

THE EPISTLE

August 2020

Striving to live as Jesus lived:
Confronting injustice with love, compassion, service.

THE LATEST FROM THE CHURCH:

- *Worship Schedule - 2*
- *July Session Highlights - 3*
- *The Blind Spot Info & Birthdays- 4*
- *Dementia Caregivers Support- 5*
- *Keedick-Dolezal Scholarship- 5*

AUGUST UPCOMING EVENTS

- *2- Worship (9:30am)*
- *9- Worship & Birthday Blessing (9:30am)*
- *12- Session Zoom Meeting (6:30pm)*
- *15- Dementia Caregivers Support Group Call In (4:00pm)*
- *16- Worship (9:30am)*
- *23- Worship (9:30am)*
- *26- The Blindspot Zoom Meeting (7:00pm)*

LETTER FROM PASTOR LORI

This. is. HARD.

These are such strange days we are living in, for all kinds of reasons.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken much from us—family milestones, community celebrations, large gatherings, worshiping together, a sense of normalcy, and in some cases employment. Just to get warmed up

Early on in this, I learned about the concept of ambiguous loss and it has been so helpful. Ambiguous loss is a loss that has no closure. In “typical” loss, we have a death event and date followed by rituals to help us grieve (although these rituals have been taken away or altered significantly in this time). Ambiguous loss may not have any of those things.

The pandemic is ongoing and we have no rituals to mark an event that is at once global and very personal. Nor do we have any idea when it will end, or what the future will hold. It is ambiguous, and there is very real loss—every day, every week, every month.

How are we supposed to deal with this?

The glib answer is, “just have faith.” By turning to God and entrusting ourselves to God’s care.

And what does God’s care look like? In fact, just where is God in all of this?

A recent social media meme declared that “God is on His [sic] throne and in control.” That stuck in my craw. While I am all for trusting in God, I do not agree that God is on a throne or in control. At least not in the way I hear people suggest is true—such as don’t bother to wear masks or take precautions because God has “numbered our days.”

Here’s what I believe: God is not in some far away place, looking down on us—God is right here, among us. God is present with us, connected to us, moving in our midst at every moment. God is with health care workers, first responders, the sick and dying, the anxious and scared, the unemployed and overworked, the newborn and the centenarian. God is in acts of kindness and compassion and generosity.

God is not pulling the strings, deciding how long this will last, how much suffering is enough, who will live and who will die. God is holding us together, supporting us. God is Immanuel, God with us, the Word made flesh and dwelling among us.

I am forgetting a lot of things these days, but this I will remember:
God is for us and for all of creation. We are not left to face our troubles alone.

Friends, I miss your faces, I miss gathering together, but I trust that God is holding us together even in—especially in—this time of being physically apart.

SUMMER OF LOVE

Learning to Love Like God

FirstPresMV - Sundays at 9:30

First Presbyterian Church

301/309 First Street NW

Mount Vernon, IA 52314

Phone: 319-895-6060

E-Mail: mvfirstpres@q.com

Check out our website:

www.firstpresmv.com

Find us on social media:



First Presbyterian Church
of Mount Vernon



FirstPresMV



FirstPresMV



FirstPresMV

Office Hours:

By Appointment

Office Manager: Marie Riechers

mvfirstpres@q.com

Pastor: Lori Wunder

431-2227 (cell)

Lewunder@gmail.com

Treasurer: Barb Bjork

bjorkbarb@gmail.com

Director of Music: Julia Andrews

julia.andrews4444@gmail.com

WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Summer of Love: Learning to Love Like God

God is love. We can all agree on that. But what does that love look like? Each week we'll look at a story from the bible that shows us how to love like God and how to act out God's love to our neighbors and the world God loves.

All services available on our YouTube Channel, FirstPresMV

June: Compassion in the Hebrew Scriptures

June 7: Genesis 18:1-8 Hospitality

June 14: Exodus 1:15-21 Courage

June 21: 2 Samuel 9:1-13 Kindness

June 28: 2 Kings 6:8-23 Unexpected Generosity

July: Compassion in the New Testament

July 5: Matthew 9:35-38 - Jesus has compassion for the people

July 12: Mark 10:17-27 - The rich young ruler

July 19: Gary Connors-Boe, Guest Preacher

July 26: John 5:1-9 Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath

August: Living a Compassionate Life

August 2: Deuteronomy 10:12-22 The essence of the law

August 9: Micah 6:6-8 What is good?

August 16: Matthew 25:31-46 Lord, when was it...?

August 23: Luke 10:25-37 The one who showed mercy

JULY SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Note: The First Presbyterian Church of Mount Vernon's Session has met regularly via Zoom and as needed since March and the beginning of the pandemic—March 18, March 24, March 31, April 14, April 28, May 12, May 26, June 16, and July 8. Our next Zoom meeting is Wednesday, August 12 at 6:30 pm.

Session Members: Ed Bjork, Carol Daly, Wendy Dorn-Recalde, Carole Frazee, Pat Hogan (Clerk of Session), Scott Larson, Scott Peterson, Larry Petrick, Larry Purvis, Teresa Sullivan, Jonathan Walsh, Greg West, Lori Wunder (Moderator).

