

From the Pastor

During the school year 1988-1989, between my second and third year of seminary, I had an unusual field education placement in Cambridge, England. It was fun to travel around the country some, and see things that were *old*. The church I attended had a new wing – built in the late 1300's.

I took some time in Whitby, a town on the north-east coast of England. There's an abbey ruins there, St. Hilda's, that is the supposed site of an important Catholic church gathering in 664, the Synod of Whitby. At that time the then-current King of Northumbria, King Oswiu, led Northumbrian Roman Catholic and Celtic Catholic leaders in a decision about the right process to determine when to celebrate Easter.

There were different calculations being used at that point, and different Catholic leaders were passionate about the calculation they followed: some on a 19-year cycle, and one cycle that I think was 84 years. (I don't fully understand this.) King Oswiu ruled that his kingdom would go by the Roman calendar, that is, according to the church leadership in Rome.

Folks in Iona and Northumbria weren't all opposed to this, but some monks withdrew to Iona (Scotland) where they had more freedom to do things the way they thought best. They were quite a distance from Rome in the days way before cars and the internet, so they had more space to operate. All of this back and forth never quite got to Ireland, either, so Irish Catholics had more freedom to express their Celtic spirituality as well.

It's this part of our heritage that has my attention captured in the month when we celebrate St. Patrick's Day. On March 17th, folks will do all sorts of things to celebrate wherever people of Irish heritage live. In Chicago they will dye the river green. People will eat corned beef and cabbage, bangers and mash, Guinness pie and other treats, and folks will lift pint glasses of Harp and Guinness Stout. And among all those celebrations will be those who also remember the poetic stories of St. Patrick and Celtic Christianity. Way before the Synod of Whitby, St. Patrick spread Christianity to Ireland in the late 4th

and early 5th century. (He lived from 385-461, approximately.)

We Presbyterians have several different strains of Christianity in our tradition. These aren't just different theological strains – who believes what and why – but also different strains of spiritual formation. Many folks, Presbyterians and others, have been trying to retrieve our Celtic roots and let them flourish again.

That's because Celtic Christian spirituality emphasizes a particular communal experience of God. By "communal" I mean "communing:" with nature, with one another, and with the Divine running through it all. If you look up Celtic Spirituality, you'll find that one could only be present to God in the community that included nature and all reality – other people, flora and fauna, respect for all living things in which the Divine is present. I'm no expert in this. What I am, though, is a Christian who was so thankful to come across this strain of Christian spiritual formation. My first notice of it was during that trip to Whitby, and I find the tradition to be beautiful and nourishing.

It's from this tradition that I learned about God's presence with me, in a personal way, like God was a daily companion, sharing the Divine joy in creation. (The joy of the Lord is our strength! Nehemiah 8.) It's from this tradition that I noticed and took in the beauty of God and God's world, of Christ's unending, active love for those in need of healing, of the Spirit's presence around us. It's from this tradition that I finally took in the emotional and spiritual weight of the living Holy Spirit:

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words." (Romans 8)

Over the past few decades, lots of Presbyterians have been drawing on this deep well of our tradition. Many folks, including my Mom and lots of seminary friends, have taken a pilgrimage to Iona in Scotland, where St. Columba was active for most of his adult life. He got there from Ireland as one of those who brought Christianity to Scotland. Celtic spirituality helped nourish Scottish spirituality, some of which became Scottish Presbyterianism,

Continued from Page 1

which, centuries down the road, became part of the PC (USA). Celtic Christianity is not the only Christian tradition in the world that has an emphasis on communing with the Divine by communing with others and with nature, but it's the Christian tradition handy to us.

So handy that we sing it! We have three hymns in the *Glory to God* hymnal that come to us from Old Irish spirituality, in particular, "St. Patrick's Breastplate." It is a poem-prayer that is a confession of faith and declaration of trust and belief in God all wrapped into one. You have a section of it in this newsletter – the full version is much longer.

The word "Breastplate" refers to protection. Not literal armor made of metal, but God's protection around us. We sing references to the Breastplate, from time to time, in worship: #702, "Christ Be Beside Me," and #543, "God, Be the Love to Search and Keep Me."

From #702
Christ be beside me;
Christ be before me;
Christ be behind me, King of my Heart.
Christ be within me;
Christ be below me;
Christ be above me, never to part.

And from #543
God be the love to search and keep me;
God be the prayer to move my voice;
God be the strength to now uphold me:
O Christ, surround me;
O Christ surround me.

I encourage you to embrace this strand of our faith tradition and pray these words for yourself, like many of our forebears from centuries ago. Pray them for yourself, and pray them for your loved ones, remembering that it is the Holy Spirit of Christ who is with us always, beautifully and joyfully with us, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28)

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,

Pastor Michelle



March 9, 2025

**We jump ahead an hour on
Sunday, March 9.**
and we'll fall back an hour on
Nov. 2, 2025.

Spring Forward!

What happened at Session?

Approved:

1. Elected Rick Comingore as Treasurer
2. Elected Kristi Slaby as Clerk
3. Approved the minutes of the Annual Congregational Meeting of Jan. 19 and Feb. 2, 2025.
4. Approve the 2024 Statistical Report
5. Moved that per-capita be paid in the amount of \$2000.00.

Ministry Reports:

Worship: Sunday attendance for January was 66, with Communion being served to 20 by Elders Kathy Staddon and Suzi Jordan. Choir was present and sang at the Jan. 5 service. The Annual Meeting took place January 19 following regular service. Paraments were changed to green for Ordinary Time, and banners changed accordingly.

