

Lent 2024

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BUFFALO

# NEWSLETTER

## Wandering Hearts: Figuring out Faith With Peter

Leslie's Musings

From the Sanctified Art Team:

*“This Lent, we are focusing on the life and faith of one of Jesus’ most famous disciples. In Peter, we see a person who is both steadfast and unsteady, a dear friend and a betrayer, a follower and a wanderer. By following Peter’s journey, we watch the story of Jesus unfold through the eyes of a very normal human being trying to figure it all out—just like us.”*

Each week’s theme from our Sanctified Art curriculum, Wandering Heart, comes from the hymn, Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing. You can find each week’s scripture and theme in the Lenten Devotional. Copies are in the narthex, or let me know if you need a copy. If you call the church office at 716.884.7250 x203, you’ll find me.

I’ve long had a fascination with Peter. Why did Jesus choose him, of all the disciples, to be the rock on which Jesus would build the church? He is impetuous, he blurts, he fails. And he succeeds—as brilliantly as he fails. During my sabbatical I learned that Peter likely traveled through Türkiye and Greece on his way to Rome, preaching and writing his letters to folks there. Peter is a great role model for us.

During my educational training, I learned that people learn in a variety of ways—through poetry, essays, art, scents, touch, music—remembering always that those

who sing pray twice. I love the variety this curriculum offers. The artwork on the bulletin covers and in the narthex. The prayer cards with suggestions for spiritual practices. The devotional booklet. Each of us is touched in a different way.

I’ll be hosting a Bible study on the coming week’s scripture in my study every Wednesday at noon. I’d love to have you stop by. Feel free to bring your lunch.

So, enjoy the devotional and the prayer cards—if you don’t have a set yet they’ll be at church, or call me and I’ll drop them off for you. Engage the artwork, and meditate on the prayer poems.

On Maundy Thursday, we’ll engage in a Stations of Peter liturgy that will take us through the events of the “Triduum,” the final days of Jesus’ life. This will be in-person only, as it will be an interactive time.

Finally, we’ll end with Easter, always a time of wondrous celebration and music and flowers! We pray that Lent and Easter will bring you thoughtful moments, grace, and maybe a struggle with doubt.

Love,  
Leslie

# Epiphany Reflections

Over Advent, you were welcome to answer the reflection questions posted in the Narthex. Our first two questions were thoughtfully answered, and the congregation's responses were presented in the Christmas/Epiphany Newsletter.

We posted two additional questions during the Christmas/Epiphany season and sought your responses. The Christmas question was,

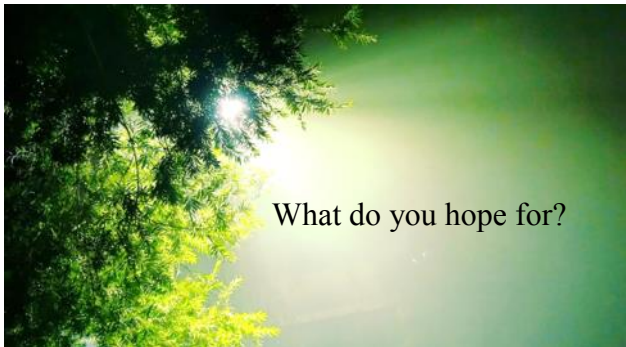
What are you grateful for?



My health, family, friends, a successful lumpectomy, the magical feeling of the holiday season, pro bono lawyers, my hearing, book club, a reduction in charges, snow, sunshine and the members of this congregation.

The Epiphany question was,

What do you hope for?



Peace in the Middle East, Ukraine, and the 28 other regions of the world where war rages. More kindness in the world, family reconciliation, health, solitude, an end to cancer, more joy in my life, that our church grows.

# Lent

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and runs for forty days until Palm Sunday, when Holy Week begins. This Lenten season, we will be focusing on the life and faith of one of Jesus' most famous disciples using the Sanctified Art Series *Wandering Heart: Figuring Out Faith with Peter*.

As the Creators comment, "Through this season, we want to affirm that faith is a constant journey of steadfast purpose, one that ebbs and flows. We want to affirm that wandering is exploration, not necessarily distance from God. We want to affirm the ways Peter keeps going: he drops his nets, he walks on water, he runs to the empty tomb, he swims to the shore to meet the risen Christ. Peter keeps searching and yearning and loving even after missteps. Ultimately, in Peter's story we are reminded that God loves imperfect people. In fact, time again that's precisely who God claims and calls."