We begin and end our meetings with this prayer from the Lutheran Book of Worship:

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, to paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

WORSHIP:

- Our first live-streamed worship service (via Facebook Live) was held on Sunday, March 15. After trying a pre-recorded service for a few weeks, we went back to streaming on Facebook and posting on our YouTube account (FirstPresMV). Many expressed their preference for the “live” experience of Facebook Live, especially the ability to communicate through the comments.
- Carl Riechers upgraded our internet speed and the recording equipment. He streams and records the service live and then uploads it to YouTube every Sunday. Thank you, Carl!
- Given that cases of the virus continue to increase in Linn County, we are not comfortable with resuming in person services. We will have an outdoor service in August midweek.
- Hymnals were distributed in June and July by Julia Andrews and Lori Wunder for people to use at home during worship.
- Director of Music Julia Andrews has worked with the choir in creating two anthems that have been posted on our Facebook and YouTube pages.

FINANCE COMMITTEE:

- For the most part, congregational giving has held steady. Thank you all very much for your generous support of our ministry! Contributions were beginning to drop off in late June but we do not know if this is Covid-related or the summer slump that tends to happen every year.
- We applied for and received a \$22,300 loan through the Small Business Administration's Payroll Protection Program.
- Keedick-Dolezal Scholarship Fund was not given out in May. Application for academic scholarships will be available late July and \$300 will be given to qualified applicants in August. Finance Committee recommended and Session approved giving \$2500 to Camp Wyoming to help cover their financial losses after canceling their 2020 camping season. This is approximately what we would have given out in camperships.
- Finance Committee recommended and Session approved the exploration of a children's ministry position. Shane Austerman and Jonathan Walsh will lead the effort to determine what we need and create a job description, salary, etc.

OTHER:

- Terry Jackson resigned from the position of custodian in late April. Terry did a fantastic job for us in his two years of service and he will be missed. Given that our building use is minimal, we are waiting to fill the position.
- A ReOpen Task Force was established at our May 26 meeting. Members include Carole Frazee, Larry Purvis, Teresa Sullivan, Greg West and Pastor Lori Wunder. The group is following recommendations from CDC, Linn County Public Health and the Cleveland Clinic.
- The Dementia Caregivers Support Group moved from meeting in person to virtual (audio only) in April.



August Birthdays

1- Mike Bigley
5- Charles Halsey
7- Barb Mozingo
8- Edwin Walsh
8- Camron Woodley
11- Huntery Bray
17- Ruth West
18- Cindy Burge
21- Ed Bjork
21- Sherlee Peterson
21- Larry Purvis
22- Cindy Coulter
23- Will Dragon
25- Franklin Walsh
26- Rory McCollum
26- Jayce Pendergrass
28- Bill Dragon
30- Brian Fitzpatrick
30- Nick Jerabek
31- Dustin Stewart

ANTIRACISM, WHITE SUPREMACY AND US: THE BLIND SPOT

In response to George Floyd's murder at the hands of Minneapolis Police in May, our congregation has had two Zoom conversations—July 1 and July 22. We have shared resources and ideas of what to do.

We decided to call our group "The Blind Spot" because we recognize that all of us are blind to the white privilege and systemic racism that are part of our nation. We also have things we don't understand and don't know about the experience of Black lives, but also brown, indigenous, LGBTQ, etc. Our goal is to listen and learn to remove our blind spots to the extent we possibly can. Join us!

Monthly Meetings – Fourth Wednesdays at 7:00pm via Zoom

(find the link in our weekly email or ask Pastor Lori)

August 26

September 23

Each month, all are invited to watch a movie or read a book to discuss:

For **AUGUST** – Watch the documentary, The 13th available on Netflix. "Filmmaker Ava DuVernay explores the history of racial inequality in the United States, focusing on the fact that the nation's prisons are disproportionately filled with African-Americans."

For **SEPTEMBER** – Read How to Be an Antiracist by Ibram X Kendi. Review by Judy Vopava and Roger Johanson

Kendi explains that 'race' is a human-made definition with no basis in biology. Thus the races should be equal in all aspects of society, like health, wealth, education. To be an antiracist, one must promote policies that lead to equality among races. Kendi says that antiracists should work to change policies rather than attitudes. Once policies are changed, attitudes will follow, like with Obamacare or gay marriage. Any policy that does not promote equality among the races is defined as a racist policy. This is a transformational book that is well worth reading.

We have many other ideas that we will share as the group continues, including creating book bags with diverse books for children through adults, and even a Little Free Library to put our front with diverse resources. The Presbytery of East Iowa's Mission and Social Justice Team is offering \$500 grants to congregations for antiracism work. We have applied for the grant and look forward to putting those funds to work!



Dementia Caregivers Support Group

Speakers + Information Sharing + Receive Mutual Support

New Day! Fourth Tuesdays at 4:00pm via Call In
Next meeting--Tuesday, August 15 at 4:00pm

While we are unable to meet in person due to the coronavirus, the Mount Vernon and Anamosa support groups will be combining. To be part of the call, let Pastor Lori or Diane Clay know and they will get the information to you.

2020 KEEDICK-DOLEZAL SCHOLARSHIPS

Thanks to the generous contributions of previous generations, our congregation is able to offer small scholarships to students pursuing post-secondary education. This year we anticipate offering \$300 per applicant.

We are accepting applications for the Keedick-Dolezal Scholarship until Friday, August 7, 2020. You can find the application on our website, www.firstpresmv.com

Questions? Contact Pastor Lori (Lewunder@gmail.com or 319-431-2227)



First Presbyterian Church
301/309 First Street NW, Mount Vernon, IA 52314

PHONE: (319) 895-6060
OFFICE E-MAIL: mvfirstpres@q.com
Editor: Marie Riechers

Each Sunday, "Weekly Announcements" bulletin insert
contains the most current events and times..