

THE WINDOW

On a journey with the living Christ; connecting with God, others, and the world.

JANUARY 2022

IT SMELLS NEW TO ME, by Andy Hamer, Pastor

Have you ever received a hand-me-down? Maybe it was clothing or a toy from an older sibling? Maybe you normally buy used cars? If so, you may have found yourself in the position of trying to explain to someone that you just got a new _____. It wasn't actually brand new, right out of the box, or filled with a new car smell. But for you, it was new.

When the "new" year rolls around we often come to the realization that uniqueness is embedded in all of our experiences. We've seen January first before, but this one is new to us. Each year, each day, each moment has its own distinct set of possibilities. We find this idea in the Scriptures as well.

*22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
23 they are new every morning;*

Let's think about this from a different direction. Are any you of you planners? Do people ever notice that you enjoy control just a bit too much? My guess is that the planners and the "control freaks" amongst us have occasionally been frustrated by the fact that we can't perfectly map out what will happen on a vacation, or during a meeting, or even on a trip to the grocery store. We can't plan for or predict all possibilities in a year, a day, or even a minute. Fortunately for us, imbedded in every single moment - in all that uncontrollable and unpredictable possibility - is the incredible potential that flows out of God's mercy.

It's true that not all chance occurrences are good, but God's mercy is. This evening, tomorrow, and next Tuesday will be new - new to us. And they will be permeated with the scent of God's mercy.

What's your outlook on this new year?

For those of us who feel ready - eyes focused ahead, wanting to take that next step forward - this encouragement of God's boundless mercy is for you. As you look out from the brink of this new year, you may glimpse greater closeness to Jesus or a greater sense of participation in his good purpose. God's mercy and love await you. God is calling you to step out. His love will steady you. See what he is doing here and now. Join him.

For those of us who are healing or who feel overwhelmed right now - standing on the brink of the new year with hands up to fend off whatever may come - this encouragement of God's boundless mercy is also for you. The Scripture quoted above is from the book of Lamentations. If you want to see how faith interacts with some of the most soul-wounding realities of life, then the book of Lamentations is a good place to start. If you're feeling brave, start reading at Chapter two. The writer caps it off in Chapter three by saying,

*17 my soul is bereft of peace;
I have forgotten what happiness is;
18 so I say, "My endurance has perished;
so has my hope from the LORD."*

IT SMELLS NEW TO ME, continued

And yet, the writer still holds on to a spark of awareness that pulls him back from the precipice. It's an awareness that God's goodness is unstoppable, and that any moment could bring a fresh whiff of mercy. We always stand on the edge of newness. So we read in the next few verses:

*But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
23 they are new every morning;*

Friends, this new year is loaded with new experiences of God's love and mercy. This is true for people who feel ready to run and for people who feel run over. It's true in communities that feel fresh and those that feel frozen. It's true for the aspects of our congregational life that are firing on all cylinders and for those that feel a little fried.

In the pages of this newsletter, you'll read about a growing ministry area, a heartfelt update from a mission partner, and new opportunities for spiritual growth. You'll also read about how our budget shifts have changed the size and functions of our staff team. God's mercy will be ready and active in each of these situations – ready to meet us as we are, capture our hearts, free us from bondage, and redefine our understanding of purpose and joy.

Regardless of how we stand to face the new year, God's love will steady us. Waiting in the heart of each moment will be the possibility of a merciful connection with the one who loves us most. We always stand at the edge of newness.

January At A Glance

At West Hills our mission statement . . . On a journey with the living Christ; connecting with God, others, and the world, provides us with the framework for how we live our lives. Here are notable activities this month, in the life of our church, seeking to connect us to God, others, and the world.

Sundays in January - Livestreaming and in-person worship service @ 10 a.m. Following the service, join us for fellowship in Geneva Lounge. For those not attending in-person, we welcome you to watch the service by livestream at: whcomaha.org/live

Discipleship Opportunities Sunday Mornings @ 9:00 a.m.:

- * Crosswalk Kids meeting temporarily online via Zoom
- * Youth 406 Journey Groups meeting temporarily online via Zoom
- * Confirmation students meeting temporarily online via Zoom
- * "The Prodigal Phophet" discipleship class with Jeff Smith in the chapel

Tuesday Mornings - Men's Bible Study meets at 7:00 a.m. in the chapel in-person and online via Zoom. The group studies the scripture passage for the upcoming Sunday sermon.

Wednesday Mornings - Women's book study begins Jan. 12 at 9:30 a.m. in the chapel. This study is on the book "Holding On When You Want To Let Go" by Sheila Walsh

Wednesday Evenings - Women's Small Group meets at 5:15 p.m. in the chapel. This group uses video-based studies on a variety of Christian topics.

