



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ORONOCO

A SMALL CHURCH WITH A BIG MISSION

March 2023

In Memoriam

Sandy Bowers passed away on Wednesday, February 22, 2023. As we grieve in our community and in our hearts, we lift up Sandy's children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren as well as Sandy's friends and loved ones in our prayers.

There will be a Celebration of Life service for Sandy on Thursday, March 2 at 11:00 a.m. at Ranfranz and Vine Funeral Home in Rochester. Visitation at Ranfranz will be an hour prior to the service. Following the service there will be a luncheon at Ranfranz's Remembrance and Reception Centre. Burial will follow at the Oronoco Cemetery.

Hug your loved ones, friends.



Church Staff

Pastor: Rev. Lisa Johnson

Secretary: Brianna Clement

Organist: Raquel "Rocky" Nisbit

Church Leadership

Mike Rand, Clerk of Session
Ellen Warner, Ruling Elder
Brenda Longman, Ruling Elder
Ron Peterson-Rucker, Ruling Elder
Geoff Walker, Ruling Elder
Todd Wickre, Ruling Elder

Kim Stanton, Treasurer
Gail Rucker, Deacon
Ellen Simon, Deacon
Joanne Schenck, Deacon
Cindy Luhman, Deacon
Jen Rand, Deacon



From the Pastor ...

"If we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal."

~ President John F. Kennedy, from his commencement address at American University – June 10, 1963

As I write this March 2023 newsletter article, I'm doing so not from my desk in my office at church but from the armchair in our living room at home. I'm doing so looking out my window at the roughly 16" of snow that fell over the last 48 hours. And I'm reflecting on the fact that, because we didn't get to mark the beginning of Lent together with our Ash Wednesday service last night, it feels like the beginning of Lent has been a little ... lost? A little stilted? A little diverted?



It's odd because I didn't grow up going to Ash Wednesday services. In Le Sueur, there used to be ecumenical mid-week Lenten services on Wednesday evenings. The pastors of the ELCA, Methodist, Presbyterian, UCC, Catholic, and Lutheran Brethren churches would all take turns hosting, preaching, and leading various other parts of worship. But an Ash Wednesday service was never part of that rotation. It was only when I got to college and started attending First Presbyterian Church in Eau Claire, WI that I learned that more than just Catholics did the "ashes on the forehead" thing at the beginning of Lent. So it's not like observing Ash Wednesday in a worship setting has always been a part of my faith life.

That being said, I have always found something immensely powerful in marking the beginning of this solemn, purposeful season together. It might sound odd, but Lent is my favorite time in the church year because it's an entire season meant to hold sacred space for our focusing and refocusing on God. We don't really get to do that as much as we'd maybe like to during Advent because of the all the Christmas lead-up activities and expectations that are a part of that season. No, Lent is a singular sort of time in the church year – a time devoid of other seasonal distractions, a time whose whole purpose is to bring us back to God.

Maybe that's why all this dang snow and our lack of an Ash Wednesday service has me feeling so off. For 20 years now, Ash Wednesday worship has been my bookend at the beginning of the Lenten season – my liturgical chance to turn a new page, to start a fresh leg of my spiritual journey. And without that bookend, I feel a little unmoored.

However, in the face of that, I remind myself of the purpose of Ash Wednesday worship – to remind ourselves and one another of our own mortality, our own impermanence and imperfection in the face of God's eternal glory. That's why we read Psalm 51 together on Ash Wednesday:

*¹ Have mercy on me, God, according to your faithful love!
Wipe away my wrongdoings according to your great compassion!
² Wash me completely clean of my guilt;
purify me from my sin!
³ Because I know my wrongdoings,
my sin is always right in front of me.
⁴ I've sinned against you—you alone.
I've committed evil in your sight.
That's why you are justified when you render your verdict,
completely correct when you issue your judgment.
~ Psalm 51:1-4*

We all live. And in that living, we all make mistakes. Someday, we will all die. "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Each of us. All of us. As American philosopher Jacob Needleman famously said, "Death is the great equalizer." When we observe Ash Wednesday together, it's like a spiritual reset – a reminder that we all fall short in our own ways.

