



The Sextant



Following the Lord's Direction

Volume 4, Issue 2 | February 2018

From the Desk of Tom Cook

In 39 years of serving the church I have been overwhelmed by the hospitality of the people I work with, whether as a student crashing the floor of a banjo makers' home in Western North Carolina, or working in an inner city church on the Southside of Chicago and being introduced the delight of "soul food." I have been fed the foods of the Middle East, Haiti, and South Africa, I have been sung to and danced for, and welcomed into pulpits that are far from home and from my culture. I have experienced hospitality in all the church's I have served, suburban and rural, resort and city. Martha and I have delighted in the hospitality of Elk Rapids. Throughout my career, the hand of Christian hospitality has always been extended to me, especially when I have been a newbie to a place and everything was an adventure. Hospitality is what we do as Christians when it comes to building relationships. Hospitality was at the core of Jesus' ministry.

In my years I've learned that hospitality is richest and most natural in communities of need. Hospitality is an ancient and biblical custom evident in both the Old and New

"No one was excluded from Jesus' ministry."

Testaments. It is a core value present in virtually all of Jesus' interactions with the poor and the wealthy. With Jesus, no mouth went unfed. No stranger was excluded. No sick person unattended. No widow not comforted. No child left untouched. No one was excluded from Jesus' ministry. There were no fences around him, no gates closed, no guards to keep people away from his divine touch and compassionate concern.

The fact is, looking through the Bible we notice that God's guest list includes a huge number of poor and broken people, those who appear to bring little or nothing to the table but their need. The distinctive quality of Christian hospitality is that it offers a generous welcome to the "least" as Jesus states in Matthew 25, without concern for benefit to the host: *"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."*

This kind of hospitality reflects God's greater hospitality that welcomes the undeserving, provides for the homeless, and sets a banquet table for the hungry. Hospitality grows out of a deep sense of gratitude and is at the core of generosity.

The practice of hospitality wasn't necessarily uniquely Christian. Most folks in the ancient world regarded hospitality as a fundamental moral obligation and practice. It was necessary for the well-being of community and essential to the protection of vulnerable strangers. Hospitality assured strangers at least a minimum of provision, protection, and connection with the larger community. What makes Christian hospitality unique is the lack of expectation for return behavior. In other words it is not transactional, it is not one hand washing another. It's an out and out full commitment to serve without expecting a return favor.

This is where the rub comes in our own culture of affluence. We often think that time is money and we tend to value money more than just about anything. It can even govern our relationships. So when there is an intrusion in life, when a stranger shows up at the door or a neighbor cries out in need, we start to think it's an imposition on our time, and we value time so much in terms of dollars that we hesitate to help. We are more comfortable when others take responsibility for it... sometimes in the church that means the minister is responsible for welcoming visitors, and calling on the sick and shut-in, and being the point person of hospitality.

Hospitality without concern for cost or benefit, without payback, is evident in the stories Jesus tells such as the banquets set for beggars, tax collectors, thieves and street people (in Luke 5, 14, & 19), and in the things he does to care for strangers such as in feeding the five thousand and in the last supper narratives each with their distinctive acts including feeding and washing the disciples' feet. Jesus' hospitality came without expecting paybacks. It was servanthood.

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Highlights from Session

After opening with a meditation on Matthew 22:31 and prayer and certifying quorum, Session conducted regular business. Presbytery will meet in Bellaire on February 10. As one of the larger congregations, we have multiple votes at this meeting. Although income trailed expenses for 2017, there was no obvious waste in the budget. Indeed, a hand full of emergency situations worked against us. Session is frank about the budget and is happy to report the endowment is up and there is a good amount of money in the reserve fund. The clerk presented the annual statistical report. Our congregation is stable at just over 300 souls. Our church increased its financial report of Roger Veliquette's education to provide his family with \$20,000 per year from the education endowment. Session agreed to make \$25,000 available as a loan to the new called pastor to aid in the purchase of a house, should that topic arise. There will be a Lenten Dinner on February 20.