Wednesdays - 406 Youth Group meets at 6:30 p.m. online via Zoom

Thursday Mornings - This group is going Co-Ed! Men and women are invited to join this Bible study that resumes Jan. 6 at 9:30 a.m. in the chapel. The group uses the Serendipity Bible study method and they are going through the book of Exodus.

Jan. 20 - Sloppy Joe Ministry Drop Off at the church. Come between 10-4 to the north circle drive and drop your cooked sloppy joe meat and buns in the bins. The food will be taken to the Stephen Center to be enjoyed by many!

Jan. 25 - Men's Night Out at 6:00 p.m. at Brazen Head Pub located at North 78th Street

Jan. 27 -Financial Peace University at West Hills. A nine-week class will be offered from 7-9 p.m. in the chapel. More info to follow soon!

Jan. 30 - Annual Church Meeting at 6:45 p.m. in-person and online via Zoom (sorry, no meal this year)

2022 BRINGS STAFF CHANGES, by Gary Anders, Elder for Personnel

Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

As West Hills Church continues this Journey with the Living Christ into 2022, there will be change.

During 2021, the budget was enhanced by the \$100,000 Federal COVID Relief Grant and by artificially holding open vacant positions to allow for additional budget savings.

Over the past few months, the Personnel Team and the Session worked to determine how the staffing at WHC will best meet our needs given the change in available resources. Through much prayer, discussion, and planning, it was determined that a reduction in staff is required.

After a review of all staff positions and given the budget constraints, it was decided to:

- Combine functions of some positions into newly created positions with new job titles and responsibilities.
- Maintain some of the positions with current titles and add responsibilities.
- Decrease some full-time positions to part time positions.
- Eliminate some positions.

In 2021 the budget funded seven full-time positions and eight part-time positions. The 2022 budget funds five full-time positions and seven part-time positions with the funded hours for part-time staff decreased. Staff will not receive a cost-of-living adjustment in 2022.

The funded staffing level for 2022 is:

- **Pastor, Andy Hamer**
- **Director of Church Administration, Mike Alfieri**
 - » hours reduced to 35 hours per week
 - » one month Furlough
- **Facility Coordinator, John Good**
- **Maintenance, Don Good**
 - » Reduced from 25 hours per week to 15 hours per week
- **Maintenance, Ricardo Lopez**
 - » Reduced from 25 hours per week to 10 hours per week
- **Director of Worship & Music & Visitation, Kevin Gibson**
- **Part Time Accompanist, Kathy Leach**
- **Director of Communication and Assistant to Pastor, Heather Hipp**
- **New position created, Administrative and Communication Assistant**
 - » 25 hours a week
 - » Combined responsibilities of the Reception/Administrative Assistant and Communication Assistant
- **Director of Spiritual Formation and Family Ministries, Jessica Scheopner**
- **Youth and Young Adult Coordinator, Luke Burns**
 - » Effective January 31, 2022, hours will be reduced to part time, 30 hours per week
- **New position created, Children's Coordinator**
 - » 25 hours week
 - » Combined responsibilities of the Children's Coordinator and Family Ministries Assistant and the Nursery Coordinator

2022 BRINGS STAFF CHANGES, continued

Since September of 2020, West Hills has been blessed to have **Caroline Grice as our Temporary Associate Pastor**. Her position was designed to end after 2021, and her last day at West Hills will be January 13, 2022. She has provided the church with exceptional pastoral support during her time at West Hills and she will be missed. Thank you, Caroline, for your service during this 16-month period and best wishes in your future endeavors. The 2022 budget does not fund an Associate Pastor position or Pastoral support other than Andy's position.

As **Director of Church Administration, Mike Alfieri** does an outstanding job. Some of his responsibilities are tracking the church finances and assisting with establishing the budget. During the budgeting process, Mike graciously accepted a pay reduction. His pay status will be reduced from 40 to 35 hours per week. In addition, he has volunteered to take a four-week unpaid furlough during 2022.

Don Good and Ricardo Lopez are hardworking, reliable, and effective employees. They go about completing maintenance tasks in the church independently and with a smile. Don and Ricardo know the building and its maintenance needs. We thank them both for their service. The budget does not allow for the positions to be funded at the 2021 level of 25 hours each and will be reduced in 2022 to a combined total of 25 hours.

The position of **Receptionist/Administrative Assistant, which Rosa Norman** has effectively staffed, is eliminated. The functions of the Receptionist/Administrative Assistant position and the Communication Assistant position are combined into a new position entitled Administrative and Communication Assistant. The budgeted hours are reduced from 35 to 25 hours per week. The functions of the new position require a different skill set compared to Rosa's position and the hourly pay rate is increased. Since Rosa's position is eliminated, her last day of work will be January 14, 2022. Rosa has been a great employee and dedicated to the church. We thank her for her hard work and outstanding service.

