

# news from the **EDGE**



First Presbyterian Church of  
**EDGEWOOD**  
The Community Church

Believing we are called together  
by God's love through Jesus Christ, our mission is to  
love God, to love each other and to love our neighbors.

The monthly newsletter of the First Presbyterian Church of Edgewood

**Summer 2020**

## PASTOR'S **POINT OF VIEW**



Michael P. Rucker  
Pastor

Dear sisters and brothers on the journey of the faith,

When I would watch a pastor go through the brief but meaningful retirement ceremony at presbytery meetings, I wondered how he or she felt after their years of service. I do not have to wonder anymore. That day has arrived for me.

Many evenings I find myself sitting on our back porch and remembering; my memory is flooded with images and sounds; a wild variety of emotions surge through me. I remember my first youth group meeting in late summer of 1983. My heart was pounding, my hands shaking as I gazed into the curious and skeptical faces of the thirty Mount Lebanon teen-agers who sat on the floor before me. As I spoke, my voice was shaking. We ended up doing some wonderful things together.

Turn the clock ahead thirty-eight years, and I remember enjoying a banquet with an enthusiastic and happy gathering of well over one hundred people squeezed around tables in the Gathering Place on the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Presbyterian Church of Edgewood. Members from today or years ago and friends of the church ate their fill and talked about their "oh so many memories!"

After a while I can set the memories to the side; what do I feel? I feel deep gratitude and joy for the 40 years of ministry.

The first whisper of a call took place way back in the mid '60's. In junior high I found myself sitting in the sanctuary of the Methodist Church my family belonged to; I was surrounded by the other students, the confirmation classes were coming to an end, I remember looking with admiration at our pastor, Reverend Oliver Davis, thinking "what this man does is different than anyone other adult I know and what this man does is important." When I am asked how my journey of faith began, I would point to that moment. It took sixteen years of chasing the wrong dream or walking down the wrong path or just plain making stupid decisions, but I finally found myself standing in front of those teens in Mount Lebanon. What an amazing journey I have traveled over the years.

I write with a heart full of gratitude for each one of you. You have added to my deep store of memories. And truly, truly, I say unto you – each memory, each conversation, each hug, each kind word of encouragement (and I needed more from you than any other congregation I have served), each listening ear in worship, each smile you offered me will enrich the remainder of my life with even more gratitude and joy. Thank you for allowing me to serve you these past nearly eight years.

Journey on, brothers and sisters of faith!

*Pastor Michael*

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News from the Edge is the monthly newsletter of the First Presbyterian Church of Edgewood. If you have information you would like to include in the next issue, email Judy Mysels at office@fpcedgewood.org by the 15th of the prior month. Sponsorship is available for \$40 per month.



### ***THE KEY QUESTION, OF COURSE, IS – WHEN WILL WE WORSHIP TOGETHER IN THE SANCTUARY?***

The Worship committee had a ZOOM meeting on the evening of Monday, June 15 to discuss public, in-person worship services. The spirited meeting lasted almost an hour. The following motion was presented to and approved by the session .

**The worship committee recommends that weekly worship services at FPCE continue to be recorded and posted on the church website and social media pages on Sunday morning. People are invited to attend the recording sessions if they so choose. In this time of the corona virus, we ask people not to come if they feel sick, have a fever, have been to a Covid 19 hot spot over last the two weeks or are in a high risk category. (People over 65 are more vulnerable, people over 80 are very vulnerable. People with asthma, COPD, cystic or pulmonary fibrosis, or with weakened immune system should not attend.) Worshipers will be asked to enter through the Swissvale Avenue doors, sit toward the rear of the sanctuary, wear masks, and practice social distancing. Hand sanitizer or sanitizing wipes will be available. We ask that worshipers not sing.**

We are discussing having public worship in the sanctuary or on the side lawn in the future. When we do begin services, we all must be aware that the style of worship and our manner of being together will be changed on order to protect one another. Masks will be worn. We will sit 6 – 8 feet apart. People who are not feeling well, or who are particularly vulnerable to the virus, or who have visited a “hot spot” recently will be asked to remain at home. There will be no handshaking or hugging. Singing will be restricted. The choir probably will not lead us in worship very much, if at all. Sanitizing will occur before and after service. Bulletins and hymnals will not be used. The service will be projected onto the screen.

