

GOOD NEWS NEWSLETTER



Annual Meeting/Confirmation Sunday on February 20

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From Our Pastor Rev. Annie Epling

Dear First Pres Friends,

In February we celebrated our confirmands and a baptism, and we were “taken to church” at our Tough Talk on Queer Theology. We also acknowledged our ministry in 2021 at the Annual Meeting, recognized Vicki Davis for her faithful ministry, and in many quiet yet faithful ways went about ministry in downtown Fort Wayne. Despite the snow and pandemic that kept some at home, it was a good month.

As we look to March, I encourage you to attend the Wednesday night Lent series. We have excellent speakers lined up, and I’m eager to hear how they’re building community in Fort Wayne. If you’re looking for an earlier or more informal service, you can also check-out the 9:30 service in the Chapel. There are also concerts, gallery openings, and other fun things happening.

May you have a Lent filled with peace and wholeness.

Blessings,
Annie Epling, Pastor/Head of Staff

Vicki Davis: 2022 Distinguished Service Award Recipient!

Every year during the Annual meeting, we, the congregation, look forward to the Elaine Wareham Award. This year, I was shocked, surprised and blubbering like a baby when I realized I was given the award! Knowing the past recipients, I could not be more honored to join the list. My thanks and love to my church family for this wonderful affirmation for my work. Peace and blessings, Vicki Davis



Thoughts on Tough Talk on Queer Theology

by Diane Haffner

Reverend Remington Johnson spoke during Tough Talks on Queer Theology, and I would say she “took us to church.” She was able to bring the entangled web of political and Christian ideas regarding the LGBTQ movement into a personal and divine space.

She began by simplifying what the Bible does say. Reverend Johnson said, “If it’s not loving, it’s wrong.” She took us right to the two greatest commandments found in Matthew 22:36-40 “to love God and love everyone else.” She spoke on a personal level as a Presbyterian minister, a gay rights activist and a transgender woman.



This gives her a unique insight into the views of conservative churches and politicians and the LGBTQ community. She hasn’t studied this as much as she has lived it. She has been on the receiving end of hatred, yet she doesn’t spew hate; she does not spew vengeance. No. She said, “We are called to be with one another. Your life makes my life better, and my life makes your life better.” She encourages us to open our hearts and our doors and embrace those who are different from us. Reverend Johnson sees all people as “beautifully complex and irreducible”.

How often do we look at someone and make assumptions about them before we even meet them? Imagine what opportunities we miss out on! Reverend Johnson spoke about taking time to be with people different from ourselves. She said, “It can give us another lens, another experience, another interpretation of the Divine.” She went on to ask us to “Let the queer folks who enter into your life become another window to the Divine.” I did a little word study on Divine. Rabbi Rick Sherwin wrote about the Divine in the January 23, 2021 issue of The Apopka Voice. He described the Divine Spirit as “emulating the good, acting in kindness, showing compassion, holding back anger, showing patience, driving away the dark with light, and replacing despair with hope.”

I, for one, would like to make more space for the Divine in my life.

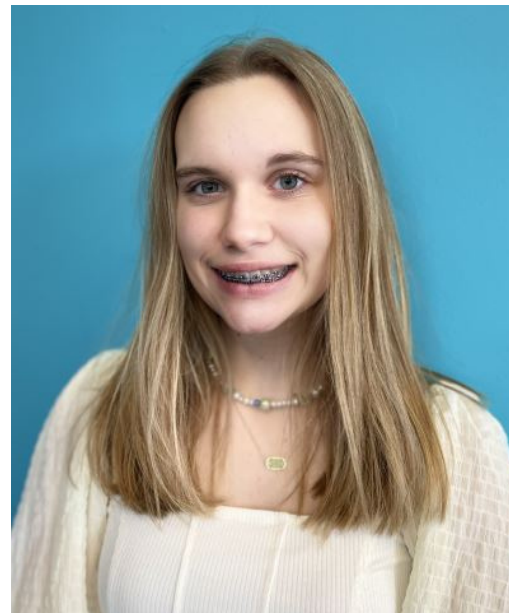
4 Questions with our confirmand Emily Delong!

What was your favorite part of confirmation?

My favorite part of confirmation was getting to know new people. I enjoyed making new friendships and gathering with them because we were all there for the same thing. We all wanted to learn more about what it means to be a Presbyterian.

What did you learn?

I learned about how God influences our actions, but it is up to us to act on those influences. I also took away the idea of God always being there with us, despite our bad decisions. I learned that God is always going to listen to us, and we can go to him when we feel unmotivated or hopeless. God's presence in our lives helps us become motivated, cared for, and not alone.



What was your least favorite part?

My least favorite part of confirmation was the beginning, when I felt like I had to know everything. Some questions would be thrown at me, and I really did not know the right answer. The more I went to more classes, I realized that there are no "right" answers in faith. Some people twice my age do not have everything figured out, so I wondered, why do I have to have everything figured out? I continued to learn that people learn more about their faith every day, just as I do. Being vulnerable was hard, but it was important in understanding what I was learning.