The Personnel Team and the Session recognize the wonderful job that **Luke Burns is doing as Youth and Young Adult Coordinator**. Given the size of our youth group, a new part-time job description was created that maintains the same level of care and attention to our current youth. Luke will remain in a full-time status until January 28th, and will begin as a part-time 30-hour per week employee on January 31, 2022.

With the change in staffing levels, the full-time staff will be taking on additional responsibilities. For example, **Kevin will add several hours each week of pastoral calls and visits, and Jessica will add adult spiritual formation responsibilities**. As the responsibilities for specific staff are modified, that information will be shared with the congregation. During this transition to fewer staff and the change in responsibilities, please pray for each of the staff. In addition to prayer, additional volunteer support is needed to maintain our congregation's commitment to discipleship and mission.

Recruitment to hire into the vacant positions will begin this month. Please pray that the recruitment, interview and hiring process is quick and effective in finding the best person possible for these important and key positions.

We know there are challenges associated with this time of change, but we also believe that God will continue to work in and through each of us. Please pray that as we renew our support of one another, we will keep our eyes open for the new work God is doing in our midst.

Isaiah 43:18b-19a

Do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

A TIME TO BE STILL . . . compiled by Gloria Zinn

If you haven't been on a **Silent Retreat** yet, here's your chance! What could be better than quiet, uninterrupted time with God in a beautiful setting? The Saint Benedict Center is calling you to come and be a part of a Silent Retreat with other West Hills women on **February 4-6**. Sign up in Geneva Lounge on Sunday morning or call Linda Springsted at 402-290-4704 with any questions you may have.

Below are three testimonies from women that have attended Silent Retreats over the years. Hear what they have to say about what this time means to them.

Silent Retreats have been an essential part of my faith journey! It's the extended time of silence (more than just a few minutes of

quiet) that leads me to a deeper level of peace, where it's easier for me to feel God's presence and hear His voice. He doesn't always have a specific message for me, but on rare occasions, He has! And I do always come away feeling renewed, loved, and so glad I went!

Betty Manna

I was first invited to a Silent Retreat by my mom. I was initially skeptical about the idea of gathering together and NOT talking to one another all weekend. What? Why? But it's one of those things you need to experience to appreciate fully. Having two days to get away, unplug from your life (literally, the Wi-Fi is extremely spotty out there), and be quiet before the Lord is truly rejuvenating to my spirit. To have the freedom to read, rest, pray, journal, walk, and just "be still and know that He is God" (Ps. 46:10) is always a balm to my soul. It is different than just being quiet at home, because you leave behind the kids, spouses, pets, chores, errands, computer, and whatever else can distract you from just spending time with Jesus. You don't

even have to worry about fixing your meals, as the cooks at St. Benedict's prepare wonderful meals and even have coffee, tea, and water available all day. Not to mention we usually all bring munchies, which are available in our group's assigned day room. There is no threat of going hungry.

So, during this set-aside space and time, there is nothing else to do but enjoy the peace and be open to whatever God might be trying to speak to you

that the noise of your regular life may have drowned out. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of attending a Silent Retreat is how much you bond with the other women in attendance. Just welcoming each other upon arrival, exchanging smiles as you pass in the hallway or on the retreat grounds,

sharing a table at mealtime, and reflecting together on Sunday as we close, always leaves me with a sense that my Silent Sisters shared a meaningful journey with me.

Kelley Deases

The Silent Retreat opportunity often comes when my life seems very demanding and too busy to take time for a weekend retreat. The effort of committing time alone with Jesus has incredible potential. Some retreats are full of reassurance, rest, and peace. Other times it is an opportunity to deal with an ongoing concern when you need to make tough decisions or a life change. At the Benedictine Center, God's beauty is amplified as we limit our focus by not talking to other people. The lack of demands on your time to cook, clean, and fuss about life make listening to God's Word and prayer a meaningful event. Many often doubted my ability to be quiet, but the Lord keeps teaching me to rest in Him. He is in control.

Deb O'Reilly



STEPHEN MINISTRY UPDATE

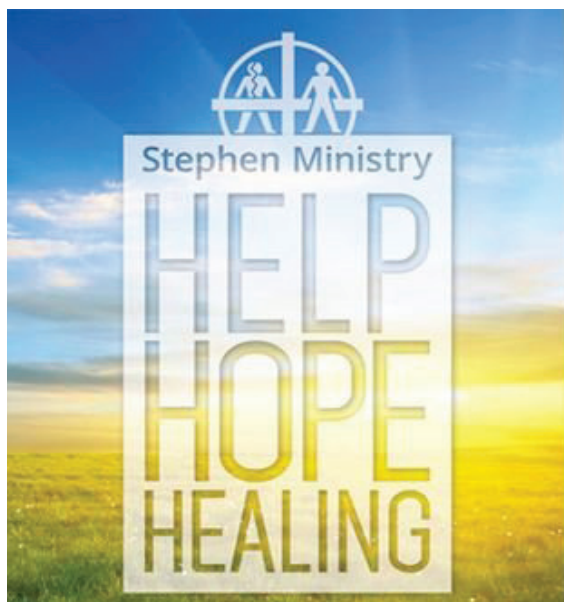
by Cathy Voshell, Deacon of Steph. Min.