# Our Church Community



## SESSION NOTES

### March

On motion by Mr. McGuigan, seconded by Mrs. Apessos, Session voted to place a medium sized ad (\$55.) in the Woodland Hills school musical program. On motion by Mr. McGuigan, seconded by Mr. Segedy, Session approved the rental of the kitchen, July 8-10, to Picklesburg. Rev. Rucker said that he will make sure that all homebound members will receive communion in June. He will work on the wedding, funeral, church use, and building use policies. Community dinners will be held the first Wednesday of the months June – September, 2020. On motion by Mr. McGuigan, seconded by Mrs. Apessos, Session voted to have seasonal signs made for the front lawn of the church. The first sign will advertise Lenten services. Rev. Rucker will get supply pastors from his retirement date to Labor Day. Starting this Sunday Rev. Rucker will announce from the pulpit (and also in the bulletin) that will we pass the peace with smiles, but no handshaking. Rev. Rucker assured Session that if church services need to be cancelled due to the virus, he will send his sermons via email.

### APRIL

April 10: Dr. Ohori moved that Tom Ochs, FPCE Treasurer, act on behalf of the First Church of Edgewood (FPCE) to secure and execute a Payroll Protection Loan (PPL) From PNC Bank. The motion was seconded by Mr. Foster. Following discussion, Session voted their approval.

April 21: Treasurer Ochs stated that donations and general income were above budget and expenses were under budget. PNC should respond shortly regarding our PPP loan application. Ms. Hartman and Mr. Masten reported that any food nearing expiration was taken to the food pantry at WCM. Shadyside Academy is holding a pandemic food drive. The Deacons recommended that our portion of that be taken to the WCM food pantry. On March 28, 2020 Mr. McGuigan moved that FPCE donate \$245 to Woodland Hills School District to purchase one chromebook. Mrs. Apessos seconded the motion and Session voted their approval. On April 9, 2020 Dr. Ohori moved that we celebrate on-line or virtual sacrament of the Lord's Supper when the community is not able to gather in person.

### May

Treasurer Ochs stated that donations and general income were above budget and expenses were under budget. We have received a \$19,500 PPP loan for 8 weeks of payroll. We will ask for forgiveness of the loan at the end of 8 weeks. Mr. Segedy said that unless something changes, there won't be any community dinners this summer. We might consider something in September or October. Rev. Rucker reported that the committee doesn't feel we are ready to go back to worshiping in the sanctuary at this time. Somethings to consider are: checking each person for fever, asking screening questions, provide/require masks and gloves, guidelines for seating, etc. It was suggested that Rev. Rucker ask congregation in his weekly message who is interested in returning to the sanctuary and when. It was also suggested that we consider worshiping outside. Mrs. Apessos reported that she has asked Mrs. Lisa Segedy to replace Mr. Coleman as Elder. Rev. Rucker will go online and ask the congregation for a nomination and then to vote.

### June

Treasurer Ochs reported that we will wait for the remainder of the 8 weeks and then apply for forgiveness for our PPP loan. He said a donation has been sent to WHSD for the purchase of a Chromebook. Rev. Rucker said he wants to help with our transition. He will be available until the end of June. Mr. Ochs moved that we continue to employ Rev. Rucker until June 30, 2020. We will pay for his 2 weeks accrued vacation after that. Dr. Ohori said they are working on the job posting form. They will be in communication with Rev. Wallace and Mrs. Turnock. Scout Troop 23 has requested permission to begin meeting at the church again. Mr. McGuigan moved that we approve this request with the following stipulations; they acknowledge that they are meeting at their own risk, they take their own precautions, and sanitize the area after their meetings. The committee will meet June 15 to discuss the issues involved with returning to worship in the sanctuary and live streaming the service.

## YOU DO MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth. You are a mustard seed planted in the ground. You are a kernel of yeast buried in a loaf of dough. You are a child of God." That is true no matter where we are or how we are feeling. Even the little things we say or do can have a larger impact than we could ever imagine.

Below are words composed by Dr. Kent M. Keith. I first heard the words set to an upbeat tune sung by Suzzy and Maggie Roche. The Roches are a fun pair of singers and songwriters. The Roches do not take themselves too seriously, yet, the messages in their songs are very serious. The song called "Anyway" can be found on their cd, *Zero Church*:

### The Paradoxical Commandments

*by Dr. Kent M. Keith*

People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered.

Love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.

Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies.

Succeed anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.

