

COVENANT NEWS

The Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Webster Groves

April 2020

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FROM THE PASTOR

*Discovering What We Ought to Say
(or, at least, how to say it)*

I am writing this on a Sunday.

Do you have any idea how strange it is for me to say that? I don't have much time even to think, on most Sundays. There's a steep ramp of making sure that everything is ready for worship. It includes checking in with my partners in leadership – Leon and Tracey and Erick and Merrimon, as well as the church's lay leaders, and the First Friends and We Care Cards persons. It includes rehearsals with other leaders and with people critical to the morning's worship – like baptism families or communion servers.

So, I often write out my sermons. In fact, other than the Prayer of the Day, I often write out everything. I fear that, if I don't get most of it down on paper, I will forget the words I need when the time comes.

This is a demonstration of my own personal lack of faith, to be honest. Jesus is remembered for having said to his disciples, "Do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say." (Luke 12:11b-12)

In Luke, Jesus is offering encouragement to his disciples and, by extension through the evangelist's testimony, to other Christians in the First Century, when they are pressed to defend themselves theologically to religious authorities. He is not talking about being ready to preach. No, my situation isn't nearly as dire as the apostles' situations would have been.

But still, I want to feel sure. I want to say what needs saying.

All of that concern has come in handy for putting together our worship experiences online, these last few weeks (and what appear will be the many weeks to come). Video and audio evangelism has been something I've known would become necessary for us. In Dr. Inglis' day, the church's worship services were broadcast on local radio. But, to be honest, I kind of hoped webcasting would be the focus of a pastor after me, not my own focus.

We're learning as we go, aren't we. You are. I am. All of us are, in this time. We're doing our best to remain connected with one another without actually being in proximity, in the pews. We're doing our best to say what needs saying – of comfort or healing, or prayer or prophecy. And the necessity of our modern media for that purpose has made this moment

what it is, for me and for all of us. We are the Church, and we shall abide as Christ's body.

I can tell you, on a strangely leisurely Sunday, it's curious to watch myself with you, to worship with you. All the video and audio files have been uploaded, so all I need to do is to plant myself comfortably at a screen and listen for the word of God along with you.

This is a strange and perilous and wondrous time. Let us keep praying God for grace. Let us keep encouraging one another.

Peace

WORSHIP NOTES FOR APRIL

This schedule is subject to change, as need may arise.

All services will be carried at the appointed time on Facebook, YouTube, and SoundCloud and will be available on demand afterward.

SUNDAY, APRIL 5, 10:00 AM – on YouTube and Facebook — *Palm / Passion Sunday*. **Scriptures:** Mark 11:1-11; Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Philippians 2:5-11; Mark 14:32-52. After an innovative and creative celebration of the festal entry of the Messiah (portrayed by Student Minister Tracey Harris) into Jerusalem astride a humble donkey (portrayed once again by the majestic KC), Pastor Dave Denoon offers the final sermon in our series based on Amy-Jill Levine's *Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner's Guide to Holy Week*. The message of the day, "Violence vs. Non-violence," considers the incidents at Gethsemane but especially what is revealed about Jesus' purpose among us.

THURSDAY, APRIL 9, 7:00 PM— on YouTube Live and Facebook Live— **Maundy Thursday**. *Sacrament of Christ's Table; Tenebrae*. We gather live online at Facebook and YouTube, to remember the night when Jesus shared his last meal and was betrayed and arrested. Communion and a Service of Shadows (Tenebrae) will be observed. For this very special service, it is suggested that you set up a special plate with small servings of bread and wine (or juice).

FRIDAY, APRIL 10, 7:00 PM on YouTube and Facebook — **Good Friday**. Journey to the Cross. With a ritual creatively recalling the traditional fourteen Stations of the Cross, we remember Jesus' final hours and his body's placement in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb.

SUNDAY, APRIL 12, 10:00 AM on YouTube and Facebook — **Festival of the Resurrection**. Scriptures: Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Isaiah 25:6-9; Mark 16:1-8. We celebrate the Resurrection apart but together, as Jesus does the unexpected and the questionably advisable – rising from the grave and eliminating social distance. **Message of the Day: "Amen"**

SUNDAY, APRIL 19, 10:00 AM — *Second Sunday of Easter*. Scriptures: Acts 5:27-32; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31. Tracey Harris leads worship, remembering Jesus' surprise calls upon the disciples, the night of his resurrection and a week later.

SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 10:00 AM — *Third Sunday of Easter*. Scriptures: Psalm 116: 1-4, 12-19; 1 Peter 1:17-23 (supplemental readings are Acts 2:14a, 36-41 and Luke 24:13-35). The scriptures on this third Sunday of Easter may lead us to wonder, *What is my purpose as a religious person?* Pastor Dave Denoon explores the harm and benefit religious people can have on the world. **Message of the Day: "What the World Should Be Able to Expect"**

New Podcast: "THE FIRST THING IN THE MORNING"

The Pastor is producing a daily podcast and invites you to listen in, as he meditates upon the scripture readings of the Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings. A quiet and contemplative web offering, *The First Thing in the Morning*, is a great way to start your day.

A website for the podcast is in development. Until it is available, you can listen from our SoundCloud page – www.SoundCloud.com/FirstChurchWG/the-first-thing-in-the-morning. Transcripts are available for reading at pastordavedenoon.blogspot.com.

MODERATOR'S CORNER APRIL 2020

As we enter the month of April, we are made aware of how quickly priorities in our life can change. The COVID 19 virus has brought the world to a screeching halt and has created new challenges for all of us. Our family at First Church is no exception. As you know our services and gatherings have been halted for the next several weeks. At the present time we are looking at May 17 as a target date for resuming activities, but this is a fluid date and can be adjusted as the circumstances dictate. Meanwhile the church staff has been hard at work by providing services and worship opportunities for all of us. If you tuned in on YouTube or Facebook for the streaming of the worship service, youth offerings and bible studies you will have seen what wonderful productions they have created. Please plan on joining us for the upcoming broadcasts. You can find a schedule of events at the church's website or communicate directly with Pastor Denoon. A hard copy of the bulletin or the message can also be sent to you either by email or through the mail. If this is your preference, and you haven't already done so, contact the church office. Although circumstances dictate our physical separation, they can't keep us from being together as a church family. Church business will continue to be conducted and our spiritual needs will still be met. Let us be thankful for the wonderful staff that we have.

That brings me to the next question. Beyond social distancing and medical precautions, what can we do as members of First Congregational Church to facilitate our church's wellbeing? These are some things that I think each of us can do:

1. Look out for each other. Check on friends and family who are alone or in need.
2. Continue to perform your responsibilities on Ministries and Committees. The church's business does not end with the closing of the facility.
3. Utilize the streaming of the Worship Service and other programs. Stay connected to the spiritual life of our church as a community.
4. Reach out if you have a need or personal concern by contacting either a member of the church staff or a friend in the congregation.
5. Be aware of the challenges being faced by our outside community and pursue creative ways to help lessen the burden while under the restraints of social distancing
6. Recognize that the church still has payrolls to meet, obligations to fulfill, and expenses to pay. Please stay up to date on your pledges and donations. You can go online to the church's website and make your payments or donations. You can also send your contributions through the mail directly to the church. As you know, we have been working through the financial challenges we face as a changing church. This new crisis will make that an even more difficult challenge, but one that can be managed with your continued support.

Finally, let's all "keep the faith" as we move forward. A crisis is not resolved by panic, but by thoughtful and determined action. We are fortified by a faith that gives us direction, strength and hope. Take comfort in our heritage and let's be a church of action.

Together in Christ,
Mark Edwards
Moderator

TRACEY'S BLESSINGS – APRIL SHOWERS



Hello my beloved friends! The flowers around the area are loving all the rain but we may feel more isolated stuck indoors. If you have proper boots and rain gear, consider taking a walk in the rain. Perhaps we need to feel the drops that come down to refresh our earth touch us and refresh us. Stomp in a puddle, no matter your age! Social distancing may keep us from the church building but remember God is at home in God's creation and will meet you there! No matter if it is in a drop of rain or in a newly opened flower, enjoy the work of God's hands.

This year Palm Sunday and Easter are in April. We may be feeling sad that our community and church family won't be together this year for our annual Easter Egg Hunt or our beautiful Easter Worship Service. We WILL have an Easter Egg hunt whenever we are able to return to Church. Please celebrate with us online and just maybe that will make us more aware of the true meaning of this time of year. Aside from our worship services, there are special recordings for children by Miss Tracey on our YouTube channel.