Session meets next on Wednesday, February 28, at 7:00 p.m.

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“Tuesdays in Lent”

This Lenten season you will not want to miss our “Tuesdays in Lent.” Although we begin on Ash Wednesday and include Maundy Thursday, the majority of the activities are on Tuesdays. The actual dates and descriptions are listed below so you can easily mark your calendar and cut out the list.

Each evening will feature a dinner along with a service or video and small group discussion. Dinner will be available for an hour so you can arrive when it is convenient. There is a sign up sheet in the narthex if you would like to volunteer to bring soup or bread.

These are wonderful opportunities to invite your friends and family. We hope to see you there!

Date	Time	Description
Wednesday, February 14	6:00-7:00 PM	Soup & Bread Supper
	7:00 PM	Ash Wednesday/Wholeness Service
Tuesday, February 20	6:00 PM	Catered Dinner (Tickets Needed) Tickets are \$10/person or \$25/family and are on sale in the narthex on Sundays, February 4, 11 and 18
	7:00 PM	Video/Small Group Discussion - Max Lucado <i>“He Chose To Become One of Us”</i> (Study Open to All)
Tuesday, February 27	6:00-7:00 PM	Soup & Bread Supper
	7:00 PM	Video/Small Group Discussion - Max Lucado <i>“He Chose To Forgive Us”</i>
Tuesday, March 6	6:00-7:00 PM	Soup & Bread Supper
	7:00 PM	Prayer Concert
Tuesday, March 13	5:30-6:30 PM	Free Community Dinner
	7:00 PM	Video/Small Group Discussion - Max Lucado <i>“He Chose to Invite Us Into His Presence”</i>
Tuesday, March 20	6:00-7:00 PM	Soup & Bread Supper
	7:00 PM	Video/Small Group Discussion - Max Lucado <i>“He Chose to Love Us Forever”</i>
Thursday, March 29	6:00 PM	Potluck Dinner
	7:00 PM	Maundy Thursday Communion Service
		
Friday, March 30		No Good Friday Services at First Presbyterian
Sunday, April 1	7:00 AM	Easter Sunrise Service
	10:00 AM	Traditional Easter Service

The Sextant

Spring Gathering Presbyterian Women Saturday, April 28

Presbyterian Women, please consider participating and/or contributing your time and talents to making this a successful event. This is a time for praise, prayer, study and fellowship with other women in our Presbytery. A light refreshment is provided at 8:30 a.m. for registration, followed by a communion service. Our association will need to provide the lunch. The cost will be \$6.00 total. We will have guest speakers.

The main speaker will be a representative of Presbyterian Women International who journeyed to Indonesia. This should be enlightening and informative. Please save the date. More information to come. Info and/or R.S.V.P. to Cheryl Knight (231-409-3316).



A First at First: A Community Free Meal

The Fellowship Committee under the leadership of Joanne Teague and Anne Conrad are excited to announce that over the next three months we will throw open the doors of our church and invite the entire community to a free meal. The first meal is scheduled for Tuesday, February 6 in Fellowship Hall from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. The menu includes meatloaf, new potatoes, squash and apple crisp. The lead chef for the meal is Jeremy Burns who is a professional cook and who is delighted to offer his services to serve the people. We are deeply grateful to the community for the enthusiastic support that has come by way of donations from Jack and Barbara White, Altonen's Orchards and the Village Market of Elk Rapids. Because of their generous donations there is absolutely no cost to the guests and everyone and all ages are welcome to enjoy the hospitality. The next two meals will be on March 13 and April 10.



ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING Sunday, February 11

Session Calls an All Congregation Annual Meeting on Sunday, February 11 immediately following the 9:00 a.m. service.

Mark your calendar today and plan to attend this important meeting. Copies of the annual reports and agenda are available on the Welcome Table.

