

PASTOR'S CORNER

I invite each of us to use this Lenten season to prepare for the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The Presbyterian Missionary Agency developed the Lenten Devotional, *“Becoming a Beloved Community”*, especially for churches that are striving to become Matthew 25 communities. The editor of *“Presbyterians Today”*, Donna Frischknecht Jackson, wrote that: “The season of Lent has often been a time to give up a vice or an indulgence (did someone say chocolate?) or to take on a spiritual discipline such as fasting or meditation.

What if this Lenten season, though, we looked beyond personal disciplines and committed to creating beloved communities in our own backyards — communities reflecting the inclusive and healing love that Jesus modeled as he made his way to the cross?

“Beloved Community” was first coined by 20th-century American philosopher Josiah Royce. However, it was the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who popularized it, using “beloved community” often in speeches to illustrate God’s kingdom as truly a kin-dom. King’s beloved community

was not a far-fetched utopia, though, but rather an attainable society based on justice for all and selfless love of one another. For King, a community became “beloved” when every person had their basic needs met.

As production of this devotional approached, I kept thinking about the commitment many of our PC(USA) congregations are making to become Matthew 25 churches. By doing so, they are building beloved communities that are dismantling racism, eradicating poverty and revitalizing ministries by serving others boldly. I wanted to capture the many ways Jesus’ words in Matthew 25 are being lived out and, thus, creating beloved communities. This devotional itself is a reflection of a beloved community, featuring the voices of 19 ordained ministers, chaplains, lay pastors and ruling elders. These men and women, from different walks of life, belong to the Presbytery of the Pacific — a place where “Matthew 25 work has been going on for years,” says the Rev. Heidi Worthen Gamble, mission catalyst. Their stories — and writing styles — differ, but they all have this in common: They are

passionate in wanting to see God’s love reign among them. As you journey with these writers, it is my prayer that a vision for how to become a beloved community where God has placed you dawns this Easter.”

I join Ms. Jackson in praying that the First Presbyterian Church in Gibson City sees, hears and responds to the call to love our God, our neighbor, our selves, our enemies, and one another.

Please join me in reading these devotions throughout the season of Lent.

In Christ,
Pastor Ray Lantz



PRESBYTIDINGS

March 2020

Pastor Ray Lantz

Worship: 10:30 a.m. Cookies and Coffee: 11:30ish

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Website: www.firstpresbygibson.org

Small churches are rich in assets money can't buy by Olanda Carr Jr./*Presbyterians Today*

It seems that in today’s culture, the “bigger is better” philosophy is all around us. Supercenters, 75 inch flat-screen televisions and mega-sized smartphones have become the norm. The church is not immune to this growing trend (pun intended), as many communities are seeing the growth of the megachurch-churches with hundreds in worship, often across multiple campuses and varying service times. It is as if the larger the church membership becomes, the healthier the church is perceived to be, leaving smaller congregations often feeling inadequate. While mega-churches may appear to be the new norm, statistics paint a different picture.

Recent trends of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) remind us that we are a denomination with a large contingent of smaller congregations. Our average congregation size is 163 members, with 30% of our congregations having a membership of 50 or fewer. While these numbers may provide some comfort to those in this group, it does not eliminate the challenges of small church ministry. Nostalgia for yesterday, dwindling resources and shrinking budgets can create liabilities to ministry, but we can learn to view these liabilities in a different light and, by doing so, transform them into exciting ministries.

For example, one of the most frequent comments I hear is, “We just aren’t the church we used to be.”

That doesn’t have to be a bad thing. Yet many of the congregations I work with seem to live in this nostalgic place when the church was bursting at the seams with new members and they dined on nectar, milk, and honey.

However, living in the past and always reflecting on the good old days are just not helpful in ministry. We must focus on where we are going, not on where we have been. Remembering the past isn’t a bad thing. We just can’t live there.

What we must do is learn to accurately study and assess the ministries of the past, removing the rose-colored glasses to carefully note the components of what made previous events, programs and missions successful.

Another popular liability in small churches is the age-ole ministry killer, “We just can’t afford that.” So many ideas and programs have been defeated before they even get off the ground due to the belief that there just isn’t enough money in the budget. I seldom hear, however, brainstorming on what things could be done in order to make a ministry successful. In many congregations, the budget has become this scary monster that no one wants to look at in the eyes. It controls, restricts, defeats, discourages and devours anything and everything that comes in its path. Small churches must be courageous, channeling their inner David and facing the Goliath budget monster.

Part of that battle means not keeping the budget and financial health of



the church behind lock and key. That seldom works in moving a church to vitality—no matter what the size of a congregation. Transparency in communicating finances should be practiced by all churches. In small congregations, especially, such a practice will often reap rewards as members tend to possess the oft-overlooked assets of ownership and pride. Thus, keeping members informed of the financial situation will likely lead to a response in giving.