As we did during Advent, we offer you a Lenten Devotional and Daily Devotional cards. Both are available on the large table in the Narthex. Reverend Leslie has a "wandering heart" you will see in various places in the sanctuary. The symbols it contains are described for you on the next page. The symbols reflect the Bible readings and lessons for the day.





### "Tune my heart" | ASH WEDNESDAY

**Tuning fork:** A tuning fork is used to tune various instruments to a proper pitch so that all the instruments can play together in harmony. This image represents the Lenten posture of inward reflection and reminds us to make adjustments to get in tune with God's will for our lives and the world.



### "Jesus sought me" | THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

**Fish:** Jesus instructs Peter to cast his nets after an unsuccessful day of fishing, and he catches an absurd abundance of fish. Peter doesn't feel worthy of this gift, but Jesus calls him to be a fisher of people all the same. The fish represents God's abundant provision of sustenance and grace, as well as Peter's shift in vocation and calling—from fisher of fish to fisher of people.



### "Rescue me from danger" | THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

**Choppy water:** Peter walks out in faith on the choppy waters, and Jesus saves him from sinking. The choppy water lines represent the turbulent waters we all walk through on our journey of faith.



### "Praise the mount" | THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

**Mountain peak:** Peter has a moment of clarity and professes Jesus to be the Messiah. Jesus affirms Peter's proclamation by saying Peter is the rock upon which he will build his church and that Peter will be given "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19). A mountain peak represents this moment of clarity and affirmation along Peter's wandering journey.



### "I'm fixed upon it" | THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

**Fermata:** In music, the fermata symbol represents a prolonged note or a pause. After learning Jesus would suffer and die, Peter rebukes Christ saying, "this must never happen to you" (Matt. 16:22). Jesus rebukes Peter right back, knowing he cannot yield on his journey of nonviolence and love. The fermata represents how Peter is fixed on how he wants things to go, but Jesus calls him to stop and get behind him. The symbol also looks like an empty tomb, which is foreshadowed in this story.



### "Teach me" | THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

**Open book:** Peter's posture toward Jesus is that of an open book. He is eager to learn from Jesus all he can glean. In this week's text, he wants to know all about the nature of forgiveness and grace.



### "Songs of loudest praise" | PALM / PASSION SUNDAY

**Music note with crescendo:** This sub icon is a note overlaid with a crescendo symbol, which in music means to get louder gradually. As we find our footing in faith, we share and express our journey with more assuredness and confidence. We can sing loudly, like those shouting "hosanna" as Jesus enters the city.



### "Streams of mercy" | MAUNDY THURSDAY

**Water jar and basin:** In a humble, subversive act, Jesus washes the disciples' feet. This act of grace is meant to be emulated and is therefore an unending, overflowing, fountain of mercy for all.



### "Prone to leave the God I love" | GOOD FRIDAY

**Rooster crowing:** In moments of weakness and sheer terror, Peter denies knowing Christ three times. He chooses the path of self-preservation in the face of violence and death, as many of us would. With his three denials, the cock crows, just as Jesus predicted.



### "And I hope" | EASTER SUNDAY

**Sunrise:** As the sun rises on the third day, Peter holds onto hope as he runs to the empty tomb to see with his own eyes the abandoned linen cloth. With each new day, we hold onto hope for new life and resurrection.