We might feel like we are sacrificing by not being together, but look at what we do gain by spending more time with those who live with and near us. We can write letters, keep a journal, spend time on our porches talking with neighbors. We can make use of technology by making a FaceTime call or creating short videos to share. Maybe we are playing some board games, or doing more reading or gardening?

Here is a challenge for all of you. Dress up – Easter Day, take a picture, then post it to the Church's Facebook page! **WE ARE THE CHURCH.** The church is you, the people! People held church in homes when churches began, so this is a return to our roots.

Please be sure to check in with each other. I am available for calls especially if your child or family would like to speak with me.

Peace and love to all in this time!

Joy for the Journey,

Tracey Harris, Student Pastor and DCE

FROM THE ORGANIST'S BENCH

There is an old Chinese curse that says, “May you live in interesting times!” We are certainly living in interesting times but I don’t believe it to be a curse. When I reflect on the amazing things I have seen in my life, I find myself saying “here it comes again!”

I am not totally isolating myself, as I come in to church to work with our amazing staff on producing the worship services. We sustain each other. I am grateful for more time to research and practice! I believe in the nurturing, restorative power of music. I am still looking for another way, other than provide music for our current mode of worship, to reach out with music and give someone a lift.

I hope in these difficult times you can find away to reconnect with friends you haven’t seen in a while, read a good book, see a good movie; do whatever lifts your spirits or makes you happy. Karma, like Culture, is the sum of one’s (or a group’s) actions. Like the old folk tale goes...

A farmer and his son had a beloved stallion who helped the family earn a living. One day, the horse ran away and their neighbors exclaimed, “Your horse ran away, what terrible luck!” The farmer replied, “Maybe so, maybe not. We’ll see.”

A few days later, the horse returned home, leading a few wild mares back to the farm as well. The neighbors shouted out, “Your horse has returned, and brought several horses home with him. What great luck!” The farmer replied, “Maybe so, maybe not. We’ll see.”

Later that week, the farmer’s son was trying to break one of the mares and she threw him to the ground, breaking his leg. The villagers cried, “Your son broke his leg, what terrible luck!” The farmer replied, “Maybe so, maybe not. We’ll see.”

A few weeks later, soldiers from the national army marched through town, recruiting all the able-bodied boys for the army. They did not take the farmer’s son, still recovering from his injury. Friends shouted, “Your boy is spared, what tremendous luck!” To which the farmer replied, “Maybe so, maybe not. We’ll see.”

Let’s embrace this ancient wisdom. Let’s remember to be kind to one another. Let’s remember that we, though practicing social isolation, are not alone. And finally, if you feel so moved, go to YouTube and work on your music skills and join Bells or the Choir.

Dr. Leon Burke III
Director of Music and Organist



CLIFF'S CORNER – HOPE FOR THE FUTURE



During these difficult days it's easy to be overwhelmed with the negative realities of our global pandemic. But our reality also has a future dimension, one that can be built through hope and action.

My daughter Rajee posted these words by Kitty O'Meara which have since gone viral on the web. I invite you to ponder the possibilities as we affirm that every obstacle might just be an opportunity in disguise.

“And the people stayed home. And read books, and listened, and rested, and exercised, and made art, and played games, and learned new ways of being, and were still. And listened more deeply. Some meditated, some prayed, some danced. Some met their shadows. And the people began to think differently. And the people healed. And, in the absence of people living in ignorant, dangerous, mindless, and heartless ways, the earth began to heal. And when the danger passed, and the people joined together again, they grieved their losses, and made new choices, and dreamed new images, and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully, as they had been healed.” (Kitty O'Meara, 2020)

May this time of social distancing be a catalyst for a new beginning.

Grace and Peace,
Cliff, Director of MICA

WORDS FROM YOUR FACILITY MANAGER

With the church being closed until mid-May, Darrell and I are going to be doing some deep cleaning of the church. We are choosing a room a day to clean and to put things away and to make a list of items that need to be fixed and or repaired.

Sample Chapel is being repainted and I am going to finish installing new LED lighting.

Once things have returned to normal operations, we will be changing the way things are disinfected and cleaned to assure the congregation has a safe place to worship.