But it's also a reminder that our falling short is now where the story ends. Alongside the acknowledgment of our sinfulness and our mortality that marks Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent, we also recognize that abundant grace of God. We recognize that God's goodness washes over us, stirring us to greater faith and leading us down paths of hope and devotion with whatever time we have here on earth. Each of us. All of us. God's grace makes no distinction. That's why I loved that quote from former President Kennedy. It's all about unity in diversity. It's about sharing the grand experience of faith while also holding holy space for everyone's individual journeys, encounters, and stories.

So even though we didn't get to participate in the sacred time of Ash Wednesday together, as you make your own way into the season of Lent this year, take time to work on your own journey, but also remember that everyone else is journeying, too. And alongside all of us while we journey and waiting for us at the end of that journey is God.

Pastor Lisa

Scripture readings for March



Sunday, March 5- Matthew 20:1-16

2nd Sunday in Lent

Sunday, March 12- Matthew 22:1-14

3rd Sunday in Lent

Sunday, March 19- Matthew 25:1-13

4th Sunday in Lent

Sunday, March 26- Matthew 25:31-46

5th Sunday in Lent

Lent 2023– Special Services



- Weekly prayer services – Thursdays from 5:45-6:15 p.m. (*see below*)
- Easter Egg Hunt – Saturday, April 1 *time TBD*
The Outreach Team is working on planning this. We don't have all the details worked out yet, but when we do, we'll let you know.
- Maundy Thursday – Thursday, April 6 at 5:30 p.m.
This will be our service around the table with a simple meal: soup, bread, and a simple dessert. We will celebrate the Lord's Supper in small groups together.
- Good Friday Tenebrae – Friday, April 7 at 7:00 p.m.

Next Session meeting.:

**Wednesday, March 1, 2023
6:30 p.m.**

Next Presbytery Meeting:

**Thursday, May 18, 2023
4:00 p.m.
Hybrid Meeting**

Keeping Up with the Smith-Mathers

First, the update: According to their last newsletter, Shelvis, Nancy, and their kids have moved to Kampala, Uganda to continue their work in the mission field. We lift up prayers for their health and safety, for the period of adjustment that comes with a move like this (that comes with *any move, really ... let alone a move to a whole other continent*), and for their call and their mission.



For the last few years, we've been helping to support Shelvis and Nancy and their family with our 2nd Sunday Spare Change offering and our prayers. A few times a year, our treasurer would deposit whatever had accumulated from that offering in the bank, then send the total as a donation directly to the Smith-Mathers' Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) account.

Due to changes that PMA has made to the way they distribute their mission funds, all contributions now go into a general fund and are distributed to all mission co-workers from there. This change has been made in an attempt to make mission co-worker support more equitable, especially for those co-workers who may be serving in areas that are especially remote or even dangerous and therefore cannot easily relay updates or connect with supporting individuals/congregations.

Donations can still be made in honor of specific mission co-workers – Shelvis and Nancy, in our case. And of course, we can always pray for them and their family in all times and places. But if you can't be here in person to contribute to our Spare Change offering, you can still help. Visit their PMA page: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/missionconnections/shelvis-and-nancy-smith-mather/>. From there, you can click on the green box under their (completely adorable) family picture that says, "Give in honor of the ministry of Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather." This will redirect you to the PMA donation page.

You can also click on the blue box that says "Subscribe to our letters" to start receiving Shelvis and Nancy's occasional updates in your inbox. They send a wonderful, entertaining, touchingly personal update roughly quarterly.

Electronic Donations

You can give online through our Presbyterian Foundation account using either the link on our website (www.oronocochurch.org at the bottom of the homepage) or this QR code



Worship Changes



Since September 2022, we've made some changes to our worship experience – changes that have become my doctoral project for my Doctor of Ministry degree (though I was planning on trying out these new worship elements anyway). In September, we added the “Exploring the Word Together” time after that sermon – that time in which we get to contemplate or discuss a question that pertains to our Scripture for the day, to share our journeys and experiences of faith with one another as a way to both build community and expand and deepen our faith. In December, we added the “Claiming Our Faith Identity” practice – the call-and-response reading at the end of the service that uses the words of our congregation’s mission statement to both remind us who we are as children of God and inspire us to go out into the world to be God’s hands and feet and love.