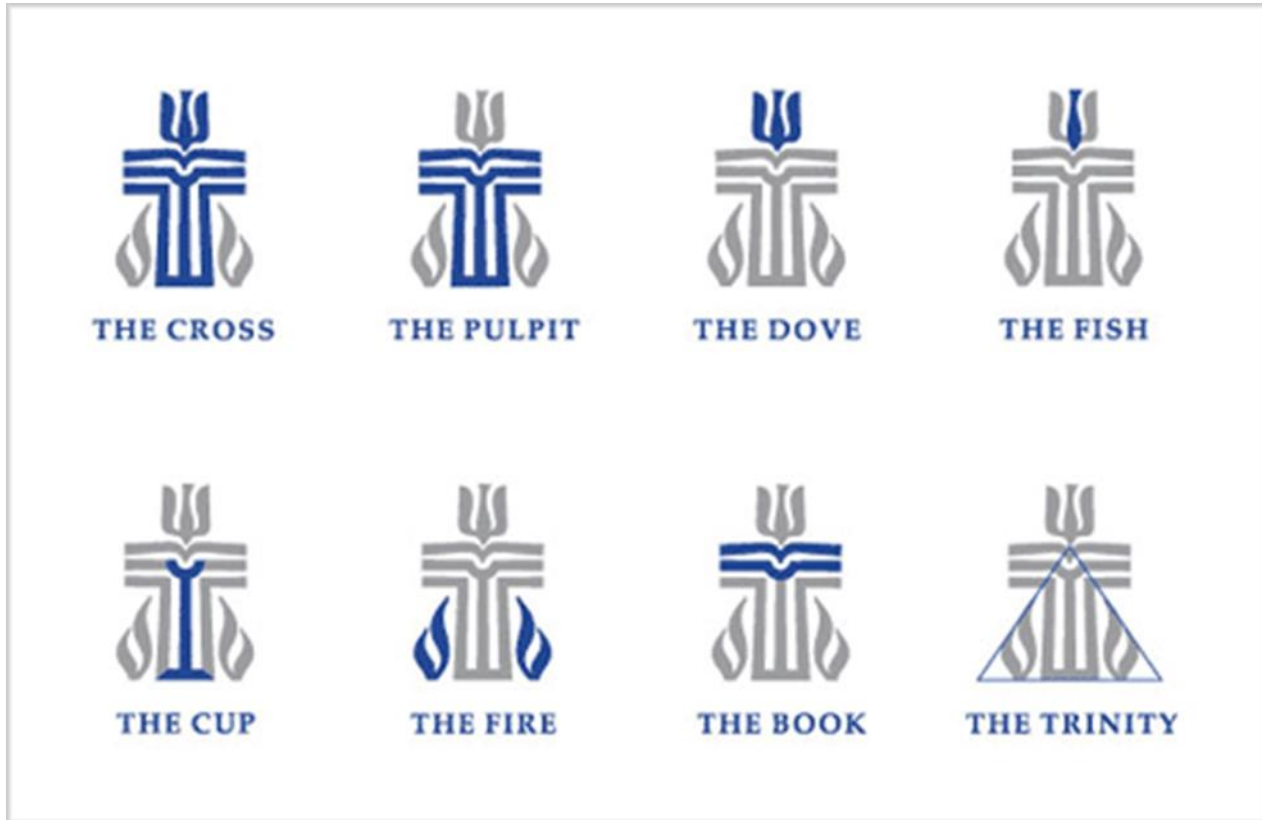


### "Here's my heart" | THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

**Heart:** Peter is a heart-on-his sleeve kind of a guy. When Peter sees Jesus, he puts on his outer garment in reverence, and then dives into the sea, not wasting a second to embrace his teacher, friend, and Messiah who then asks him three times, "Do you love me?"

## What Does That Mean?

We see symbols everywhere in our church and they are an integral part of our Lenten study, *Wandering Hearts*. As members of the Presbyterian Church USA, we are represented by a complex symbol, designed to describe our faith. And here it is, explained.



**The Cross** represents the love of God in Jesus Christ and his passion and resurrection. Because of its association with Presbyterian history, the Celtic cross was chosen as a model.

**The Pulpit** captures the important role of preaching in Presbyterian worship. The image can also be seen to represent the seamless **Robe of Christ**.

**The Dove** is one symbol of the Holy Spirit, as was seen in Christ's baptism by John. It represents the peace and wholeness which Christ's death and resurrection brings to a broken world.

**The fish** is an early Christian sign for Christ, recalling his ministry to those who hunger for both food and spiritual nourishment.

**The Cup or Chalice** represents communion. The symbol also represents the **Baptismal Font**. These images represent the two sacraments of our church. They are ongoing signs and symbols of God's presence with us.

**The Fire** has a double meaning. It is a symbol of revelation in the Old Testament when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush. It reminds us of the beginning of the Christian

church on Pentecost. The Holy Spirit descended as flames on the apostles' heads and gave them the gifts they needed to follow Christ's charge to be messengers of the good news of God's love.

