

From the Pastor

Some of you may have heard my story about the time I went to Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, KY, a megachurch with a few branches in the general area of Louisville and Jeffersonville, IN. This was years ago, of course, when I was a chaplain and professor at Hanover College. One of my students was a gifted violinist and played with Southeast's orchestra. She invited me to come to church one Sunday and hear her play, and I was delighted to do so.

The music, of course, was lovely. But the worship service made me itchy. For one thing, there was a transparent baptism tub lodged in the wall behind the pulpit, high up so the thousands of people there could see it. It was strange to see a baptism in such a way. It's probably no surprise that I was a bit uncomfortable with the liturgy – it was an evangelical church, and there wasn't much. Then we had communion. I was in one of the top tiers and the way communion happened was that a church volunteer left a plate of teeny tiny crackers and little cups of juice.

Oh, this rubbed me the wrong way, it really did. We didn't even see the person who dropped off the plates. Everyone just served themselves. This isn't necessarily a bad or wrong thing because it depends on how you understand scripture and tradition and so on. But I was saying all sorts of things in my head, cranky things, like "this isn't even real communion."

The second I had that particular thought – the very second – I heard a big booming voice fill the sanctuary, saying "Do not judge!" That froze me where I was, because for a split second I thought God was speaking to me in my mind and heart, seeing clearly just how judgmental I was being, instead of loving. Then it came again.

The second time, though, the passage from Matthew was projected in front of us and the voice kept

going. I guess the first voice I heard was a mic test.

"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For the judgment you give will be the judgment you get, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye?

You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye."

The fact that the voice I heard was just a test, and not God taking special aim at me, did not change the fact that my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, had preached that part of the Sermon on the Mount directly into my soul.

Being judgmental in this way keeps us from seeing beauty and joy in God's world. It's not a stance of curiosity or teachability. It does not in any way manifest love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control (Galatians 5). Consider that for a moment: when we are judging others, *none of the Fruit of the Spirit are present.*

So the older I get the more I enjoy life's surprises that come along the way when people do something you don't expect them to do. For me, that's an opportunity to experience profound grace, those surprises from God that expand our understanding of the world and remind us that there is always more going on than we think there is. (Always.)

Imagine my surprise when I learned that Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch is the strongest ally that the indigenous people of our country have had in the Supreme Court. Ever. Because of the way we think we know people or issues when they are labeled "liberal" or "conservative" – when we label them that

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way – we almost always miss the nuances and complexity of people and issues.

This surprises a lot of folks, because Justice Gorsuch is often described – with approval or disapproval – as an arch conservative on an arch conservative court.

“Conservative” can mean quite a few different things, as we know: moral conservatism, legal conservatism, and so on, and a lot of us – maybe all of us? – have ideals and values we want to conserve.

Gorsuch grew up in Colorado, and from his early career he has been conservative with regard to the Constitution. For him, this included the development of profound empathy for our indigenous peoples given the way the United States government has violated the rights of native peoples and treaties. For Justice Gorsuch, this is a violation of the Constitution. He wants to hold us, as a country, to our own written ideals.

All this has come to mind because of September 30: in Canada it is a memorial day, called “The National Day of Truth and Reconciliation.” The truth that is being told and the reconciliation that is underway have to do with the atrocities and generational impact of the culturally, religiously, and physically violent boarding school systems that ripped native children from their families and communities in order to force them into “whiteness.” This day of remembering has expanded into the United States as a somber day of memorial, for the atrocities of our own US boarding schools that entailed the same atrocities.

I wonder if with Justice Gorsuch we can lament the impact of our ancestors’ involvement in these schools. Drexel Hall at St. Joe’s was built to be such a boarding school, and lasted for eight years. The history is in our midst and not far off.

Judgement, I think, when it comes to judging others, prohibits us from seeing truth. One truthful detail about a worship service does not give full understanding, which, in the end, only God can have. It prohibits us from being loving or kind. My judgment of Southeast was not in any way loving or gentle or peaceable.

We are in a time of vehement and wide-spread judgement of others. Instead of being swayed by our

own ways of being judgmental, in addition to the judgmental words we hear from others, we can be swayed by Justice Gorsuch (a sibling in the faith), by the Apostle Paul (Galatians 5), and even the booming voice passing on the word of the One we proclaim as Lord, Jesus Christ himself, in the Sermon on the Mount.

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

What happened at Session?

Session did not meet in the month of September. Look for information about session in the November newsletter.

