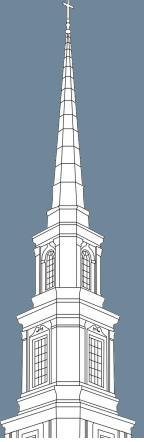


# GOOD NEWS NEWSLETTER



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# From Our Pastor Dr. Anne Bain Epling

Dear First Pres Friends,

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the Good News newsletter. This newsletter is born from the understanding that while we do a good job of announcing what is coming up in the life of the church via the worship bulletin and the weekly enews, we don't do a very good job of letting you know the good news of what has happened. We spend a great deal of time and effort asking you to come to events or support certain ministries, but fail to tell you the impact your time and treasures had. Thus, the Good News newsletter is born.

You can expect to find an electronic copy of the newsletter on the church's website every month, and for those of you who receive the sermons by mail, you'll receive a hard copy in the mail. The newsletter is the place to read about new members or new staff members, the important work church committees are engaged in, and the impact or involvement the church has in the community. If you have an idea for an article, let Jiin Jung or Tony Belton know. They are the brains behind the newsletter.

As we lean into 2022, I am excited about what lies ahead. By the time you read this, will have the Session accepted new members; Todd and Brent will be putting the finishing touches on the next show in the theater and concert in the music series; and the Adult Education committee (CCW) will be wrapping up plans for our Wednesday night Lent speaker series. Indeed, there are many good things happening at First Pres.

We have experienced much in the past 22 months of a global pandemic, but together we have learned the importance of community. I look forward to 2022 and being the church together, both in-person and online.

Blessings,  
Annie



Rev. Annie Epling hosted a new member welcome gathering in November







Oh and Jesus, as we definitely don't want to forget the focus of the Holy Joes and what made all this possible.

10 weeks ago it was easy to self-identify with these 5 or 6 other men around the room as complete strangers. But I can definitely say that after the past couple months of sharing stories, spilling our guts, and then refilling them with pizza and ribs and an occasional beer, that these men are friends. I'm not sure what I expected at the start of this journey, but I can't express enough that it was no less than what I needed. We all signed up with different expectations and needs, from growing our circle of friends, to just hoping to find enough positive energy to keep going. But similar to the way the Disciples became a crew, we all became a Holy Joe because, well, Jesus.

We came together for more. I guess more of what exactly, we'll find out along the way. But we're making strides. Strides to becoming better husbands, fathers, brothers, and men. All while building friendships that will lead to us getting more out of life, ourselves, and our relationships. In a nutshell, I guess that's what makes the Holy Joes special.

We're looking forward to meeting back up starting in February. Usually we're at someone's house, just talking, sharing thoughts, eating stuff, and potentially building things. If you'd like to join us we'd love to extend our brotherhood to you. Just email [tbelton@firstpresfortwayne.org](mailto:tbelton@firstpresfortwayne.org) and let me know!

## NOT YOUR AVERAGE JOES

by Tony Belton, Director of Community Engagement & Communication

They say there's no hood like parenthood, motherhood, and let's be honest, a good ductless undercabinet hood can be a game changer as well. But we'll save the DIY discussions for after our next bro-nding session, as this space is reserved for bros and brotherhood.



## LEARNING MORE ABOUT KOREAN CULTURES: HANA KLUB

by Jiin Jung, Church Coordinator

The word Hana, meaning one or unity, plays to one of our unique assets here at First Pres, merging both American and Korean cultures. Last October we hosted a cooking class, the first Korean cooking class ever done at First Pres.

We had approximately 60 people, both members and outsiders, all in McKay Hall enjoying Bulgogi (Korean Barbecue) and Bibimbap with seasoned veggies.

Hana Klub coordinators are working to solidify our list of events for the coming year. The first event will be to celebrate the Lunar New Year at Naked Tchopstix on Friday, January 28 at 6pm. Spaces are limited, please RSVP via Facebook or email Jiin Jung. We're looking forward to seeing you there and having more fun in 2022!