**The Book or Bible** reminds us of the role of Scripture as a means of knowing God's word.

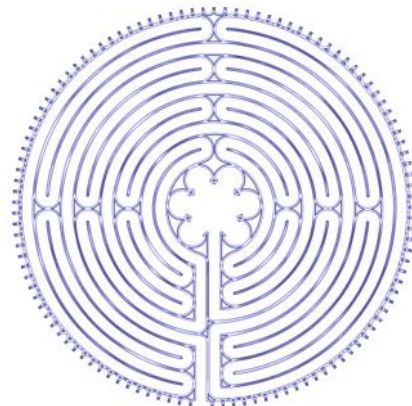
**The Triangle** is a traditional symbol of the **Trinity**, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. It also suggests the nature of Presbyterian government, with its concern for balance and order, dividing authority between clergy and elders and the levels of governing bodies in the church.

In 1983, the General Assembly commissioned graphic artist Malcolm Gear to create a church seal that would honor the historic symbols of the Reformed tradition but also provide a fresh new symbol to represent the PC(USA). Since its adoption in 1985, the seal has been widely accepted across the church and used in a variety of ways and on many different objects--from church bulletins and signs to needlework, ties, and jackets.

# Walk the Labyrinth

ONE STEP AT A TIME. ONE STEP AT A TIME.

A labyrinth is a patterned path, often circular in form, used as a walking meditation or spiritual practice. A single winding path leads to the center. Then, when you are ready, you retrace the path out of the labyrinth, taking with you resolution, healing, or peace. Labyrinth walks are an ancient practice found in numerous world cultures. The labyrinth will be open on Wednesday March 6, 13, 20, and 27 from 5pm to 8pm in the Hospitality Room.



## Prayer Shawls

Prayer Shawls mean so much to the people who receive them! The group gathers once a month on the third Monday of the month at Dash's on Hertel Avenue from 1:30 to 3pm. Knitters and crocheters are welcome. No technical skill required. If you have questions call Liz Kamke at 716-400-3770

## News of the Congregation

We are saddened to hear of the sudden death of Kristen Grande, daughter of our former Pastor, the Rev. Geri Lyons, on February 17. If you wish to send a card to Rev. Geri and her family, the address is:

251 White Oak Dr  
Grand Island NY 14072

Congratulations to the proud parents, Lea and Ian Henry, and ecstatic grandparents, Mike and Ellen Henry, on the arrival of Rosalie Jean, born on February 17.

Congratulations to James Gardner, who has been nominated by the Republican party to run in the special election for Erie County District Attorney.

## A Tribute to Nancy

Our beloved Nancy Barry transitioned into eternal life on January 22, 2024 at age 94 in the loving care of her family in Lancaster PA.

As a member of our First Church Family since March 18, 1956, there was probably no area of the church that was untouched by Nancy Barry. You name it, she did it! From running the dishwasher at countless church suppers, running the Women's Association for years, tutoring refugees and teaching citizenship to refugees, running the coffee hour, and just plain making sure things around the church were going well, Nancy was in the middle of it. Her husband died when she had four young children and she managed to raise them all and keep everything under control.

For health reasons she had to move in with her daughter in Lancaster PA. Her family recently gathered to celebrate her birthday, and a couple of days later she slipped away. There was a funeral in PA, but her family is gathering for a memorial service on the Saturday before Mothers' Day, May 11, at 11 AM.

Cards can be sent to the family care of:

Cathy Wasilewski  
19 Landis Ave,  
Lancaster PA 17602.

Liz Kamke

## **Understanding the Israel-Palestine Conflict**

### **The Position of the PCUSA**

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) stands firm in its support of Palestinians and their right to live free in their land, without occupation, aggression, and bloodshed. We support and protect Israel's right to exist as a free and sovereign nation.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) urges the Israeli government to honor the Palestinian people with the same freedom they offer their own citizens and continue to do so amid this crisis. We also urge HAMAS to release the hostages and refrain from additional violence. Regardless of our differences and strong views on matters of human rights, bombing innocent people, killing, and kidnapping children are never acceptable.

The PCUSA urges all leaders to immediately put an end to the bloodshed, release those who are captured and held hostage, end the fighting, and open humanitarian corridors to get medical attention to everyone who is in need. [www.pcusa.org/news/2023/10/13/acting-stated-clrk-condemns-violence-israel-palest/](http://www.pcusa.org/news/2023/10/13/acting-stated-clrk-condemns-violence-israel-palest/)

Although it has spoken out, the church is often accused of being silent. Its call for justice and peace has continued to go unheeded. Now it must speak up and speak out again, perhaps in stronger language. Its message is clear, consistent, and straightforward: it calls for the broad goal of ending the occupation, appeals with a most urgent priority for international protection for Palestinians living under Israeli military occupation, and the protection of innocent Israeli citizens. The United States and the international community must act now to end the conflict and the occupation.