Sincerely,
Chip Isringhaus

DEBBIE'S UPDATES FROM HOME

As you know I am working from home and checking in a few times a week to grab the mail and take care of business I cannot do from home. To be able to do most of the business from home, we made the switch from the desktop version of Quickbooks to the online version. The interface is very different, but I'm getting used to it, and actually just may like it better! I am also able to process the donations and run to the bank with the deposits.

Aside from the business of taking care of church business, I have been spending much of my non-church time trying to help a few of my freelance clients out. All of my clients are small businesses that are being affected adversely by the shelter orders. Hopefully they and all of us will all pull out of this stronger than before.

Spring has arrived and I am hoping to spend a bit of time in the garden. I love waking up and walking through the garden every morning. It's amazing to see how fast the plants grow from day to day. Unfortunately the weeds do too!

While my dog Buddy is happy I am at home more, I will be happy to get back to the church. I miss working with our wonderful staff and miss seeing the many happy faces of the volunteers and members that drop by the office.

Please feel free to contact me if you need me. The best way to reach me is by email at Admin@FirstChurchWG.org.

Take care and be safe!

Debbie



THE PRESENT OF PRESENCE: THE GIFTS OF MINDFULNESS AND COMPASSION FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

April 14, 21, 28, May 5, and May 12 (Tuesday)

7:00 to 8:30 P.M. Online

led by the Rev. Dr. Laurel Hayes

FCCWG's Campus Minister at Webster University

In these anxiety-ridden times, we need spiritual practices and community more than ever. Increased mindfulness and compassion can benefit us all right now. This free five-week course will help you to notice your experience of the present moment by focusing on the breath, bodily sensations, thought patterns, and emotions. You will learn how to return to the present moment when your mind wanders off, become more aware of where your thoughts go, work gently with physical and emotional sensations, and cultivate kindness toward yourself and others. You are welcome to meditate in a chair, so you do not need to be flexible.

Please email Laurel at laurel.hayes@sbcglobal.net if you would like to participate in the five-week course. Each class session will build on the last, so please plan to attend all five if you register for the course.

We will meet together online (via Zoom, a video-conferencing platform) for as long as we cannot meet in person.

MEDITATE WITH LAUREL!

Our member, Laurel Hayes, is offering daily drop-in meditation sessions online starting at noon. Contact Laurel at laurel.hayes@sbcglobal.net for more information

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

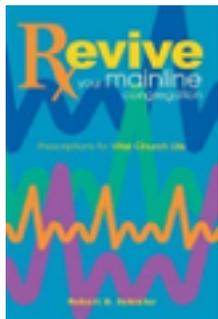
Marty Craig	4/1
Jane Brader	4/6
Marshall Brooks	4/3
Valerie Paci	4/10
Diane Weber	4/10



Marshall Dyer	4/15
Phil Shoulberg	4/18
Diane McCoy	4/23
John Robinson	4/26
Elizabeth Walker	4/30

HOLIDAY LIBRARY ✓ IT OUT

The Strategic Planning Committee is working diligently on how our Church can be a meaningful, vibrant and financially stable church in the future. I encourage you to think about this, too, and perhaps read the books highlighted below.



Revive Your Mainline Congregation helps readers of Protestant churches to understand the importance in moving congregations from the mentality of ‘surviving’ to ‘thriving’. This book is a ‘must read’ for all Christians, laity, and pastors who are concerned about the continuing decline in mainline Protestant churches. It points out how to be willing to change and do most things differently than have been done in the last 35- 50 years!

Church in the Inventive Age, by Doug Pagitt, is aimed at those who care about the future of the church and want to be part of shaping that future today. It is full of hope for what this future can be. Rather than revealing a blueprint for a future church, he offers a taste of the ways some inventive churches are taking shape. It inspires the reader to continue working to create the future, without fully knowing what that future will look like. If this is something you care about doing, then check out this book.



Based on the successful work that authors Michael Piazza and Cameron Trimble have done through The Center for Progressive Renewal, **Liberating Hope: Daring to Renew the Mainline Church** provides concrete and tangible 21st century insight to those churches looking to renew their congregations through hope and optimism. Liberating Hope provides accurate evidence that the renewal of the progressive mainline church is happening.

MICHAEL S. PIAZZA AND
CAMERON S. TRIMBLE

Other books on this subject you might want to read: **Can Our Church Live?** by Alice Mann, **Congregation The Journey Back to Church** by Gary Dorsey, and **Changing The Conversation** by Anthony Robinson.