Do good anyway.

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.

Be honest and frank anyway.

The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down  
by the smallest men and women with the smallest minds.

Think big anyway.

People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs.

Fight for a few underdogs anyway.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.

Build anyway.

People really need help but may attack you if you do help them.

Help people anyway.

Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.

Give the world the best you have anyway.

**Do not hide it! Let your light shine before others...encourage one another  
and build up each other.**



## FPCE IN THE TIME OF THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC

“The most important things that happen in our lives are completely out of our control.” That is how I opened the June 9 meeting of session. Two powerful forces are sweeping across our nation. They have a life of their own, beyond our control.

One, the Covid 19 virus pandemic remains and will continue to remain a menace to people around the world. The virus is invisible, contagious, can spread rapidly, has infected hundreds of thousands of people across the country and taken the lives of tens of thousands. Covid 19 is not understood very well and has no known cure or vaccine. It is scary. Even though the country is beginning to “open up”, people are encouraged to be very cautious. Yes, some of us are frustrated, some are resentful and angry, but people trained in the field of epidemiology and pandemic response advise us, especially the vulnerable, to remain vigilant in our cautious lifestyle. We will do so.

Secondly, racial inequality and seething, suppressed anger at this injustice has been ignited by the continued killing of unarmed black men by armed white men and police officers. The pent-up emotion and long-ignored cries for justice and equality has inspired people of all races, ethnicities, ages and genders to become part of passionate and justifiable protests across the country and around the world. It is a truly amazing, and unsettling phenomenon to behold. Like the pandemic, the issue confronting us is bigger than we are.

These unfolding events are not entirely our fault, but they are our responsibility. In the face of them a small congregation tucked into the hills of Edgewood, Pennsylvania, may feel overwhelmed. As an old, Breton fisherman once prayed, “*O God, Thy sea is so big and my boat is so small.*” Our strength is that we are people of faith.

Christians are people of unbounded, undying hope. Our hope is the same hope that has sustained the church of Jesus Christ through centuries of pain, violence, injustice, and pandemics. As the Apostle Paul writes in II Corinthians 12: 9-10, **“My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” So then, I will boast most gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, with insults, with troubles, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.**” As Jesus assured his disciples before he left them for the last time, **“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.”**

The leadership of FPCE is doing its best to stand strong during this time in our history. Worship services continue every week. True, we do not gather as one people in the sanctuary, but we do gather as the people of God through the modern day wonders of Facebook, Instagram, Sound Cloud and You Tube. We have a spreadsheet of analytics on the numbers of people who join us virtually and interact with FPCE every week. I am not tech savvy enough to interpret those numbers. But FPCE is alive on-line. Trusting God and connecting with one another.

Believe me, I long to meet together in our sanctuary on Sunday mornings. Do you know how odd it is to end my career preaching in that large, lovely sanctuary to only three listeners? I am not complaining, I marvel at the new worship and preaching possibilities emerging from this tragedy. When I preached my first sermon in 1980, this virtual, tech-driven connection was not possible. Now it is helping to hold the congregation together.

The members and leadership of FPCE stay in touch with one another on the phone, via email messages, Facebook posts, YouTube video, and ZOOM! It’s crazy...but it is happening. *Please know that the staff and the leadership are happy to hear from anyone in the congregation with a concern or need.* Additionally, we have a group of prayer warriors lifting up every person or concern that comes their way.

Our treasurer, Tom Ochs, delivered the financial report to the June 9 session. Because of your faith in a faithful and generous God, the financial giving of the congregation is right where it should be. The stewardship of this congregation has not been stopped by a virus, protests, or social distancing! Thanks be to God.



FROGS ended unexpectedly mid-March because of the Covid 19 Pandemic. It happened so suddenly, none of us were able to say goodbye or make plans for the future. We had a full roster of FROGS, even though some of our 4th grade girls were attending an after-school program, (Girls on the Run) sponsored by Woodland Hills School District. Our roster of FROGS this year was a fantastically great group of kids! We celebrated monthly birthdays for each child (even though we missed Giancarlo, Viola, Avon in April and Marcus in May), along with doing monthly crafts/activities.

I, along with our unsung volunteers for FROGS met Tuesday, June 23 to evaluate this past session, find out who might be returning in September (or whenever Woodland Hills School District resumes their school year?). We practiced correct social distancing while enjoying catching up with each other.