Happy New Year! A year full of anticipation and excitement. What are you excited about for this new year? I am excited that West Hills will be commissioning six new Stephen Ministers this spring. Stephen Ministry has been relatively dormant for a few years and everything is changing due to Covid protocols. *But we will be vigilant in revitalizing Stephen Ministry so that we can meet the needs of our congregation and community.*

Stephen Ministry based in St Louis, the headquarters for Stephen Ministry, has updated all of their curriculum in 2020 while everyone was sheltering in place to avoid the spread of the virus. Due to their perseverance, we now enjoy learning how to relate to each other in new and exciting ways.

Some of our traditions at West Hills will remain including providing a Stephen Minister after each worship service to meet with those who desire prayer, and the fifth Sunday healing prayers. We have a new format to comply with Covid protocol but the healing prayers will continue as before.

If you find yourself in need of someone to walk beside you for a time during a difficult situation, please contact either Laura Meyers, 402-490-0974 or Cathy Voshell, 402-301-9434. Help is only a phone call away.



PASTOR CAROLYN, thank you for your ministry at West Hills! We will miss you and your mischievous laugh. You reminded us to be grateful everyday we woke up and to thank God for it. You also reminded us that it's not enough to call yourself a Christian but that you have to be a Christian.

We wish you all the best in what God is calling you to next. They will be blessed, just as we were.

- WH Staff

SPIRITUAL GROWTH RESOURCES FOR THE NEW YEAR!



Kevin Gibson, Rick Mason, and Jessica Scheopner have compiled a sampling of books and apps that you could use to spur on your spiritual growth this year.

The Deeply Formed Life: Five Transformative Values to Root Us in the Way of Jesus (Rich Villodas)

This book was released in 2020, and it has been well-received and included on several "best" Christian book lists. The five values discussed in this book are 1) contemplative rhythms, 2) racial reconciliation, 3) interior examination, 4) sexual wholeness, and 5) missional presence. Villodas is the lead pastor of New Life Fellowship in Elmhurst, Queens.

Sacred Overlap: Learning to Live Faithfully in the Space Between (J.R Briggs)

This book was released in 2020, and it takes into account the unrest that we have been experiencing during the pandemic. Briggs sees this tumultuous time as an opportunity for us to lean into and live out the ways of Jesus.

The Sacred Pulse: Holy Rhythms for Overwhelmed Souls (April Fiet)

Fiet co-pastors the First Presbyterian Church in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, with her husband, Jeff. In this book, Fiet doesn't provide readers with a list of how-to's, but more of a general approach to redeem the various parts of our day and seasons of life of following Christ.

As we begin the new year, there are a few timeless truths about spiritual growth and spiritual parenting that will help you find ways to nurture your children's faith journeys as well as your own:

- Look for a natural way to build faith practices into your existing routine.
- Doing a practice multiple times each week paves the way for learning new spiritual practices and spiritual growth. Mealtime, drive time, and bedtime tend to be consistent times you can hook into.
- Don't be afraid to find the right tool by trying out different ones. What works for one person, one family, or one child at one stage of life won't work for another.
- Check out some family resources in the lower level

at WHC, or crowdsource and ideas and tools in the West Hills Parents Group on Facebook

- Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you in your own growth and as you nurture your kids' faith.

Here are some tools you might like to try:

Everybody, Always for Kids (Bob Goff and Lindsey Goff Viducich)

Released in 2021, this fun collection of 40 stories will spark faith conversations for the whole family. Be ready to laugh, learn, and live out your faith with this read-aloud.

Parenting in the Pew (Robbie Castleman)

This is a foundational read for any adult who wants to love kids into the kingdom by inviting them to worship. This perennial classic has equipped a generation of parents to help their children connect with God in Sunday worship while simultaneously growing in their own faith. Explore the why, when, and how of engaging in worship in a way that is meaningful for everyone.

New City Catechism (The Gospel Coalition, introduction by Kathy Keller)

Based on the Westminster Shorter Catechism, New City Catechism offers a new take on an ancient practice for teaching children and adults foundational theology and Christian virtues. This book provides an updated framework, working through key doctrines in 52 questions and answers about the nature of God, human nature, sin, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Church.

