



CTC Connections August, 2021



Session reinstates the use of masks for all indoor gatherings

Sighting the recent increase of infections from the Delta variant of Covid-19 in Saginaw County, the session has reinstated the requirement that masks be worn by all who gather indoors here at the church starting this Sunday, August 8th. Coffee hours will continue outside when the weather cooperates and when members are able to provide for it.

From Pastor Brant Piper

What's Happening Next?

I want to express my appreciation to those who have participated in our visioning efforts through our congregational gatherings, focus groups, surveys, and prayer triads. It is both my thinking and my prayer that by engaging one another around the values and beliefs that are essential to our individual understandings of our community, you will find renewed energy for your relationship with God and with others. Almost as important, you will have clarified for this community the gifts and skills essential for the new pastor to possess so that Countryside Trinity can fulfill the mission of the Church.

Core Values

The first part of the gathering on July 25th, focused on discerning our positive core values, those behaviors and attitudes we expect every participant in our community to demonstrate to each other and to all in our community.

Three core values that have consistently been considered as most important are:

- **Acceptance**
- **Mission**
- **Spirituality**

A clear consensus around an exact understanding of each of these values continues to challenge us as demonstrated by the discussions which followed the creation of these lists. For instance, Spirituality is understood to be a very individual effort as we each tend to practice the spiritual disciplines most meaningful for us. Yet it is also supported by our community efforts to increase involvement in worship, Bible study, prayer, and service. It was recognized that a passionate pursuit of these disciplines is essential if they are to bear fruit for the congregation and its members.

What has surfaced through our engagement with one another has been some important questions that invite a response of clarification. The first was the question, "Why are we undertaking this effort?" I am thankful to the person who voiced it and brought the concern to my attention. I apologize for not making it more clear from the start why we are pursuing consensus around our core values and bedrock beliefs.

The process set before us in seeking pastoral leadership invites us to come to a consensus concerning what we are passionate about accomplishing as a church. What are the specific needs in our community for which we would be willing to risk all our time and treasure? This process of consensus building was also undertaken after Ken's leaving, as a team of leaders engaged in intensive discussions around scriptures and the understandings of what it means to be the church. Together this team produced not only a mission study which provided guidance for the Pastor Nominating Committee, it also created encouragement that came from the recognition that God was directing and energizing the effort.

This study was, however, completed before the people of Warren Ave. church joined us and brought their own richness and experiences of what the church is called to do and be. It was also created before Covid-19 opened up to us new ministries of technology that have since shaped our understanding of the church.

This effort will serve this church well as you seek out your next pastor. Candidates often ask to see the mission study because they know that their greatest satisfaction will come when their interests and skills match the intent of the church. When a church is clear of what it wants to accomplish, then its guidance to the Pastor Nominating Committee enables it to discover and discern the person best suited in getting those things accomplished. This will lead to better satisfaction for both the pastor and the church in the years to come.

It will also serve this church well in my opinion, because the more deeply we engage with one another around the difficult work of building consensus the more transformative this work is for us as individuals and as the church. In a focus group, as we explored some of the negative tendencies this church might demonstrate in times of stress, it became clear that disengagement happens. In these times people, out of concern for creating negative feelings within themselves and creating distance from others, tend to pull back from engaging with others and even with God. This disengagement, though it is often done for the sake of unity, creates only greater distance. It leads us to a sense of despair that we will never really be together, and eventually leads to the death of a community. Disengagement stands counter to what has been expressed as the most important values the church wants to demonstrate to the world, acceptance, mission, and spirituality. These are all about honest engagement with one another. As we share with one another the issues that are vital to our understandings of faith and there discover our differences, we also necessarily, experience the anxiety around being different from others with whom we want to be close. This anxiety creates opportunities for the Spirit of God to bring us together around our compassion for one another and around our unity in our shared mission. This is the true community we are seeking to create. This true community was experienced in this same focus group as we dared to engage each other about the issue of our disengagement. When people were honest about their sadness of the disengagement and shared their hope that we would be able to move beyond this, they found themselves experiencing the joy of true engagement and the hope that energizes them to engage more completely with themselves, others, and God.

In a demonstration of the greater health that comes through honest engagement, a concern was expressed about why I chose to retire at this time. I appreciated the voicing of this concern because it held me accountable to modeling behavior that is essential in a healthy church. This request for greater clarity around my choice will, in my mind and I think also in the minds of those who expressed it, create a safer environment in which people can express their feelings in response to my choice, be it sadness, anger, hurt, or relief.

I understood my work from the beginning as a "Designated Pastor" to be a shorter-term ministry directed towards the effort of discerning a new vision for this congregation which would integrate the people, resources, and faith experiences of Warren Ave. Church into it. It was my vision that a new understanding of this particular church's mission, in this particular time and place would be developed and embraced. This effort, which was started in the winter of 2020, was cut short by the pandemic, and continues to be impeded to some degree because of it. This included opportunities to engage the students, families, teachers, and administrators across the street in education and support activities. These opportunities also evaporated due to the pandemic. I am saddened that this vision will not be completed in the ways that I hoped. In the meantime, I have felt called to other opportunities to provide care and support for which I need to create time and space, and retirement offers this to me. I am thankful and appreciative to those who have shared with me their honest experiences around my leaving. I believe there is no greater gift than to be entrusted with someone's true thoughts and feelings.