DID YOU KNOW... BERT TREMAYNE, MODERATOR 1960-1962

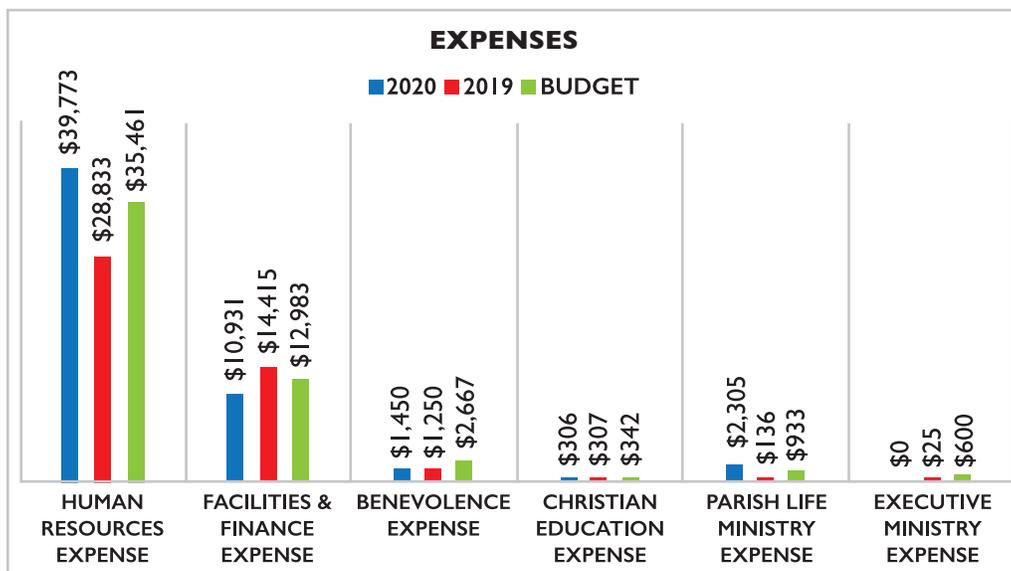
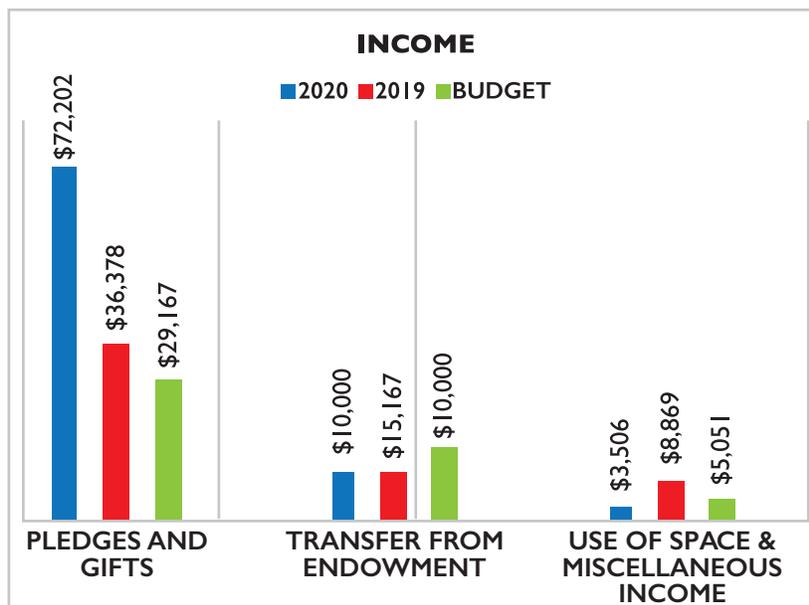
The idea of uniting the Congregational Christian Church and the Evangelical & Reformed Church, as records show, was discussed as early as the 1930s, in our Church. There were conversations between our pastor George Gibson, Rev. Truman Douglas of Pilgrim Church and Dr. S. D. Press of Eden Seminary exploring such possibilities. In 1947 a national committee was named to discuss a proposed union of the two churches. At the General Council of Congregational Churches, in 1948, steps to merge were begun. The merger was accomplished in 1957. Our local church considered for some time whether we would accept being part of the merger. Bert Tremayne was Moderator during the years leading up to our Church ratifying the agreement in 1961 making us part of the United Church of Christ.