After hearing back from most of our parents, we expect a full roster of returning FROGS in September. We will keep you all posted when we actually resume and will again ask for donations of drinks, snacks, etc.

I would like to especially thank the FROG volunteers for their loyalty, love for the kids, patience, laughter, empathy, etc. for they are the true backbone of this program.

*Judy Mysels, Director*



### **A NOTE FROM JUDY MYSELS...**

*During this unprecedented time of Covid 19, we have an additional challenge of our Pastor retiring. I would like to assure you ALL that I am in the office Monday through Friday, 9AM to 1PM (summer hours), with the answering machine taking messages after that and can also be reached by email: [office@fpcedgewood.org](mailto:office@fpcedgewood.org). Please do not hesitate to contact me for ANY REASON. I am not a substitute for Pastor Michael, but I have been here for 32 years, going through many transitional periods and feel very capable of handling many situations that might arise. Between myself, Shaun, Sunny, Rob, the Session, the Deacons, we all need to step up and help in any way possible. Hopefully soon we will return to some normalcy, but in the meantime, know that I am here!*

## Wilkinsburg Community Ministry (WCM)

Under the guidance of the executive director, Ruth Kittner, the Wilkinsburg Community Ministry has re-focused and re-invigorated their mission to the Wilkinsburg Community. This community-focused mission group received much needed boosts of support and a few generous cash infusions! WCM is the recipient of a \$28,000 grant from the Heinz Foundation, a \$23,760 grant from The Pittsburgh Foundation, \$19,387 from the Payroll Protection Program, a \$1000 grant from Waverly Presbyterian Church, and a very large canned food donation from Shadyside Academy - thanks to Shadyside's connection with our Deacons.

During this pandemic, the food needs in the Wilkinsburg community have increased substantially. Three thousand pounds of food are distributed to 1,400 individuals each week. Our congregation supports the ministry with a \$14,000 donation spread out over the year. Even more, WCM has undertaken a new initiative, directed by the new food coordinator, Carlos Gasca-Yanez. Fresh food is grown in community gardens and distributed to clients. More healthy food gardens are planned.

Please take a minute and visit the WCM website, [WCM15221.org](http://WCM15221.org). There you will find a plethora of information about how the Wilkinsburg community is served. The First Presbyterian Church of Edgewood has enjoyed a more than 50-year relationship with this vital mission.

### HOW LONG WILL PASTOR MICHAEL BE WITH US?

Do know that the decision to depart has not come easily. Heather and I have been discussing and seeking God's counsel on this matter for more than a year. There is not anything wrong with this congregation. But I am tired. I am running on fumes. Whatever I have offered to FPCE has not been effective in growing or changing the culture of this congregation. If FPCE is to grow, *it must change*. (Personally, I believe a merger with another congregation in their facility is worth very serious conversation.) I am doing my best, but a different, younger (?), more energetic and creative female or male pastor would better serve you at this time. It is time for me to move on.

A couple of months ago, I had my first complete evaluation with a new doctor, a gerontologist. I like him. After checking me out inside and out and running some tests he said, *"I believe that if you take good care of yourself, listen to my advice, follow my advice, you have twenty good healthy years ahead of you."* I want to live the next twenty differently than the last 40, spending my time and energy in different ways. More out in the world.

On a more personal level, I am retiring for these reasons: I am look forward to being with Heather full-time. We have travel plans, once this virus is conquered or significantly quelled, we will go. I want to have entire weekends free. We want to spontaneously hop in the car and visit my son in Atlanta, my daughter and grandchildren in Washington D.C., my wandering-around brother wherever he lands, my family in Ohio, and Heather's friends who are all over the country. I want to meet my two college buddies in Cleveland and watch the Browns lose in person, even the 1:00 p.m. games. I want to volunteer with politically activist groups; progressive groups leading the fight against racism, income inequality, and global warming. Heather and I want to volunteer with pro-immigrant and refugee settlement groups. Perhaps we will create a progressive inter-faith fellowship group to meet in our home.

Heather and I do not have any firm immediate plans formed, but we are open to all the new possibilities that may come our way. I hope and pray that FPCE feels the same.

I am planning to retire on June 30. I will preach my last sermon on Sunday, June 28. The service will be recorded on Friday, June 26.

Be assured, all of you have been a blessing to me. I am sure that you will be a blessing to the person who next



blessing to me. I am sure that you will serves you.



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