

Missions

We are collecting for the month of March:

- Tuna
- Tuna Helper
- Crackers - any kind
- Soup - family size any kind

Ladies doing prep work for the Food Pantry:



Huge thank you to the following ladies: Lorraine Falk, Connie Graham, Noreen Humerickhouse, Dianna Keesler, Joan Koch, Pam Tuttle and Mara Jo Williams

Encouraging Words

"Thank you so much for being such an amazing blessing to our children and our youth! Your investment will enable 8 of our children to participate in our summer programs at no cost - Thank you!! Blessings in the New Year  
Vicki Bell

As the pantry was being filled on a very early 23-degree morning, a thank you could be heard. Each time the pantry doors were opened, and food was placed inside, all I could hear was someone yelling thank you!! I finally seen the homeless young man, sitting on the bench at the library. We're not sure how long the pantry had been providing food for him, but he was full of gratitude.  
Dianna Keesler

March 2023

FOCUS

First Reformed Church  
824-3161  
firstref@adamswells.com  
www.firstreformedbluffton.org  
Worship~10:30 a.m. Eat & Greet 9:45 a.m.  
Senior Pastor-Dr. Bryson Bell  
CE Coordinator & Music Director-  
Isabella Stutzman  
Family Ministries Assistant-Jen Sturgeon

Celebrating Birthday's

- March 9 John Beckler-95th!
- March 9 Rosemary Richey-99th!
- March 11 Margaret Ann Bussel
- March 14 Karlie Hook
- March 16 Sean McAvoy
- March 18 Kay Nash
- March 21 Ana Marie Constantine
- March 22 Bob Koch
- March 23 Carolyn Gilbert
- March 23 Hunter McElveen
- March 24 Boyd Tuttle
- March 25 Bryan Smith
- March 26 Claudia Williams
- March 27 Cameron Williams
- March 30 James Barger
- March 30 Joan Koch

You will no longer be receiving by mail, offering envelopes. Due to cost increase and other options people are now using to donate, they are not being used as much as in the past. We will continue to offer the pew envelopes. If you would like to have some on hand, just let me know and I'll bundle some of the pew envelopes up for you. Just contact the office.

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March Volunteers

Worship Nursery:  
March 5-Connie Graham March 12-Peggy Kite  
March 19-Julia Johnson March 26-Angie Oman

Children's Worship:  
Preschool~Caylynne Moore K-4-Ashton Trout  
5th-7th-Steve & Linda Sturgeon  
Greeters: Alan & Mara Jo Williams

Upcoming Events & Dates to Note

Every Monday:  
9:00 a.m.-AA Meeting-Rider Lounge  
Every Thursday:  
9:00 a.m.-T.O.P.S-(Taking off Pounds Sensibly)  
March 5: 9:15 a.m.-Connections Class  
9:45 a.m. Eat & Greet 10:30 a.m.-Worship  
March 6: 6:30 p.m. Missions Meeting  
March 7: 7:00 p.m.Christian Education Meeting  
March 12:  
9:15 a.m.Connections Class  
9:45 a.m.- Eat & Greet  
New Members Sunday-10:30 a.m.-Worship  
Missions Moment-Doug Isch~Loving Shepherd  
3:00 p.m.-Baptismal Sunday-First Baptist Church  
March 13: 6:00 p.m. Trustees  
6:30 p.m.-Consistory 7:30 p.m.-Elders  
March 19: 9:15 a.m. Connections Class  
9:45 a.m.-Eat & Greet  
10:30 a.m.- Worship  
March 26: 9:15 a.m. Connections Class  
9:45 a.m. Eat & Greet -10:30 a.m.-Worship  
April 1: Easter Egg Hunt at the home of  
Trent & Caylynne Moore. 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.  
April 6: 7:00 p.m. Maundy Thursday Service  
-Sedar Meal  
April 7: Good Friday Service 7:00 p.m. Life Church  
April 9: Easter Sunday  
April 30: Dr. Bell's last day- Carry-in following  
Worship. Chicken, drinks and table service will be  
provided. Please bring one or two dishes to share.

We will be having a Baptismal Service on  
Sunday, March 12th, 3:00 p.m. at First  
Baptist Church. If you are interested in  
being baptized, please contact the office.

*From the Desk of Pastor Gene*

We find ourselves in another season of Lent - a time that we can focus on our walk with the Lord. I know that we do that throughout the year and, actually, every day. Nevertheless, the season of Lent gives us the opportunity to ask God to instill in us a greater need for Him.