Christian Education & Youth Update

The past month has been extremely fruitful in the area of family ministry in the church. In January the youth group wrapped up our Spanish lessons as we continue preparing for our mission trip to Puerto Rico this summer. Thank you again to Kristen VanDenBerge for teaching these classes and for her dedication to our youth. We also had another great youth group brunch fundraiser. I appreciate all of the support the church continues



showing to the youth ministry. We also added another parent to our Sunday School teaching team in January. You may be unaware, but over the past 18 months we have recruited an entirely new team of children's Sunday School teachers. This group is doing an outstanding job of shaping the faith of our children. We also attracted two new students, first time at a youth event in January. One of those is an at-risk student that I have become associated with through my work outside the church. Please continue praying that God will provide us with opportunities to impact the world right outside our own front door, bringing the love of Jesus to our community.

Looking ahead, February is another full month with opportunities to attract new students and deepen the faith of those who are already a part of the church. We have our next Community Movie Night on the second. We will be watching "Despicable Me 3" this time around. On February 16 we will be attending the premiere of the latest Marvel movie "The Black Panther." This outing requires a ticket and the deadline for students to signup is February 11. At the end of the month, February 23-25 the youth group will be attending our annual winter retreat at Pleasant Valley Bible Camp. This is always one of the highlights of the year. It provides students with an opportunity to set aside their regular schedule, make

new friends and grow in their faith. I have talked to former students years after they graduated from youth group and they point to camp as one of the most formative experiences in their faith journey. I would greatly appreciate your prayers for our students as we look forward to camp.

February 2018

Christian Education & Youth Calendar of Events

Sundays

Youth Group

Wednesdays

Breakfast Club

Thursdays, Feb. 1, 8, 15 & 22

Guitar Lessons

Friday, February 2

Youth Movie Night at the Lighthouse

Friday, February 16

Youth Movie Night in Traverse City

February 23 - 25

Youth Winter Camp



Vacation Bible School

Please mark your calendar for Vacation Bible School 2018, which is scheduled for June 25-29. This year the theme is "Shipwrecked, Rescued By Jesus." Tracy Fosdick and Sara Bogard are directing again this year. Please let them know if you can help.



SENIOR CITIZEN Dance
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 5-7pm

At the Light House 508 Elm Street, Elk Rapids

Come enjoy great music, dancing, fellowship & refreshments. This is a **FREE** event sponsored by 8th Graders from Cherryland Middle School. Please call **Melanie Stoll** for more information **231-392-1862**.

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This church is in for some really exciting times as it prepares to welcome a new called installed minister into its pulpit and at the helm. There are two things I hope and pray in this time. First, that as a congregation you do everything conceivable to welcome whoever it is that God is calling to serve in this church. Elk Rapids is a small community with defined circles of friends and whoever is called will need to make this place a home. So I challenge you to be super sensitive to their arrival and that you welcome them not just on Sunday morning as a minister, or as an advisor to a committee, or an idea person who can carry this church vision forward. I challenge you to welcome him/her into your home and into your lives... that you do everything you can to make their family feel welcome.

Next, I challenge you to continue to grow in acts of hospitality. It has been fun to see how just a few moves in fellowship have changed the tenor of Sunday morning. The Fellowship Committee moved our coffee gathering time into the church's narthex and started to provide cookies home baked by members. I am a cookie and coffee evangelist and I think what we see now is a growing fellowship in the life of the church. We see it in the beginning of the summer pig roast and in the kick off picnic in August. This month we are taking a new and giant step toward expanding hospitality by providing our first free community dinner on Tuesday, February 6. The plan is to do the same in March and in April. My challenge is to continue to do this. The Deacons are faithful in visiting our shut-ins with communion and I know the prayer list makes important connections. Continue to be sensitive to including others in the life of this church and to show acts of hospitality because at the core of who we are as Christians is living as hosts on Christ's behalf... hosts to those who are seeking to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.



First Presbyterian Church
of Elk Rapids

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FREE

Community Dinner

at First Presbyterian Church of Elk Rapids

3 Tuesdays | 5:30-6:30^{PM} Fellowship Hall

February 6

March 13

April 10



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Everyone is Welcome!