There's an App for That!

Echo

Echo has an uncluttered design which makes it easy to use. You can create prayer lists and set reminders to pray during the day.

Our Daily Bread

This is the app version of the popular print edition of Our Daily Bread. You can read the daily devotional or listen to the audio version. It also has scripture reading plans.

Parent Cue

Created for parents of kids birth-12th grade, the Parent Cue app gives simple, practical, weekly resources for talking about faith and character that are tailored to each child's life stage. <https://theparentcue.org/>

This is a very small sampling of suggested resources, I encourage you to follow [the link to our website for more!](http://www.whcomaha.org/resources/spiritual-formation-discipleship) www.whcomaha.org/resources/spiritual-formation-discipleship

HOW DO YOU INCREASE YOUR FAITH? by Gloria Zinn

I grew up in a Presbyterian church that never offered Bible Study classes for women or men. We had a biblical-based sermon every Sunday and Sunday School classes until you graduated from high school. You were then expected to teach a Sunday School class (that's when a number of that age group dropped church altogether)! Although you were encouraged by the minister to read your Bible every day, there were very few resources that could help you understand what you were reading, so you were basically on your own unless you were fortunate enough to have someone in your life who could help you understand this somewhat confusing set of 66 books.

Today, we have more resources than ever before to help us understand the Bible and how the Bible relates to our own lives to increase our faith and our walk with God. However, very few of us take advantage of these resources, even those offered in our own church. In a survey from Statista from 2021, it was found that only 11% of Americans read the Bible daily (which means 89% do not). Those who frequently read the Bible are over 70 years of age, and it was found that the Millennials (ages 25-40) never read the Bible or attend a Bible study group, yet they have voiced a "strong interest" in God and finding out what is in the Bible!

Here at West Hills, we offer a plethora of opportunities to help you in your walk, but few have taken advantage of these offerings. We hope 2022 will be different since these offerings are an excellent step to begin the new year by participating in any of the following classes:

Sunday: The Prodigal Prophet, starting January 9 at 9 am in the Chapel. **Jeff Smith** is facilitating a class on **Tim Keller's book: The Prodigal Prophet**. Keller has written a number of books as a Christian apologist (someone who defends religious doctrine) and has, in this book, presented that Jonah's journey did not end when he was freed from the belly of a fish! It is through Keller's writing that he shares a powerful Christian message for each one of us.

Tuesday: Men's Bible Study. 7 am in the Chapel. The men will continue studying the biblical passages for the upcoming Sunday sermon. Zoom attendance is also available. Attendees volunteer to lead the discussion each week.

Wednesday: Women's Small Group. Starting January 12 at 9:30 a.m. in the Chapel. **Jane Loeck** is leading a study on Sheila Walsh's book, **Holding On When You Want To Let Go**. In this book, Ms. Walsh reminds us that even though we all face challenges and heartaches, God has been writing our story from the very beginning, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can see miracles unfolding.

Wednesday: Women's Small Group. Starting on January 12 at 5:15p.m. in the Chapel. This group uses video-based studies on a variety of Christian topics.

Thursday: Women and Men's Bible Study. Starting on January 6 at 9:30 a.m. in the Chapel. The group will continue studying Exodus from the Bible. Women and men are encouraged to join us each Thursday morning. **Gloria Zinn** leads this group.

As you have read, there are many opportunities for you to increase your Bible knowledge by attending and discussing many various topics relating to your personal growth and development through Bible Study groups. We hope you will take advantage of one or more of these offerings and begin the new year with a healthy start for your soul.

**New Year,
New Faith
Journey!**

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE BIBLE?

1. Which soon-to-be disciple heard John call Jesus the Lamb of God?
a) Matthew b) Peter c) Andrew d) James
2. In what town was the wedding held where Jesus turned the water into wine? a) Bethany
b) Jerusalem c) Magdala d) Cana
3. How many years was the man who waited to enter the pool in Bethesda paralyzed?
a) 38 b) 32 c) 15 d) 28
4. What was Jesus calling God that made the religious leaders in the book of John so upset?
a) King b) Father c) Holy One d) High Priest
5. What Old Testament person did Jesus say wrote about Him?
a) Abraham b) David c) Moses d) Jeremiah
6. What is another name for the Sea of Tiberias?
a) Dead Sea b) Sea of Galilee c) Lake Hula
d) Salt Sea
7. How many baskets of food were left over after the feeding of the 5000? a) 10 b) 15
c) 12 d) 21
8. What did Jesus mix together before he put it on the eyes of the blind man? a) water and mud
b) wine and mud c) Jesus' spit and mud
d) he had the man spit on the ground
9. According to one of Jesus' parables, the sheep know the shepherd because they recognize what? a) his staff b) his smell c) his nearness
d) his voice
10. What village were Mary, Martha and Lazarus from?
a) Bethany b) Cana c) Nazareth d) Capernaum
11. Which Old Testament prophet foresaw the coming of a king on a donkey? a) Samuel
b) Micah c) Zechariah d) Jeremiah
12. Which disciple did the Greeks come to for an audience with Jesus?
a) Philip b) Andrew c) Peter d) John