Starting in March 2023, we'll be adding our last new worship practice – “Glimpses of God.” This practice will take the place of the “Call to Worship” at the beginning of the service. Traditionally, the Call to Worship is a time to invite one another to gather for worship – a time to remind ourselves and each other that God is active among us both in our worship and in the world around us, a time to be stirred to praise and to pray together by the mighty and magnificent work and personhood of God. Starting in March, instead of doing that with a scripted call-and-response reading, we'll be engaging in an open time for some short testimonies. The idea is that 1-3 people will feel moved to come up to the front and share where you've seen God in the last few weeks. Your “glimpse of God” stories don't have to be long. They don't have to be eloquent. They just need to be your honest experience of God outside our walls. As we hear one another's stories and share our own stories, the hope is that those glimpses will remind us why we come to worship. Essentially, we'll be calling each other into worship with the authentic experiences of our lives because when we hear people talk about where and when and how they've seen God moving and working, how can we help but lift up our voices and our lives to God in worship and prayer?



Oronoco Food Shelf Monthly Item

We've got a new monthly piece that will be showing up in the newsletter! The OFS volunteer responsible for ordering has given us a list of monthly needs – a specific item that the Food Shelf could use that month. This monthly item will also be posted on our church Facebook page, so feel free to find it every month and share the image!

In addition to this month's highlight item, we've been told the Oronoco Food Shelf is also in need of toilet paper and paper towels.

Lent 2023- "Willingness"

As we continue to follow the Narrative Lectionary, this year our Lenten Scripture readings come from the gospel of Matthew. Each of these readings (which you can find listed below) are parables that Jesus tells throughout the gospel – parables that teach us different facets of willingness.

Throughout our worship services in Lent, we'll also be exploring this theme of "willingness" in a much more visual, tactile way. Each Sunday, as you come into worship, you'll be invited to pick up a rock. After our Lenten reading for the morning, there will be a short time of silent prayer in which you'll be invited to pour your burdens, your concerns, and all the things that weigh you down into that stone. At the end of that time, you'll be invited to bring that stone up and place

Our Lenten readings during worship will come from a particular poem by Ann Weems – "Stars for the Righteous" – which can be found in her book *Putting the Amazing Back in Grace* (© 1999, Westminster John Knox Press). *It's a poem that has its own lesson to teach us about willingness and faith. Each Sunday, we'll read the next portion of this poem/story along with a portion of Scripture.*

2nd Sunday in Lent – March 5: Matthew 20:1-16

Key word: **FAIRNESS**

Willing to accept

3rd Sunday in Lent – March 12: Matthew 22:1-14

Key word: **RESPONDING**

Willing to respond

4th Sunday in Lent – March 19: Matthew 25:1-13

Key word: **PREPAREDNESS**

Willing to do the work

5th Sunday in Lent – March 26: Matthew 25:31-46

Key word: **GENEROSITY**

Willing to welcome

Palm Sunday – April 2: Matthew 21:1-17

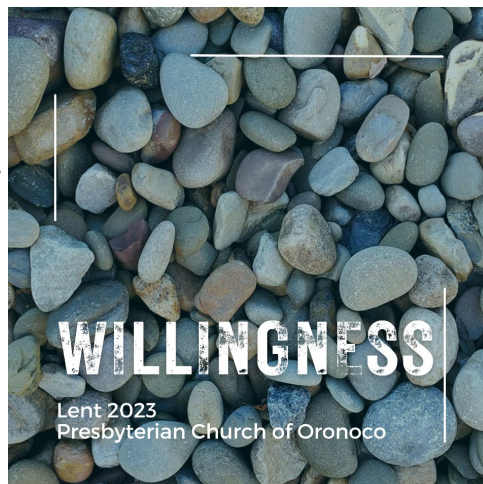
Key word: **REVERENCE**

Willing to honor

Easter Sunday – April 9: Matthew 28:1-10

Key words: **GO & TELL**

Willing to witness



March Star Word

In this season of Lent, what repentance or self-examination has come from your star word so far?



Lenten Photo Challenge

The Lenten Photo Challenge is back! Each day of Lent is assigned a different word – something to get us thinking and praying and digging deeper into our faith in some way. Sometime throughout the day, take a picture that makes you think of that word. For example, if the word was “light,” you could take a picture of a candle or the sun rays or the smile of a friend (as it LIGHTS up your day), etc.

There are copies of this year’s word list in this newsletter. There will also be copies of the word list at church, on the websites, and on our Facebook and Instagram pages.