If you have any questions about Hana Klub, contact Jiin Jung at [jjung@firstpresfortwayne.org](mailto:jjung@firstpresfortwayne.org) or follow our Facebook page at 'Hana Klub Fort Wayne' for more upcoming events!



## TAKE A STEP FORWARD IF...

by Rev. Carrie Winebrenner

...you've never had to worry about your phone being turned off.

...you've never had someone cross the street to avoid you.

...you almost always see members of your race, sexual orientation, religion, and class widely represented on television, in the newspaper, and the media in a POSITIVE manner.

I'll admit, I had taken three steps forward at this point. Most of us in the Youth Lounge had taken those same three steps together. But not everyone. During our Priviledge Walk exercise, Daylana and Aleisha, two Black women who are also our facilitators, were left behind at the starting line.

This year in Youth Group, we've been building awareness in the community, both inside and outside the church, during programming we call "Tough Stuff." Recently, our Tough Stuff session involved the self-proclaimed "Professional Radicals" of The Changemakers (<https://www.facebook.com/ChangeMakersFW/>), a local community action group born out of the hurt and distrust arising from the murder of George Floyd.



"Tough Stuff" in November



During our time with The Changemakers, the youth, joined by a few adults from the congregation spent time becoming aware of our own privileges and giving sacred space to our own vulnerabilities. We also were given generous and gentle space to share those vulnerabilities through stories of our own time of hurt and distrust. While racial disparities were a focus of the day, we also shared concerns and fears regarding sexual orientation, generational differences, and how we can put our privileges and voices to work for our siblings in the community.

Our time together was not only eye-opening, but it was also quite intentionally ear-opening. We learned that the only real way to get to know someone is to ask questions. But to take those questions to the next level, we must also be willing to listen to the answers. This kind of listening, called Active Listening, is a skill that must be cultivated and continuously exercised, like a muscle. Active listening is much more than just hearing someone speak or waiting your turn to respond. It's giving someone your full self: your eye contact, your undivided attention, your uninterrupted time. Kind of what Jesus would do, huh?

I am so incredibly proud of the youth for tackling this Tough Stuff with hearts for justice and love for their neighbors. So go ahead, and take a step forward knowing the youth of First Pres Fort Wayne are truly the hands and feet of Christ. And that's GOOD NEWS!  
For more information about Youth Group or the Children, Youth, and Family ministries of First Pres Fort Wayne, please pick up a newsletter outside the church office.



First Pres CYF: preparing food for Rescue Mission Meal (top-left), Youth Group had the first Cupcake Wars in October (top-right), at the Project 216 (bottom-right)



## MEETING OUR NEW STAFF: Todd Sandman Cruz, Director of Fine & Performing Arts Ministry

**Tell me about yourself** I was born in Evansville IN but grew up in Ft Wayne. I lived on the Northeast side of town in a neighborhood called Countryside. I used to ride my bike through Black Hawk subdivision to go to the movies at Georgetown Square. I attended St Charles Borromeo grade school and then Bishop Dwenger High School. I got into theater due to sibling rivalry-my older brother Ed and sister Kathy both were in the plays and musicals at Bishop Dwenger. They both had also done theater in grade school -so I was introduced to theater at a very young age-and I guess it stuck! I was bit by the acting bug in the third grade when I was Joseph in the nativity. I attended Ball State University where I got my Bachelors in Theater with a minor in Telecommunications, and then completed by master of Fine Arts in Acting at the University of Washington. While living in Los Angeles, I became a Hypnotherapist. I had a private practice and would eventually become Director of Admissions for the school as well (always a bit ambitious). I eventually returned to Muncie IN where I was the Executive Director for Muncie Civic Theater for about 9 years and taught acting at Ball State University.



**What do you like most about First Pres?** What I like most about First Pres is the people. I am fortunate to work with an amazing group of people who work hard to help others. An inclusive staff who really want and enjoy, making the Ft Wayne community a better place.