Won't You Be Our Neighbor??

Who: Members of nearby Presbyterian (PCUSA) congregations

What: Brown bag lunch, sharing and learning

Where: Bethany Presbyterian Church, 3305 Longlois Dr, Lafayette, IN 47904

When: Thursday, Nov 6 at Noon (E) – approximately 3p (E)

***Please join us for open conversation about our congregations!!*

Come prepared to: Make new friends,
 Exchange ideas,
 Discover new opportunities,
 Get connected with neighboring congregations.

Have questions? Our contact info is below!

PS: Remember to Bring Your Own Lunch! (drink & chips will be provided).

Your hosting sisters in Christ,

Linda Comingore*

First Presbyterian Church of Rensselaer

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Charlotte Ferguson*

Bethany Church, Lafayette

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Might we become Better Neighbors together?



A prayer for difficult days

Remind me, God,
that on difficult days
and in troubling times,
the bravest thing I can do
is to keep going.
Accompany me, Jesus
on difficult days,
and in challenging circumstances
to find courage
to keep going.
Inspire me, Holy Spirit,
when on difficult days,
and in tumultuous moments
I need to stop and wait for your renewal
to show myself grace.
Amen.

By Mark Koenig

Inspired by a Facebook post by the Rev. Melvin Gore Lowry

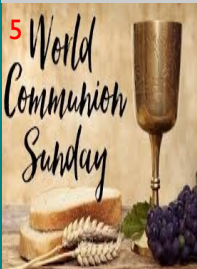
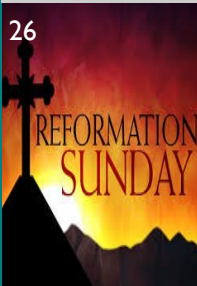
What religious or Christian terms do you want to learn more about?

Andrew and Pastor Michelle are working on a section of the website that would shed some light on church or Christian jargon for those who don't know much about church or religion. If you think of terms or concepts that need more clarity, please send Michelle an email.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CALENDAR



2025

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 Youth 5:00pm-6:30pm	2 Bridge Club 12:00pm	3	4 AA-Alcoholics Anonymous 7:00 pm
5 <i>World Communion Sunday</i> 	6 Book Club 4:00 pm	7 Bible Study 4:00 pm Dance Magic 3:30pm	8 Youth 5:00pm-6:30pm	9 Bridge Club 12:00pm Session meets 3:00pm Forestry Council 5:00pm	10	11 AA-Alcoholics Anonymous 7:00 pm
12 Worship 9:30 am Fellowship	13	14 Bible Study 4:00 pm Dance Magic 3:30pm	15 Youth 5:00pm-6:30pm	16 Bridge Club 12:00pm	17	18 AA-Alcoholics Anonymous 7:00 pm
19 Worship 9:30 am	20	21 Bible Study 4:00 pm Dance Magic 3:30pm	22 No Youth	23 Bridge Club 12:00pm	24	25 AA-Alcoholics Anonymous 7:00 pm
26  REFORMATION SUNDAY	27	28 Bible Study 4:00 pm Dance Magic 3:30pm	29 Youth 5:00pm-6:30pm	30 Bridge Club 12:00pm	31  Happy Halloween!	

Sabbath



By **dabar96** on September 25, 2025



Photo by Linda D. Hostettler

It not only calls you
to cease making things,
but also to cease trying
to make something of yourself,
in order that the divine
may have space, time,
and breath to make
something else of you;
something more holy,
something more sacred,
something much more
like what the world needs
to rotate toward the hope
for which we all were created.

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So excited for our youth group meeting again this semester.

We will be doing lessons from Shannon Andersen's book entitled "A Deed a Day". We are learning about how in our lives, we must change some to be the reason to show love, Christ's love. Pastor Michelle follows our lesson time with a short mini-service for the youth in the lounge. We hear more of God's word and sing a song or two from the hymnals. Yesterday we sang Amazing Grace.

Dinner is still being provided by the church members and every night it is very delicious. Keep us in your prayers as we continue to grow in God's teachings and learn about so many things in our neighborhood of Rensselaer and how we can make it a better place.

-Stephanie Davisson



First Presbyterian Church
220 North Cullen Street
Rensselaer, Indiana 47978

Daylight Savings Time Ends Sunday Nov. 2, 2025

Don't forget to "fall back" and set your clocks an hour behind by 2 a.m., Sunday Nov. 2!