To participate, you can take a picture and post it to Facebook, Twitter, and/or Instagram. Include the word of the day with your post as well as **#PCOLentPhoto** so we can all find and enjoy each other’s photos. (Actually, if you search the hashtag on any of those social media platforms, you’ll even be able to find photos from previous years.)

If social media is not your forte, you can still participate. Take the pictures with your phone or your regular camera and keep track of which pictures go with which words. You can either share them with others on Sunday mornings, or if you want, get them to Pastor Lisa and she can post them on the church’s Facebook page for you (either credited to you or anonymously, whichever you choose).

This year, we’re also going to try a new way to engage with this word list. In the fellowship room, there will be a display board along with a bunch of Post-It notes and pens. Each Sunday, the words for the following week will be posted on the board. On Sunday morning, you could spend a few minutes contemplating the words for the coming week, then add a Post-It with a few notes or maybe the description of an image you might associate with each word. Every day, Pastor Lisa will post a picture of the



Weekly Prayer Services

Throughout the fall, we held weekly prayer services on **Thursday evenings from 5:45-6:15 p.m.** These services ran through December, but we took a break in January and most of February. However, these services will resume during Lent. The first one will be Thursday, March 9 from 5:45-6:15 p.m. *(Please note that this is different than previously published. Between the storm and school conferences, we have to miss the first few.)*

The idea is for these services to be mostly a time for quiet prayer. We’ll begin with a short opening together. The lights in the sanctuary will be lower and there will be soft music playing in the background. If you’d like to use this time to sit silently in your own prayer, you’re welcome to do that. If you’d like to use this time to try any of the highlighted prayer practices Pastor Lisa introduced throughout the fall, you’re welcome to do that, too. There will be materials available each Thursday evening. If you’d like to use this time to pray with someone – either someone else in attendance or with Pastor Lisa – you’re also welcome to do that. This is really meant to help you make some scheduled time for God in the midst of your week.

Winter Weather Procedure

As the winter months are once again upon us, just a reminder that occasionally, we do have to close church due to weather and road conditions. The following are our procedures when this happens:



- Pastor Lisa and the session member assigned to open and close the church for the month will make the decision
- Pastor Lisa will send out an all-church email alerting people of the closing. It will also be posted to our Facebook page (Presbyterian Church of Oronoco) and our website.
- Session members will call people to let them know of the closing using set calling lists that we have established
- Pastor Lisa will contact KAAL, KTTC, KIMT, and Fox 47 to put the cancellation on to local "Closings and Delays" lists as well

Please be sure we have your accurate contact information in case of a weather-related closing. We want to be sure everyone remains safe during this frigid season.

Per Capita– The "GLUE" That Holds Presbyterians Together

What is it? The Presbyterian Church is a connectional church. We worship, serve, and govern together. Per capita contributions fund the shared governing responsibilities for the whole church (Presbytery, Synod, General Assembly), no matter the size of an individual church.

How old is it? It is mentioned in the Synod of Philadelphia minutes in 1738!

How much is it? In 2022, \$36.50 per member. And as per the vote during the November 2022 presbytery meeting, the 2023 per capita will be \$37.50.

Where does the money go? 66% to our Presbytery; 17% to our Synod; 17% to the General Assembly (national office).

Why is it important? Per capita monies support the work of the church globally to nationally to locally, including the technology grant we received earlier this year to worship remotely.

What is our church's policy? It is, and has been, the policy of the Presbyterian Church of Oronoco to pay our per capita every year, whether individual members have contributed their portion or not.

Have I paid this year? If you are not sure, please contact Ellen Warner (ellenjwarner@gmail.com) to find out.

How do I pay? You can write a check to the Presbyterian Church of Oronoco and simply write "per capita" on the memo line.



Prayer Requests

“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” ~ Philippians 4:6-7

And so we lift up **Helen Craft, Curt Burt, the family of Sandy Bowers,** and **Katha Johnson,** in prayer.

March Birthdays & Anniversaries



- ♥ 3/1 Carlyle Johnson
- ♥ 3/3 Lance Sorensen
- ♥ 3/4 Geoff Warner
- ♥ 3/9 Deb Nelson
- ♥ 3/13 Mark Pinney
- ♥ 3/19 Ron Peterson-Rucker
- ♥ 3/24 Kim Stanton

Staying in Touch

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Website: <http://www.presbyterytwincities.org>

Presbyterian Church (USA)

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Website: <http://www.pcusa.org>