Mission: Letter of gratitude have been received, from the following: Carnegie Players, Inc. for our \$2000.00 donation from the chili supper. Wes Tillet, Executive director of LUM thanked us for our generous donation of \$1,000.00. We received a letter from Jennifer Burns Lewis, enclosed is a copy of our annual giving for special offerings, and our youth's participation in the Giving Catalog.

Property: As a result of the roof leaking periodically over the years around the chimney of the church building, the lower end of the southwest wooden support rafter, which carries one-fourth of the weight of the sanctuary roof, has rotted causing that corner of the roof to begin dropping. If it is not repaired soon, that corner of the roof will collapse inward.

Inside of the brown beams that you see above the pews, there is a steel frame called a truss. This truss ties the four corners of the roof together and supports the center portion. A wood box has been built around the steel truss members to hide them. This steel truss is bolted to the rafter where it has rotted.

To replace the rotted rafter, that corner of the roof would have to be completely removed, which would be a major project. Therefore, we have come up with a simpler solution.

A steel plate will be attached to each side of the existing wood rafter, where the wood is still good, and extend downward to replace the rotted wooden portion. The ends of the steel plates will set on the concrete and/or block wall where the rotted rafter sat. In addition, a steel support pipe will be installed from the basement floor, up through the sanctuary floor, and be attached to the existing steel truss to provide additional support for it. In the basement, a screw mechanism will be added to the pipe base so that the pipe can be lengthened to maintain support to the steel truss if the 16" pad settles in the future.

An enclosure will be constructed around the pipe in the sanctuary portion to hide it. The basement portion will set on a newly poured 16" deep concrete pad where the women's toilet now sets. It will not be enclosed. Therefore, we will lose the women's basement toilet but the sink will remain usable. We will make the men's restroom a unisex restroom in the basement.

The manse washing machine has been repaired! They will send the invoice to the church. We have the PAC folks here again on February 23rd.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CALENDAR

March

2025

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1 AA-Alcoholics Anonymous 7:00 pm
2 Worship 9:30 am Communion	3 Book Club 4:00 pm	4 Dance Magic 3:30 pm Bible Study 4:00 pm	5 Youth Group 5:00-6:30pm Ash Wednesday Service at First Christian 6:00pm	6 Bridge Club 12:00pm	7	8 AA-Alcoholics Anonymous 7:00 pm
9 Worship 9:30 am 	10 No Abuse Awareness Accountability (AAA) until further notice	11 Dance Magic 3:30 pm Bible Study 4:00 pm	12 Youth Group 5:00-6:30pm	13 Bridge Club 12:00pm Forestry Council 5:00pm Session Meets 3:00pm	14	15 AA-Alcoholics Anonymous 7:00 pm
16 Worship 9:30 am	17 	18 Dance Magic 3:30 pm Bible Study 4:00 pm	19 Youth Group 5:00-6:30pm	20  Bridge Club 12:00pm	21	22 AA-Alcoholics Anonymous 7:00 pm
23 Worship 9:30 am	24	25 Dance Magic 3:30 pm Bible Study 4:00 pm	26 Youth Group 5:00-6:30pm	27 Bridge Club 12:00pm	28	29 AA-Alcoholics Anonymous 7:00 pm
30 Worship 9:30 am	31					

✠ Selections from *St. Patrick's Breastplate* ✠

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invoca-
tion of the Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.

I arise today
Through the strength of Christ's birth
with His baptism,
Through the strength of His crucifix-
ion with His burial,
Through the strength of His resur-
rection with His ascension,
Through the strength of His de-
scent for the judgment of doom.



I arise today, through
The strength of heaven,
The light of the sun,
The radiance of the moon,
The splendor of fire,
The speed of lightning,
The swiftness of wind,
The depth of the sea,
The stability of the earth,
The firmness of rock.

I arise today, through
God's strength to pilot me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,

God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to save me

Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who
thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who
speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

I arise today
Through a mighty strength,
the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.

March Discussion Group

We hope you can join us for discussion on **Monday, March 10 at 4:00pm CT** as we reflect on the difference between hope and optimism as Christians living in the USA at this time in history. The article is "The Difference Between Hope and Optimism," By Arthur C. Brooks for *The Atlantic*. I believe you will find it...hopeful! Articles are available at the back of the sanctuary or in the church office.

If you are joining us by Zoom, email Bethany for the link at her email: churchoffice@firstpresrensselaer.org.

Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Schererville, IN is looking for a new financial secretary! Duties include AP, payroll, tax remittance, bank statement reconciliation, journal entries, payroll reports, member pledges and contributions, issuing appropriate quarterly and annual reports to various government agencies. Interested or know someone who is? Contact Pastor Laurel at church!!! Must have church accounting experience and references.

**Laurel B Hamilton
Pastor, Immanuel Presbyterian Church
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312-343-2053 - cell**

Lent services: All are welcome!

I am pleased to be working with my fellow ministers, Rev. Sean Johnson from Trinity United Methodist, and Rev. Jeff Seger from First Christian, to provide Lent services for our congregations and community. All are welcome to join us.

Ash Wednesday, **March 5**

6:00 pm CT, First Christian Church

Maundy Thursday, **April 17**

6:00 pm CT, Trinity United Methodist

Good Friday, **April 18**

6:00 pm CT, First Presbyterian

Devotional Booklets for Lent

Don't forget to pick up a copy of our Lenten Devotional in the back of the sanctuary or in the church office. It is called *Life Renewed*, and it is from Augsburg Fortress.

Changes have been pretty dramatic since the new presidential administration began. If you want to speak out for or against what is going on, we have the same channels of communication we have had for decades. On the other side of this page you will find contact information for most of our elected officials at both the state and federal level.





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