**If you could live anywhere, where would it be?** I have been fortunate to live in some wonderful places (the Prodigal Son -I suppose): Seattle, Los Angeles, San Diego, Palm Springs-and I very much have enjoyed living in Muncie and Ft Wayne as well. I am very happy to be living back in Ft Wayne after 38 years, being close to family. I suppose someday-if I could ever bring myself to retire-I might winter somewhere else, maybe Florida, but I don't see myself moving permanently out of the Fort.

**Can you share us your favorite Bible verse and why?** "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing." ~ Thessalonians 5:11

Having worked as an Actor, Director, and Professor of Theater, this verse guides me as I am always trying to help someone do better as an actor and as a person. After all, art imitates life. I believe God has given me these gifts to assist others to grow in their talent and their life.



**If you had a theme song, what would it be?** "Corner of the Sky" from the Musical PIPPIN. It's all about finding your place in the world and always striving to do more with your life: be better, do better and make a difference. Finding your place in the world where your "Spirit can run free". It can be a daunting thing to do at times—you may have to make some decisions in your life that others won't understand or think that you're crazy. But when you find it, things seem to fall into place. It's not something that happens by luck, or overnight, or by sitting back and watching life go by. It takes hard work, focus, sacrifice, and persistence. That's my interpretation at least.

**What's your vision for First Pres Theater?** My vision for First Pres Theater requires producing shows that are inclusive, entertaining, and educational: Seasons that include music, dance, comedy, drama and require racial diversity in casting and strong roles for women, men, and children! We strive to foster a theater atmosphere of acceptance that encourages all to take part regardless of age, race, gender identity, or experience level. Everyone is welcome!

## MINUTE FOR MISSION

by Tony Borton

The tumultuous summer of 2020 brought many issues of racial and social justice to the forefront of many people's minds across the nation—including right here in Fort Wayne. Ever since, numerous members of First Pres have been trying to gain greater understanding of these issues and how we can be part of changes for the better. But where to start?

Some folks on the Missions Committee decided to start with a look at ourselves through the prism of the oft-repeated suggestion that "Sunday morning is the most segregated time of the week." Why? How could that change? And does anyone want to change it? Are congregations and their styles of worship really that different? We were blessed with an opportunity to connect with members of Body of Christ Church on Hanna Street to hopefully explore these questions—but also to simply build new relationships with people of color from other areas of the city. Covid-19 has made it a challenge to build these relationships in person, but after a series of virtual Zoom meetings and conversations, members of First Pres finally were able to attend Saturday worship at Body of Christ, and were pleased to welcome their pastor, Kent Nichols, as a guest to our own Sunday worship this fall. In an effort to find some joint project(s), we also participated in Body of Christ's first Saturday fellowship event geared toward kids and families from the church and in the neighboring community. We all hope to do a lot more in the New Year—stay tuned for updates from the Missions Committee on future events!

## 2022 ARTS UNITED AWARD NOMINEE -THE CAST OF "THE WOLVES"

"THE WOLVES" is a bold and daring fly-on-the-wall look at a girls soccer team as they navigate everything from society, sex, and soccer—with all the bark and bite of a pack of adolescent warriors.

Directed by local superstar Shelby Lewis, this First Presbyterian Theater production featured an all-female cast ranging in age from 13 to 21, which was intentional. Since the script was complex, smart, and hilarious, it was made for 16-17 year old characters, which gave these young actors the chance to truly explore what it means to be a teenager in 2021.



The wonderful local cast features #25 Sophia Bell, #11 Ella McIntosh, #13 Cat Ahlersmeyer, #14 Madeline Steck, #00 Madison Garza, #8 Cassie Smith, #2 Gretchen Lowe, #46 Dorian Underwood, #7 Isabel Maahs, and Kat Hickey as Soccer Mom. Promotional artwork design is by Natalie McDonald.

## 2022 PLEDGE REMINDER

It's not too late! If you have not yet pledged, you can mail your pledge card to the church, 300 W. Wayne Street, Fort Wayne, IN 46802 or email Michelle Adams, Financial Manager, at [madams@firstpresfortwayne.org](mailto:madams@firstpresfortwayne.org)

