Education reported Youth dates for Spring 2024:
  - Spring Break - March 22-31: youth will not meet.
  - Last Spring session for Peeps: Wed, April 24
  - Not yet definite on VBS dates currently but considering June 4-5-6 (T-W-Th) timeframe 5-7p.
- ⇒ We will be serving Communion to members in the Pews beginning in March. Two elders will be needed each month, Easter and Christmas Eve. Services approved for Good Friday.

Next meeting will be held on Thursday, March 14, at 4:00 p.m. in Pastor's study.  
The meeting was adjourned with prayer at 5:48 p.m.



*You shall be called*  
**Repairers**  
*of the breach*

— ISAIAH 58



ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING  
**Palm Sunday & Easter Sunday**

# Lenten Lunches

Wed. March 6 -St. Augustine Catholic Church  
Wed. March 13 -Trinity United Methodist  
Wed. March 20 -First Christian Church  
Wed. March 27 -Brushwood Church



**Cost: \$6.00**

**Start Time: 11:45 am**  
**1 hr. length**



On Sunday, February 4, the Ordination of Vanessa Paschke Jefferson and Installation of Elders took place. Several elders and Pastor Michelle participated in the Laying On of Hands.

# FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



| Sun                                                                                                            | Mon                                                            | Tue                                                       | Wed                                                                                                          | Thu                                                                                        | Fri                                                                                         | Sat                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                |                                                                |                                                           |                                                                                                              |                                                                                            | 1                                                                                           | 2 <b>Jacki Ritchie Memorial</b><br>Visitation 10 -12<br>Service 12 pm<br><hr/> AA - 7 pm |
| 3<br>Communion<br>9:30 am                                                                                      | 4<br>AAA-Abuse<br>Awareness &<br>Accountability<br>2:30 - 8 pm | 5<br>Dance Magic<br>3:30 pm<br><hr/> Bible Study<br>4 pm  | 6<br>Youth Group<br>meets<br>5 - 6:30 pm                                                                     | 7                                                                                          | 8                                                                                           | 9<br>AA -<br>Alcoholics<br>Anonymous<br>7 pm                                             |
| 10<br>Worship<br>9:30 am<br><hr/> PAC<br>Art Awards<br>1:30 - 3:00 pm                                          | 11<br>AAA<br>2:30 - 8 pm                                       | 12<br>Dance Magic<br>3:30 pm<br><hr/> Bible Study<br>4 pm | 13<br>Youth Group<br>meets<br>5 - 6:30 pm                                                                    | 14<br>Session<br>meeting<br>4 pm                                                           | 15                                                                                          | 16 <b>FOOD<br/>PANTRY<br/>8 - 10 am</b><br><hr/> AA-Alcoholics<br>Anonymous<br>7 pm      |
| 17<br>Worship<br>9:30 am<br> | 18<br>AAA<br>2:30 -<br>8 pm                                    | 19<br>Dance Magic<br>3:30 pm<br><hr/> Bible Study<br>4 pm | 20<br>Youth Group<br>meets<br>5 - 6:30 pm                                                                    | 21                                                                                         | 22                                                                                          | 23 AA -<br>Alcoholics<br>Anonymous<br>7 pm                                               |
| 24<br>Worship<br>9:30 am<br> | 25<br>AAA<br>2:30 - 8 pm                                       | 26<br>Bible Study<br>4 pm                                 | 27<br><b>NO YOUTH</b><br> | 28<br> | 29<br> | 30 AA -<br>Alcoholics<br>Anonymous<br>7 pm                                               |
| 31<br>Worship<br>9:30 am<br> |                                                                |                                                           |                                                                                                              |                                                                                            |                                                                                             |                                                                                          |



First Presbyterian Church  
220 North Cullen Street  
Rensselaer, Indiana 47978