Bert Tremayne was Moderator when our beloved minister, Rev. Inglis, was ready for retirement, however, Inglis died suddenly before that could happen. This was a great shock for our church and a tough adjustment for the congregation to make. Rev. Goslin was called to be our new pastor. Rev. Greig Ritchie would continue as our Associate Pastor. Church life went on. The east parking lot was completed, greater involvement in outreach was planned. Our church took the lead in supporting Plymouth House to serve residents of the Carr Square area in St. Louis. In 1962 Caroline Mission, Fellowship Mission Center and Plymouth House were incorporated as the Board for Inner City Mission of the UCC in the Metropolitan St. Louis – generally known as Unleashing Potential (formerly UCC Neighborhood Houses.)

TREASURER'S REPORT

The charts below show church income and expenses for January 2020, January 2019 as compared to the budget:



Items to note:

- Pledges and Gifts income was much higher in January 2020 because we received over \$40,000 of 2020 pledges in 2019. **How did that happen and why?** People took advantage of tax planning by doubling up on their charitable giving or using their retirement account required minimum distribution to fulfill their 2020 pledge early. If you want to learn more about these tax planning methods, contact me or Mark Cereghino. I can be reached at Jennifer.Jones@rubinbrown.com.
- Since we did receive those 2020 pledges early, we are currently in a stable cash position during this changing economic times!
- The spike in human resources expense this January compared to last year is partially because Dr. Leon Burke III, Director of Music, had not joined us yet last year. An increase in health insurance costs shows in the human resources expense also.

January 2020 results are the latest month results we have completed but our current environment warrants us to be closely watching our church income. Since there are no activities in the church, we will not be receiving use of space or Sunday offerings. As we pray for church members, please also keep the church in your prayers during this volatile economy.

If you have any other questions or want further detail, please let me know.

Thanks
Jennifer Jones, Treasurer

LINKS TO OUR ONLINE SOCIAL MEDIA SITES
Watch or listen to sermons, bible studies, & more



Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/FirstChurchWG/>



Twitter

<https://twitter.com/firstchurchwg>



YouTube

<https://tinyurl.com/FCCWG-YouTube>



SoundCloud

<https://soundcloud.com/firstchurchwg/tracks>

MAKE DONATIONS ON OUR SECURE WEBSITE

<https://firstchurchwg.org/donate/>

ORDER AN EASTER FLOWER

<https://fccwgstlmo.breezechms.com/form/3e5607>

We will make arrangements for you to safely pick them up after the service on Easter Sunday. Or you can drop one off at the house of one of our members who might need a bit of cheer.



10 West Lockwood Avenue
Webster Groves, MO 63119
314-962-0475
www.FirstChurchWG.org

Contact Information

Moderator
Mark Edwards
marke@wustl.edu

Pastor
Rev. David A. Denoon
DDenoon@FirstChurchWG.org

Office Administrator
Debbie Tolstoi
Admin@FirstChurchWG.org

Director of Music & Organist
Dr. Leon Burke
Leon.Burke@FirstChurchWG.org

Director of Christian Education
Tracey Harris
Tracey.Harris@FirstChurchWG.org

Coordinator of Youth Ministries &
Assistant Music Director
Dr. Erick Falconer
Erick.Falconer@FirstChurchWG.org

Facilities Manager
Chip Isringhaus
cti1234@FirstChurchWG.org

Custodian
Darrell Lakies

Assistant Custodian
Gus McLean

Director, Center for Counseling & Healing
Rev. Linda E. Smith, BCRN, LCSW, HTCP/I
lesrhs@sbcglobal.net

Director of MICA
Rev. Cliff Aerie
cliff.aerie@gmail.com

Student Minister
Merrimon Boyd
mboyd@eden.edu

Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.

April Meal-A-Month

Canned Turkey • Brown Rice
Canned Corn (low or no salt)
Applesauce (in plastic, no sugar added)
Powdered Milk, shelf stable milk, soy milk
Peanut Butter • Real Fruit Jelly
Dried Fruits

Missing Someone?

Have you been missing someone for a while from worship and other church events? Please, let Pastor Dave Denoon or Parish Life Chair, know. Either will be happy to follow up for you.

Follow us on

Facebook - www.facebook.com/FirstChurchWG/
YouTube - <https://tinyurl.com/youtube-fccwg>
Sound Cloud - soundcloud.com/firstchurchwg