And remember, while small churches might not have a lot of money to do the ministries they want, they generally have a family atmosphere that cannot be overlooked as an asset for building toward the future. Someone might be looking for a more intimate congregational setting.

Most small churches are rich in the way of being blessed with a supportive family community that can’t be found elsewhere. In fact, Sunday worship in small churches often resembles a family reunion-complete with hugs, smiles and stories. The challenge is to use that energy to create a “buzz” of possibilities, drawing upon the strength of the family and reminding all of their commitment, hope and confidence.

After all, it is written that whenever two or three are gathered, Jesus Christ is always in the midst—anything more than that is just gravy for the potluck supper.

**DO SOMETHING
GREAT**

March 2020

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 10:30 a.m. Worship Communion Matthew 4:1-11	2	3	4 9:45 Pastor Ray reading to HS students 6 Soup Supper 6:30 Lenten Worship-FPC	5	6 World Day of Prayer	7 Recycle 9 am Bible reading at Holly Brook
8 10:30 a.m. Worship John 3:1-17	9	10 Pastor Ray in Champaign for meetings.	11 Pastor Ray in Champaign for meetings 6 Soup Supper 6:30 Lenten Worship-ALC	12	13	14 9 am Bible reading at Holly Brook
15 10:30 a.m. Worship John 4:5-42	16	17 Primary Election in the fellowship hall	18 9:45 Pastor Ray reading to HS students 6 Soup Supper 6:30 Lenten Worship-UMC	19	20	21 Recycle 9 am Bible reading at Holly Brook
22 10:30 a.m. Worship John 9:1-41	23	24	25 9:45 Pastor Ray reading to HS students NO Lenten Soup & Worship	26 5:30 Session	27	28 9 a.m. Bible reading at Holly Brook
29 10:30 a.m. Worship John 11:1-45	30	31				

Pastor Ray will be preaching on the scripture listed in bold on each Sunday.

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCH...

A Lenten Soup Supper (6 pm) will be served followed by a Lenten Service of Worship (6:30 pm) on all Wednesdays in Lent **except on March 25**. Worship will be based on "The Vital Teachings of Jesus." The schedule is listed below:

- March 4: First Presbyterian Ch
- March 11: American Lutheran Ch
- March 18: United Methodist Ch
- March 25: NONE
- April 1: First Christian Church
- April 8: New Beginnings Church

DID YOU WANT TO FAST THIS LENT?

In the words of Pope Francis:

- Fast from hurting words and say kind words.
- Fast from anger and be filled with patience.
- Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.
- Fast from worries and have trust in God.
- Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.
- Fast from pressures and be prayerful.
- Fast from bitterness and fill

your hearts with joy.

- Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others.
- Fast from grudges and be reconciled.
- Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.

Easter Sunday, April 12, is quickly approaching. Session has made plans to have Easter Lilies adorn the sanctuary. Please watch for a form in the Sunday bulletin letting you know how you may place an Easter lily on the altar in loving honor or loving memory of someone dear to you. These may be purchased through the church for \$9.00 (with foil and bow).



Transportation will once again be

offered for Easter Sunday. If you are interested in a ride to Easter Sunday worship we have hired the bus to pick you up and bring you to worship and return you safely home. If interested, please call the church office at 784-5422.

Pastor Ray will host a Lenten Reading Group based on our *Becoming a Beloved Community* (A Matthew 25 journey to the cross) Lenten devotional every day at 8:30 a.m. beginning Monday, March 2nd. Please meet him in the fellowship hall. This will only take up a very small portion of your day and what a way to learn about Lent. Hope to see you there beginning Monday, March 2th.

Mark your calendars for our first **GAME NIGHT** to be held on Wednesday, April 22nd (Earth Day). Snacks and drinks will be provided. More information to follow.



BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

March	April
02: Neil Nelson	03: Nick Retherford
04: Blake Alexander	06: Charlie Kerchenfaut
04: Meladee Ferguson	09: Katie Spangler
11: Maddox Alexander	10: Darlene Kane
17: Dail Kirkpatrick	15: Ann Spangler
18: Sharla Williams	24: Bark Kirkpatrick
18: Janice Swanson	25: Harry & Dorri Groom
29: Ruth Davis	27: Ron Clow
	28: Tim Swanson

K. P. Duty
Mar: Carla Ashmore
Apr: Jean Williams
Second Sunday Offering
Mar 8: One Great Hour of Sharing
Apr: Gibson Area Housing Rehab Foundation
Ushers
Mar: Ron & Mary Clow
Apr: Trudy Lantz and Sharla Williams
Communion Servers
Mar 1: Ron & Mary Clow
Apr: Charlie Schultz and Danny Heustis

Communion Set-Up
Mar 1: Vonna Heustis
Apr 5: Barb Kirkpatrick
Flower Vases to CM
Mar: Vonna Heustis
Apr: Barb Kirkpatrick