As I think about Lent, I think about all that my Savior has done for me. He has given me the precious gift of eternal life; He has granted on my soul His great pardon and mercy. I have been saved and that humbles me greatly, for I have been so undeserving of His goodness to me. Jesus has set me free and the scripture says, "For whom the Son sets free is free indeed." (John 8:36) We know that it is only Christ who can save and there is none other.

I think that an appropriate scripture that reminds us of this is Psalm 139. This Psalm reminds us of God's mighty hand that keeps us close to Him. I want to encourage you to read the entire chapter. Verses 23 and 24 tell us this, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (NIV) Let this be our prayer during this entire season. Let it be a period of time in our spiritual lives when we intend to draw closer to Him.

We are sharing the theme of "Amazing Grace" in our sermon series leading up to Easter Sunday. This song is most appropriate for our series because it reminds us that it is God and God alone who saves us, who extends His great mercy and declares us justified when we place our trust in Him.

To remind you as well, there are several who are joining the church on Sunday, March 12th, and we are looking forward to adding these new members. On that day, at 3:00 p.m., there will be a baptismal service. This service will be held at the First Baptist Church, just down the street from us. They have graciously allowed us the privilege of using their baptistry, as this will be a baptism of immersion for those desiring.

Just to remind you, Passion week will entail several opportunities to gather as the church for worship. On Maundy Thursday, April 6, there will be a Seder meal in the Fellowship Hall of the church. We will be reflecting on what the Seder meal entails. While we will not be eating all the foods of Passover, it will be a time when we can more greatly understand how Passover finds its complete application in Jesus Christ, the Sacrificial Lamb of God. Please join us for that special time of teaching and reflection. On Good Friday there will be a community wide service. The time and place is yet to be determined. We will keep you posted where and the time of that service as it becomes available.

For now, let us continue to turn our hearts to the Lord and give Him our best, for He is so deserving of it all.

*Soli deo gloria* - Glory to God alone!

Pastor Gene

## From the Music Director and Christian Education Coordinator

### Spiritual Disciplines: Prayer

As I've prepared to write this article, prayer has popped up everywhere in my life in the last week. I started following the outpouring at Asbury where they were talking a great deal about prayer and its role in revival. I noticed a flyer in our church about a prayer meeting for the war in Ukraine at the Apostolic church, although I didn't get to attend. However, I did attend a worship and prayer service at Prayer Works in Fort Wayne. Maybe none of that seems terribly notable to you, but I can't remember the last time I went to a service dedicated to prayer before this week. What's happening at Asbury was especially significant to me as I've longed to see revival from the time I understood what it was. When I first left ministry school, my passion was revival, and I knew prayer was key to seeing that desire realized.

In my own life, it is easy to say the words of a prayer but much more difficult to believe they hold any power. Do I have enough faith? I suspect I am not alone in this struggle, although I would be happy on your behalf if I was. Studying this discipline, it would seem the belief part is important. Thankfully, Jesus tells us all we need is faith as small as mustard seed (Matt. 17:20), so it is enough if you only have the faith to say the words.

Then there is the issue of the attitude of the heart. Am I praying with the right intentions? The Bible tells us in 2 Chronicles 7:14 "if my people who are called by my name *humble* themselves and pray and seek my face and *turn* from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven..." (emphasis mine). Foremost, we must have love for the Lord and love for people; the outflow of true love will be humility. We know that love is not proud (1 Cor. 13:4). I think it is permissible for us to rant our frustrations to God, but if we wish to see change, love and humility must lead. It is clear we must also turn, or repent, from all sin. Submit to the conviction of the Spirit and allow Him to bring grief for the places your heart has gone wrong. God is faithful to forgive (1 John 1:9).

Lastly, there is the object of prayer. Am I praying for the right things? We are told throughout the Bible that God freely gives us what we ask for (Psa. 37:4; Matt. 7:7-11). Based off of personal experience, I think we get stuck at the intentions step. We want the desires of our hearts but skip right over delighting in the Lord. While I say, "Your will be done", I really mean "Your will, where it is the same as mine, be done". To know God's will requires a transformed mind, discernment, and a whole lot of listening (Rom. 12:2). Fall back on the discipline of silence and listen when it feels like your prayers are hitting the ceiling. Read God's Word. Know Him as you know a friend. God will draw your heart towards those things you should pray for.

With Love,  
Isabella Stutzman

### Easter Egg Hunt

Please join us Saturday, April 1<sup>st</sup> at 11 AM at the Moore's house (3709 E 550 S) for our annual Easter Egg Hunt! We will dye eggs, play games, and share lunch together. Please bring hard boiled eggs if you would like to dye them, a basket or bag for the egg hunt, and lawn chairs. Let us know you are coming by signing up in the overflow room, online, or by contacting the church office.