Therefore, General Assembly asks pastors, lay leaders, sessions and individual members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to:

1. Pray, and invite others to pray, to the God of Peace to direct the hearts, minds, wills, and actions of those in positions of authority or influence in the Middle East, as well as those who know only aggression and violence, to seek the ways of peace.
2. Avail themselves of study resources that help them understand the history, nature, and dimensions of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.
3. Seek out other Christians, Jews, and Muslims, in their own areas, to work together through inter-faith peacebuilding, and in support of every effort made, whether by Israelis, Palestinians, the U.S. government, the United Nations, the Christian churches, and/or other religious and secular organizations that aim toward bringing about a just, honorable, secure, and viable peace in the Middle East.
4. Take individual and collective initiatives to tell the truth, having "listened with both ears," and to advocate for a just peace in the Middle East with their representatives in Congress, the administration, United Nations officials, local/regional/national newspaper editors and other opinion makers.

This position has been confirmed by PCUSA. The entire document is available at [www.pcusa.org/site\\_media/media/uploads/\\_resolutions/endoccupation03.pdf](http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/_resolutions/endoccupation03.pdf)

## Overview of the Current Incursion in Gaza

This is the fifth incursion into Gaza by Israel since 2006 for various reasons. This is the second incursion in response to actions by HAMAS. HAMAS—the acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya (Islamic Resistance Movement)—is the largest militant group in the Palestinian territories and one of the territories' two major political parties.

HAMAS has been the de facto governing body in the Gaza Strip since 2007, when it ousted the Palestinian Authority from power. (The moderate Palestinian Authority remains in control with Israel of the West Bank) HAMAS is committed to armed resistance against Israel and the creation of an Islamic Palestinian state in Israel's place. They are designated terrorists by the United States, European Union, Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, Japan and Paraguay.

HAMAS gunmen launched an assault on Israel from the Gaza Strip on October 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people and taking 240 hostages. The Israeli military responded with air strikes on Gaza and launched a ground offensive. Since the October attacks, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) warplanes have carried out air strikes across Gaza while its troops have moved through the territory. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel had a "clear goal of destroying HAMAS's military and governing capabilities", as well as freeing the hostages. Netanyahu also declared that Israel would have "overall security responsibility" for Gaza "for an indefinite period" after the conflict. However, he later said Israel had no plans to reoccupy the territory.

Under a deal brokered by Qatar, a seven-day pause in fighting began on November 24, 2023. During the truce, 81 Israelis and dual nationals were released, along with 24 foreigners. In return for the Israeli hostages, 240 Palestinians were free from Israeli jails. Each side blamed the other for the collapse of the truce and the resumption of fighting on December first. Current international efforts to broker a cease-fire had a setback as Israel reportedly recalled its negotiating team and Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) accused Hamas of hobbling the high-stakes negotiations by sticking to "delusional" demands.

The war's deaths, destruction and displacement are without precedent in the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The war has divided Israelis while the offensive threatens to ignite a wider conflict involving Iran-backed groups in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen that support the Palestinians. In recent days bombings are occurring on the West Bank/Israel borders.

The war has killed approximately 3,000 Israelis and over 28,000 Gaza residents. It has displaced some 85% of Gaza's residents, with hundreds of thousands packing U.N.-run shelters and camps in the south. U.N. officials say a quarter of the population of 2.3 million is starving as a trickle of humanitarian aid reaches them because of the fighting and Israeli restrictions.

In power for [most of the past 16 years](#), Netanyahu has long portrayed himself as tough on security. Netanyahu rejects calls from the U.S, its closest ally, for postwar plans that would include a path to Palestinian statehood. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the refusal to accept a two-state solution unacceptable. "The Middle East is a tinderbox. We must do all we can to prevent conflict igniting across the region," Guterres has stated. "And that starts with an immediate humanitarian cease-fire to relieve the suffering in Gaza."

*Sources for entire history: Associated Press, Encyclopedia Britannica, Al Jazeera, BBC and NPR Nov. 24, 2023 through February 13, 2024.*

## BIBLE STUDY OPPORTUNITIES

On Wednesdays at noon, Pastor Leslie will be offering a study of the lessons for the upcoming Sunday. Feel free to drop in and bring your lunch.