What advice do you have for anyone going through confirmation?

I would give the advice, don't be worried about the "hard stuff". I was worried about having everything figured out, and having to have the "right" answers. But in reality, the main part of confirmation was communicating with my mentors. I think communication and giving effort to understand the ways of God is the most important thing in confirmation class.



Our confirmands: Evan Mallory, Leah Mallory, Emily Delong, Noah Kim, Charlotte Epling, Clara Satter and Ian Kim

On My Daughter's Baptism Day...!

by Matt Morley

Today was such a sweet sweet day. As Ashley, Kenzie, and I were surrounded by so many people that love us, we got to witness Kenzie's baptism. For me, it was such an emotional day. I've been let down by the church in the last four or five years, and my relationship with it has soured. I found my joy in a few one on one relationships that I could lean into, and worked through spiritual issues in that setting. I thought this may be how I go through life from now on, just focusing on my relationship with Jesus, and talking about him with a few trusted folks.

It wasn't until Kenzie was in the womb that I second guessed this idea. No matter how much I've grown weary of the church, there is no denying that I would not be here today if it weren't for the church. The church filled in whenever I needed it. It gave me father figures to look up to my whole life. It gave me sweet women to help me after my mom died. It gave me new friends whenever I moved. It gave me people to care for me as I lay in the hospital nearly dead.

I think no matter how good Ashley and I do as parents, we will still need help from our family and our community to raise Kenzie. Every parent needs the helpers. That was on my mind a lot as we were waiting on Kenzie to arrive. Then I read that Pastor Annie at First Presbyterian Church was leading a special class about reclaiming scripture from fundamentalism, and I was very intrigued. I didn't get to attend any of those classes, but we decided we would try this place out on a Sunday morning. We went and really enjoyed each sermon that we heard. The sermons from all pastors were so refreshing and full of love and hope for all people. The more I looked into the denomination and this church specifically, the more I enjoyed that they are active in the Fort Wayne schools, Pride month & festival, the food banks, and so much more. They really want to reach everyone and show them love. It took Ashley and me some time to get used to the more traditional service, but it's worth it to be a part of something that is authentic.

I've never been one that gets on board with baby baptisms. I'm not a real fan of the idea that if something happened to Kenzie today, God wouldn't let her in Heaven because she wasn't baptized. That's just silly talk, and not scriptural in my opinion. After a couple chats with Annie and Carrie, I was comforted to learn that in the Presbyterian tradition, infant baptism is about the church coming together to say, "This new one is our family, and no matter what, she has a home here. We're here to help take care of her and love her, and to do whatever we can to help her and her parents." It really felt like the baby dedications that I'm more familiar with, just with water.



Matt, Ashley and McKenzie Morley

Today was so overwhelming in all the best ways. They really made Kenzie a part of the whole service. Pastor Annie's sermon was a letter to Kenzie. In it she said, "As much as we may want to remain on the mountaintop, there is work to be done out on the plain. Our calling as Christians is to go down the mountain and be in ministry with other people to support them. Kenzie, over the course of your lifetime you'll hear billions of words spoken, and many of those words will tell you the mountaintop is the goal. You'll hear people tell you what matters most is what you wear, how you look, what you make, what job you have.

You'll hear people encourage you to do what's popular or cool, no matter what's right. You'll hear people tell you, you need to go to the right schools, live in the right neighborhood, hang out with the right people, all with the goal of getting to the mountaintop, no matter what you have to do to get there. But the mountaintop is not the goal, at least not for someone who is baptized. Serving in the valleys is. So everyone can get to the mountaintop."

So as I went up with my wife and daughter for the actual baptism, I had a heck of a time holding it together. To have someone like Annie as Kenzie's first pastor, and to speak such wisdom into her, really filled this dad's heart with gratitude and joy. I really felt thankful and happy that we chose this place to be our place, and as parents, to help us with Kenzie. This place that also had Ashley's family and some of our favorite people from out of town to help support her on her big day. We did it right today. Kenzie has a bright future, and First Pres will be a part of that.

The Gospel According to Ted Lasso Lecture Series

Even if you've never watched Ted Lasso, you can learn something from Ted, who is an American football coach hired to coach an English soccer club but knows nothing about soccer. He has only been a football coach! But Ted does know how to bring out the best in people to make a good team. It's his true gift.

Join us on Wednesdays to hear from various community leaders about how they're using their gifts to build community in Fort Wayne. Dinner is 5:30pm-6pm and the speaker will present from 6-7pm. Come, listen and learn.

March 9

Javier Mondragon, Founder/CEO Bridge of Grace, 2020 Fort Wayne Person of the Year

March 16

Susan Baier, Executive Director, Allen County Public Library

March 23

Daylana Saunders & Alisha Rauch, Fort Wayne Changemakers

March 30

Cassie Beers, Women's Fund Director, Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne

April 6

Iric Headley, Director, Fort Wayne United