Bedrock Beliefs

On Sunday, July 25th, members of the congregation began the work of coming to a consensus on our Bedrock Beliefs. Bedrock Beliefs are the principles and symbols of faith which matter most in our daily lives. They are the beliefs we immediately turn to in times of crisis. When the big events in life rock us, the sudden death of a friend or family member, a devastating diagnosis from the doctor, a pandemic that shuts down the church, what are the beliefs to which we cling for dear life?

We started the process by exploring phrases from The Brief Statement of Faith of the Presbyterian Church, USA, and pulling out the ones that are most important to us. These are listed below. (Follow this link to review this statement online). <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/what-we-believe/brief-statement-of-faith/>)

Statements from Brief Statement of Faith, PCUSA

In life and in death we belong to God...through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...

We trust in the one true God... We trust in Jesus Christ, fully human and fully God.

Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition, Jesus was crucified, suffering the depths of human pain and giving his life for the sins of the world.

God raised this Jesus from the dead, vindicating his sinless life, breaking the power of sin and evil, delivering us from death to life eternal.

In sovereign love God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God's image, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community.

Ignoring God's commandments, we violate the image of God in others and in ourselves...

...we rebel against God...accept lies as truth, exploit neighbor and nature...

We deserve God's condemnation. Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.

We trust in God the Holy Spirit, everywhere the giver and renewer of life.

The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith, sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor...

...[The Spirit] binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the Church.

... [The Spirit gives us courage] to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.

In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks...

... we rejoice that nothing in life or death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus...

Then came the challenge to distill down those statements into short statements of faith. Here is how one group distilled down its statements:

We belong to God	= Belonging
We Trust in God	= Trust
God created everyone equal	= Equality
We sin—against God, others, our environment	= Sin
God is merciful	= Forgiveness
God is the giver and renewer of life	= ?
Grace sets us free to accept ourselves and binds us to others	= Community
Justice, Freedom and Peace	= Justice
Service to others	= Service
Nothing can separate us from God	= Eternity

Another group gave a list: Gratitude, Belief, Faith, Grace, Community, Ten Commandments, Love, Trust, Scripture, and Forgiveness.

What would be your top ten beliefs about who God is, the work God does, and what it means to be human beings in relationship with God? These are the beliefs that we will continue to explore throughout the month of August.

Please make plans now to participate in the Focus Groups listed below. If you are feeling unsafe about joining together with others in public, please fill out the survey found in this newsletter and send it back to the church office.

Many thanks to Scott Jacobs who helped to oversee the provision of our boxed lunches for our gathering and to Dan and Barb Groom who helped with drinks and oversaw the cleanup efforts.

Focus Groups:

Sunday, August 8th, after Worship, Tuesday, August 10th, 6:30 pm, Wednesday, August 11th, noon, Sunday, August 15th, after worship

These Focus Groups are designed to enable church participants to further discern their bedrock beliefs and to build on the momentum of our Congregational Gathering.

In these groups participants will examine the different sources of our of bedrock beliefs, from scriptures, to symbols, to statements of faith. We will also continue to explore which beliefs surfaced as being essential to us in times of crisis, and hurt, and loss. New lists of top beliefs will be developed to be shared with the larger congregation. These activities will be bracketed by prayer.

Desserts, snacks, and beverages will be served and sign-up sheets are available on the table at the entrance by the middle doors.

Surveys

Those who are not able to participate in person are invited to respond to the surveys included in this newsletter. The most recent survey includes new information gleaned from the congregational gathering on July 25th in which we began to seek consensus around bedrock beliefs. Please fill it out both and bring or mail them in. If you can find others with whom to share your thoughts around these values and beliefs, and with whom you can complete the surveys, so much the better.

Listening Prayer Triads

This effort has as its goal to “hear” the questions, issues, or needs that weigh upon the hearts and minds of people who might not participate in a community of faith. To help this happen, you are invited to participate in a discipline of listening and intercessory prayer with one or two others.

Covenant together to meet weekly to:

- Read a portion of scripture from Acts
- Pray for God’s guidance
- Visit public places to overhear conversations
 - The mall, a box store, a grocery store, a restaurant
 - Walk through your neighborhood, a park, or a recreation area
- Listen to discern needs
- Observe behaviors to learn issues
- Talk about what you heard with one or two others
- Weekly commitment to listen and pray for others

I will be at the church on most Wednesday and Sunday afternoons at 2pm to participate with those who would like to join me in this effort. We will decide where we want to go, break up into smaller groups to listen and observe, and then return to the church for a short sharing and prayer time.