(answers on the back page)

Session approved the following motions:

- to accept the requests from members to transfer to another church.
- to approve removing Mike Geiler from the membership rolls per The Book of Order G-3.O3O6. As an ordained minister he is now a member of Presbytery.
- to remove from the West Hills membership rolls the inactive members as noted in The Book of Order regarding General Membership Rolls G-3.O2O4.
- to accept the 2022 Budget of \$840,327 as presented by the Finance Committee and to use up to \$50,000 from reserves to meet the expected shortage.
- to approve the 2022 Communion dates on the first Sunday of each month and Maundy Thursday.
- to approve serving Communion during the Burns/Wozny Wedding on Saturday, December 18, 2021.
- to table the Matthew 25 Church discussion and to hold a Special Session Meeting for 1 hour on Sunday, January 9, 2022, after the 10:00 am service to finalize the Matthew 25 discussion.
- to Call a Congregational Meeting for January 30, 2022, at 6:45PM for the purpose of: Approving Minutes of 2021 Congregational Meetings, Presenting the Annual Report and, Presenting 2021 Year-end Financials, the 2022 Budget, and Pastoral Compensation.

To contact Session, send an email to:
clerkofsession@whcomaha.org



BAPTISM, by Daniel Patrick O'Reilly

Well, hello, fellow West Hillians. Have you ever looked at the front of the sanctuary and wondered, what would happen if I drank out of the baptismal font? Would a halo appear over my head? Would my mouth catch fire? Okay, you probably haven't wondered that (at least I hope not), but maybe you've asked, where did the notion of baptism come from? Why do we baptize with a font vs. a horse tank or a river? Why do we baptize infants (as well as adults)? What is the purpose of baptism? What are the benefits?

Several weeks ago, my seven-year-old granddaughter, Grace, professed her faith in Jesus Christ and her desire to be baptized. Her church practices full immersion. Grace does not like opening her eyes underwater, so she asked if she could wear goggles during the ceremony. The answer was yes. However, when the dunking moment came, Grace forgot to pull down her goggles. In a panic, she grabbed the pastor and pulled him under, too. The pastor was wearing hip waders over his suit, but that didn't keep the water out. Thankfully, he had already preached, so he didn't have to preach the sermon in dripping wet pants.



In Matthew 3:13-17, John the Baptist baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River. And in Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus says, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Jesus gives us the example and the command when it comes to baptism.

The word baptism comes from the Greek *baptisma*, which means *to dip* or *to immerse*.

The Jews had ritual washing to fulfill legal requirements. If you touched a dead guy, you had to wash your hands. Well, duh! Could this have

been related to John the Baptist's call for people to repent and be baptized? And if the original baptisms were dunking adults in the river, how did we get to sprinkling water on babies?

Originally, immersion was the primary means of baptism. However, if this was not possible (a dry spell or no flowing water nearby), water could be poured three times over the head. The name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were to be invoked.

Infant baptism is recorded in the first century, but no real reason for it. Then came Saint Augustine in the 4th century. Augie was a party animal and well versed in sinning. When he became a Christian, he expressed regret that he had not been baptized earlier (and maybe not sinned quite so much). Augie preached that we are all born into sin and should be baptized as soon as possible.

According to the Book of Order (we Presbyterians love our order):

- Baptism enacts and seals what the Word proclaims: God's redeeming grace offered to all people . . .
- Baptism calls to repentance, to faithfulness, and to discipleship . . .
- Baptism signifies the beginning of life in Christ.
- For Children: The Baptism of children witnesses to the truth that God's love claims people before they are able to respond in faith.
- For Adults: The Baptism of those who enter into the covenant upon their own profession of faith, witnesses to the truth that God's gift of grace calls for fulfillment in a response of faithfulness.

I love children, and I love baptisms at West Hills. They are touching and affirming. During the service, the parents and the entire congregation repeat our vows -- a profession of faith in Christ, a renouncement of sin, a promise to participate actively in the mission of the church and a vow to nurture the child before us in the faith. What a beautiful and amazing thing.