Kurt Froese will be offering a three-week class for Lent which will focus on the three pillars of Lent. These are prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

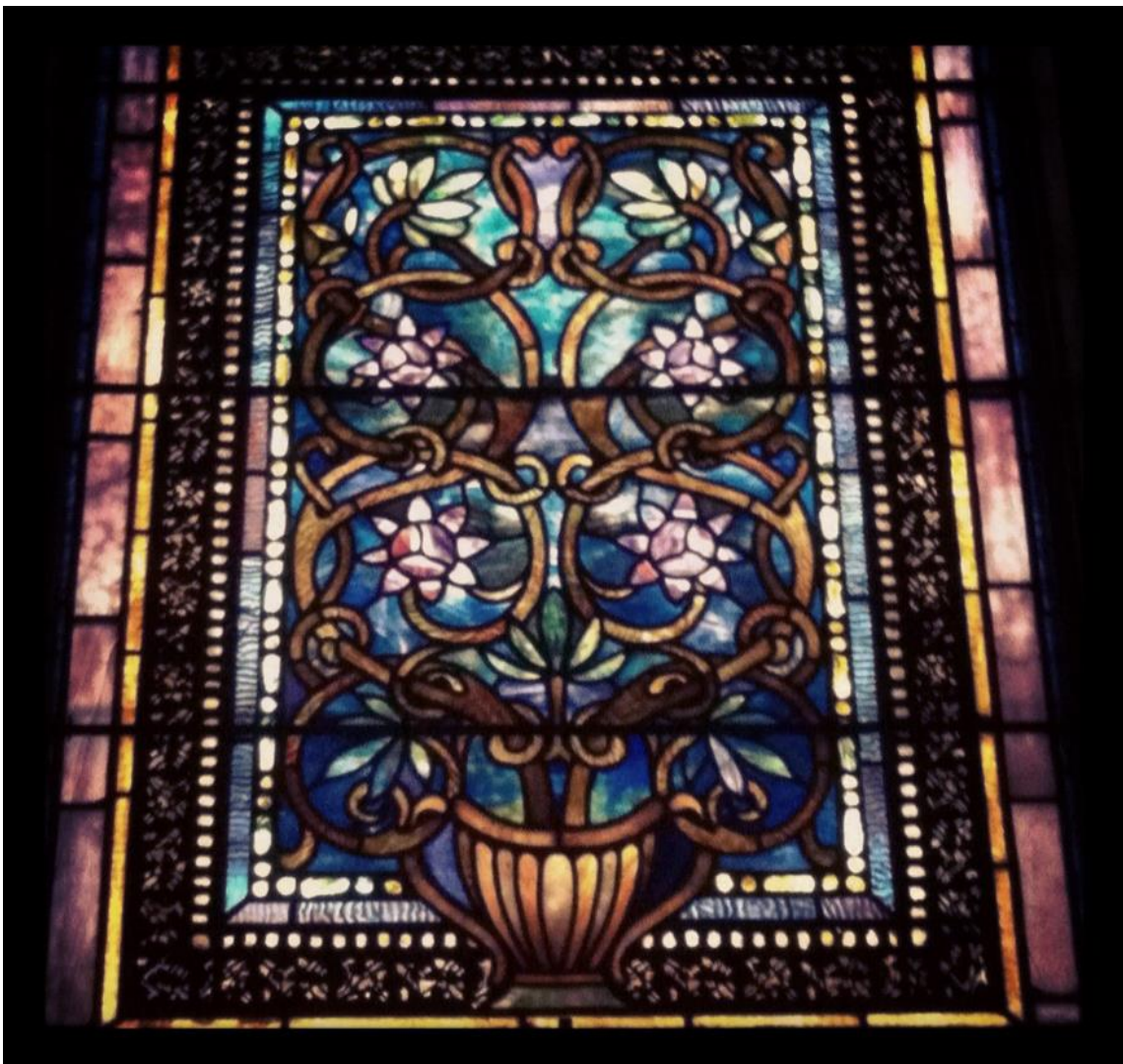
Class one will focus on prayer and what role that plays in a life of faith.

Class two will review the tradition of fasting and texts that mention it. We will then discuss what role fasting plays in the current Christian tradition.

Class three will examine the importance of acts of charity and how they can influence our life as well as the lives of others.

These three pillars will be studied and discussed so that we can apply practical faithful living that influences our relationships and communities.