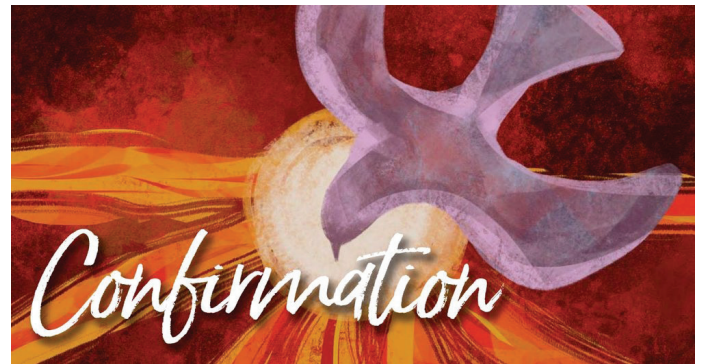
Baptism. Probably more questions than answers, but there you have it. Stay safe, stay healthy and stay hopeful. See you in church.

The Confirmation Experience at West Hills church is a two-year process

in which a team of committed staff and mentors work with a group of youth to explore what they believe, and to discover, through their own explorations and experiences what it means to follow Christ. I would love to let you all in on what we have been doing in confirmation so far this year.

First, our **confirmation retreat** at Calvin Crest in Fremont, Nebraska was a blast! We had a great time staying in the lodges, roasting hot dogs and marshmallows over the camp fire, playing frisbee golf, lounging in hammocks, and learning about the word of God. Confirmation retreats at West Hills aren't just for our confirmation students, it's for the entire family. It was a great weekend for families to meet other families going through the same confirmation process. It was great for our youth, too. Confirmation isn't just about obtaining factual bible knowledge, it's also about building a community of youth that can share life experiences together. The first step in building relationships is creating an atmosphere of fun and openness! Our annual retreat does just that!

Secondly, we have a wonderful group of **confirmation mentors**! Each of our youth in the Confirmation Experience this year has an adult congregation member assigned to them as a mentor. Mentors are friends to our youth. They check-in with them and see how they are doing spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. They are interested in their lives and connect the youth to the broader church mission. This is one of the clearest examples of intergenerational ministry at West Hills. The mentors love getting to know their youth, and you know what? Our youth love their mentors as well!



Lastly, at West Hills, the Confirmation Experience is now two years. We operate with a year A and year B curriculum. The year A curriculum introduces the youth to Christian concepts like Fellowship, Stewardship, Mission, and Worship. During year A, students will also get their feet wet with comparative religion. They will have to know not only about Christianity, but they will also learn a little about Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. This year we are exploring our year B curriculum. Our year B curriculum puts the bible under a microscope! What language was the Old Testament written in? Who was Moses and why was he so important to the early development of Israel? Who were the judges and why did God eventually replace them with kings? Why was King David called "the man after God's own heart?" What happened during the Babylonian Exile and why were second temple times so different? All these questions are examined during our year B studies! When the youth are finished with confirmation this year, they just might be able to ace an introduction to the bible class at UNO! So, go ahead, ask them some questions! You might be surprised what they have learned!

I am so grateful to be able to work with our confirmation class this year. The congregation has done a great job supporting our youth and that love will be felt for many years to come. Join us for **Confirmation Sunday on April 24, 2022!** May Christ be exalted and lifted high!

A CHRISTMAS GREETING FROM CAMEROON...



AID INTERNATIONAL – CHRISTIAN WOMEN OF VISION (AI-CHRISWOV)

SERVICE ORGANIZATION FOR DESTITUTE ORPHANS, STREET CHILDREN, WIDOWS HIV/AIDS
E-MAIL: aichriswov2007@yahoo.com

Motto: Service Above Self-Interest
Greetings: Charity – Progress



P.O Box 126
N.W. Region – Cameroon

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

From AIChrisWOV

To: Our Partners and Friends

It is constantly a pleasure to interchange sincere words of love and peace with you during this season of happiness! We are overjoyed and full of gratitude to God for enabling us carry on during this pandemic of Corona Virus and specifically crisis in the English speaking Zones of Cameroon. By the grace of God, we were able to reach out and positively changed the livelihoods of vulnerable widows, orphans, People living with HIV survivors of gender based violence, and internally displaced people; through providing them with nutritional support, school fee, foot bills for medical health support, carry out trainings on income generating activities (IGA), etc. Many thanks to our Partners for moral, material and financial support.

We achieved all these amidst prevalent socio-political and economic crisis in the Northwest and Southwest Region of Cameroon, where we are based. There were frequent lockdown, Kidnaps, arbitrary killings that hindered our work. Due to the crisis too, some of our volunteers were abducted and huge sums of money demanded for their ransom

This passing year 2021 marks the 20th Anniversary of the public recognition of AIChrisWOV as a faith based –Charity Organization. Let us watch and pray for God's Window of Calm when we (Beneficiaries, Sponsors and Volunteers) can gather publicly to celebrate and give thanks to God for our 20 years of service to the needy.

However, we are grateful to God that despite all these distressing circumstances, we are still alive and healthy and able to share in the joy of Christmas. We hope that the light of Christmas will brighten your hearts and ours, and lead us in the way of revival and eternal salvation.

Please accept warm seasonal greetings from AI-ChrisWOV Beneficiaries, Volunteers, and staff.

Merry Christmas!!! And Happy New Year

Antunka Christina
(President)

Dorothy Tanwani
(Project Officer)

GREETING FROM CAMEROON, continued



HEARING ASSISTANCE

We're happy to announce that the hearing assistance devices have been a huge blessing to our congregation! You can check out the listening devices at the soundboard in the sanctuary. This system can be used by individuals who wear hearing aids and by those who aren't.

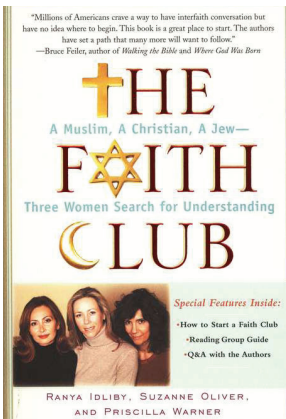


SAVE THE DATE!
Saturday, March 5
for Men's Game Day!

BOOK SUGGESTION

SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE

by Maralee Gifford



The Faith Club: A Muslim, A Christian, A Jew, Three Women Search for Understanding looks at the quest for religious faith and respect.

According to Simon and Schuster's "Free Press" division:

"After September 11, Ranya Idliby, an American Muslim

of Palestinian descent, faced constant questions about Islam, God, and death from her children, the only Muslims in their classrooms. Inspired by a story about Muhammad, Ranya reached out to two other mothers to write an interfaith children's book that would highlight the connections between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. After just a few meetings, however, the women realized that they needed an honest and open environment where they could admit—and discuss—their concerns, stereotypes, and misunderstandings. After hours of soul-searching about the issues that divided them, Ranya, Suzanne, and Priscilla grew close enough to discover and explore what united them."

This book offers reflections of a spiritual nature. Since its publication, The Faith Club has been the catalyst for discussions in various faith settings. In addition, its new edition provides materials anyone might need to start their own Faith Club. This includes books in Hebrew and Aramaic.

About the author: Ranya Idliby received her B.S. from Georgetown University and M.S. from the London School of Economics before pursuing a career as a writer.

suggested by Debbie Chadwick



"There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving." Acts 20:35

In the **December newsletter**, I told you I would put the above scripture to the test by giving each of my three grandchildren \$50.00 to spend on someone else. At first, I thought the teenagers wouldn't want to participate in this, but all three were excited about giving to someone else. So, how did it go?

BEN – His **first gift** was to Luke Burns, West Hills' Youth and Young Adult Coordinator. This was a no-brainer for Ben. He thinks Luke is super special and thoroughly enjoyed giving him something. He still wants to give something to a special teacher at school.

SARAH – Her **first gift** was to her German teacher at college. She really respects this teacher and was happy to let her know this with her gift. The teacher was obviously touched by the gift.

Her **second gift** came about at Cracker Barrel, where Sarah and her family ate lunch the day after Christmas. There was a gentleman eating lunch alone at the table next to them, and they told the wait-ress they wanted to buy his lunch. The waitress was delighted to give them his ticket and let the man know someone else had treated him to lunch. Sarah said it was really nice to see people's reactions when someone unexpectedly did something nice for them.

MADDOX – Maddox is heavy into basketball and is part of a traveling team. Other teams have a special "magnetic mat" to keep their shoes clean during games. He treated his team to their own "magnetic mat." He was happy to give them something they could all share.

Was giving better than receiving? Sarah said it best – **"Receiving a gift is really good, but giving that good feeling to someone else is really heartwarming. Loved doing it!"**



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



JANUARY

2-Verne DeHaven
3-Nancy Chesire
4-Laura Meyers
5-Greg Kuhn
6-Rick Westcott
8-Liz Pittack
11-Laura Loewens
13-Steve Burgess
Les Peterson
14-Grant Thomas
16-Jenny Anderson

19-Olivia Willie
Sue Krahmer
20-Rosa Norman
24-Trink Traudt
25-Linda Fouts
27-Rorric Barnes
28-Jim Love
30-Boyd Dingman
Jill Nelson
Trent Zimmerman
31-Priscilla Powell
Mike Bridgman

FEBRUARY

1-Linda Lavelly
Kayla Wohlgemuth
2-Sheryl Overby
3-Daryl Greger
4-Suzanne Kuhn
6-Steve Dostal
7-Becky Anders
Calvin O'Hare

The complete list of February birthdays will be in the February newsletter.