Classes will begin **March 6<sup>th</sup>**, continue **March 13<sup>th</sup>**, and conclude on **March 20<sup>th</sup>**. All classes will be 6:30-7:30 p.m. and will be offered **in person** at First Church as well as online via Zoom. I look forward to learning together!







# WORSHIP SERVICES

**March 3**

**Communion**

**March 10**

**Daylight Savings  
Time Begins!**

**March 17**

**Wear Green**

**March 24**

**Palm Sunday**

**March 28**

**Maundy Thursday  
7 pm service**

**March 31**

**EASTER  
10:15 am  
Brass Prelude**

## FIRST CHURCH STAFF

**The Reverend Leslie Latham**  
*Pastor, Head of Staff*  
Revleslie@firstchurchbuffalo.org

**The Reverend John Long, D.D.,**  
*Parish Associate for  
Community Outreach*  
johnrlong17@verizon.net

**Dr. David Bond,**  
*Organist/Choirmaster,  
Bookkeeper, Facilities Manager*  
DBond@firstchurchbuffalo.org  
Voicemail extension 204

**Cory Connell, Maintenance Coordinator**  
Connelljamescory@gmail.com  
Voicemail extension 201

**Kurt Froese, Director of Family Ministries**  
KFroese@firstchurchbuffalo.org  
Voicemail extension 200

## SUNDAY SCHEDULE

10:30 AM      Worship in the Sanctuary  
10:45 AM      Children's Sunday school  
11:30 PM      Fellowship time

## FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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(across from Kleinhans)

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email@firstchurchbuffalo.org

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Instagram: @1stChurchBflo  
Twitter: @1stChurchBflo

## FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OFFICERS

<u>SESSION</u> <u>BY CLASS AND TERM</u>	<u>BOARD OF DEACONS</u> <u>BY CLASS AND TERM</u>
<b>Class of 2023</b> Janet Hill (2) Quinton Meyer (1) Tim Hess (1) Kailee Van Brunt (1)	<b>Class of 2023</b> Ilsa Cooper (1) Mark Armesto (1) Eli Van Brunt (1)
<b>Class of 2024</b> James Gardner (2) Jean Hess (2) Maria Patrick-Roberts (1)	<b>Class of 2024</b> Christina Banas (1) Gail McKeel (1) Jim McKeel (2) Madeline Mason-Brandon (1)
<b>Class of 2025</b> Pat Frey (1) Pat Harmon (1) Suzanne Pilon (1)	<b>Class of 2025</b> Olga Rico-Armesto (2) Nikia Jenkins (1) LouAnn Riegle (1)

## OFFICERS OF THE CORPORATION

James Gardner, President  
Don Houck Vice President  
Mark Armesto, Treasurer  
Janet Hill, Secretary



*The mission of historic First Church is to bring diverse people of metropolitan Buffalo together to follow Jesus Christ through worshiping God, fostering spiritual growth and serving the community.*

**EASTER FLOWER ORDER FORM**

*Help decorate our sanctuary with flowers,  
while honoring your loved ones.*

**PRICE:** \$15 each

**ORDER DEADLINE:** Sunday, March 17, 2024

**METHODS OF ORDERING:**

**By order form:** Place completed order form in either the offering basket or in David Bond’s mail slot in the church office.

**By phone call or email to David Bond:** 716-884-7250, x204, or [dbond@firstchurchbuffalo.org](mailto:dbond@firstchurchbuffalo.org). Provide him with info as is requested on below order form.

**METHODS OF PAYMENT:**

**Via check:** make payable to *First Presbyterian Church of Buffalo*, with “*Easter plants*” legibly written in memo section at bottom of check. Please mail check to First Church to David Bond’s attention, or place in his mail slot in the church office.

**Via online:** access First Church website: <https://www.firstchurchbuffalo.org>. Scroll to bottom & click “DONATE”. Type total amount in box labeled “**non-charitable payments**”, 1-time donation. Log in using email address & password. Follow instructions. In “**notes**” section, under credit card info, type “*Easter plants*”.

**DEDICATIONS:** Names will be printed in bulletin on **Easter Sunday, April 9th.**

Your Name (PRINT LEGIBLY): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # & Email Address (PRINT LEGIBLY):

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of **Easter** plants you wish to order: \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) of loved one(s) being honored or memorialized: (PRINT LEGIBLY):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Dedications: (PRINT LEGIBLY - “in honor of” or “in memory of”):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I will take home my plant(s) on **March 31st, Easter Sunday:** (Y or N): \_\_\_\_\_