Congregational Meeting, Sunday, August 22nd.

We will again start with an abbreviated service, and then move into the fellowship hall to work as smaller teams to further work on our Bedrock Beliefs. Please fill out an order form for a boxed lunch found on the Welcome Table as you enter the middle doors.

Session Begins Search for “Bridge Pastor”

The session has authorized a team to begin the search for a “Bridge” pastor, a pastor who serves on a temporary basis, usually 3 to 6 months at the behest of the session, while the Pastor Nominating Committee does its work of writing the Mission Information Form and seeking out candidates for the Installed Pastor position. This pastor will hopefully be in place the Sunday after Pastor Piper concludes his ministry with us, and will provide stability and consistency through the Christmas and perhaps even the Lenten seasons as the church moves forward on its vision and supports the work of the PNC.

Stewardship

The session expresses its gratitude to the congregation for its continued faithful stewardship to the mission of the church. We surpassed our Monthly Goal for June of \$5200 by over \$200, collecting \$5434. Our goal for July was \$10,200. Our goal for August is \$13,500. This is a big goal for us, especially with the anxiety around increasing infections of the Delta variant of Covid-19. There will also be 5 Sundays, so it provides an additional Sunday for us to make our goal. With our return to worship the session expresses its hope that it will greater opportunities for giving. Please check your commitment to the church's ministries when you receive your half year statement so that adjustments can be made, if needed.



YOUR SESSION/COUNCIL AT WORK

No regular meeting in July - will return in August



BOY SCOUTS: Boy Scout Troup 304 is having a can drive to help the boys pay for summer and weekend camping. If you have extra cans and would like to help, please drop them off at the church on August 29th. Someone will be at the trailer in the parking lot to receive them beginning at 10:00 a.m.

On September 10th, the Scouts will also be conducting an American Flag Retirement Ceremony with the American Legion on Weiss. If you have flags that need to be retired, you can drop them off at the church and place them in the box at the east entrance.



Great Lakes Loons "Faith and Family Night": The Great Lakes Loons has scheduled a "Faith and Family Night" for Thursday, August 19th with reduced prices on the box seats, Christian entertainment and fireworks following the game. We would need to have 20 people commit to attend in order to get the discount in ticket price. If you would like to attend the Loons will be playing the Lansing Lugnuts and the game starts at 7:05 p.m. and you will need to call the office to reserve your spot and/or there will be a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board in Fellowship Hall. This is coming up quickly, so please let us know asap.

Be Respectful: Please be respectful during worship service and refrain from talking. Remember that once the Prelude begins and until the Postlude ends the Worship Service **is in progress** and is being livestreamed. During this time we are to remain in our seats and listen to the beautiful music that is being played and the message our Pastor brings to us. We ask that you do not get up until the Postlude has concluded so as not to interfere with the livestreaming. Thank you.

GREETING CARDS - NEW CRAFT GROUP: Have you ever thought it would be fun to make your own greeting cards? Shirlee Scovill has volunteered to hold a class where you can learn how to do it! For each card you will have everything cut out and ready to complete. The first class will be on Wednesday, August 4th at 1:00 here at Countryside. The cost will be 10 cards for \$15 or 5 cards for \$8. Please call Shirlee Scovill @ 989 892-1903 or 327-2219 to make a reservation or with any questions you may have. Cards will also be available to purchase.



The Crop Walk is scheduled for October 10, 2021. Here's how you can help:

- You can walk any part or all of the planned route on October 10th which leaves from the Saginaw YMCA and collect pledge donations from your friends, relatives and family;
- If you are not able to walk for whatever reason, you can still collect pledge donations for the cause.

See Marcia Lacker for further information.

Thanksgiving Food Baskets: We are hoping that this year, we will be able to return to our normal food basket gift for some of the area families in need. We will begin accepting non-parishable food donations beginning in August for those able to help out. The following items will be collecting now - as we get closer to Thanksgiving, we will post those items which are still needed. As always, we will need people to help out on "Packing & Shopping" Day so stay tuned for more information.

Non-parishable canned goods or jars, i.e. vegetables, gravy, fruit, tuna fish, spaghetti sauce, pork & beans, soup, peanut butter & jelly, etc.

Thank you so much for your generosity.

Angel Tree: We are hopeful that we can resume our Christmas Angel Tree this year. More information to come.



Kitty Blehm wishes to send a Belated-Thank you to all who sent her a lovely birthday card and remembered her on her birthday. Your thoughtfulness was so very much appreciated.

Blessings and love, Kitty Blehm

TWO COINS A MEAL will continue to be collected on the first Sunday of each month during Worship Service. There will be a pail at the back of the Sanctuary marked as such. Please bring your coins in a plastic baggie or envelope if you are able to do so and place in the pail either on your way in or out of Church. Thank you.



August Mission of the Month: Weiss Elementary School Supplies Collection. There is a box in Fellowship Hall for your donations. A list of needed items has been posted on the bulletin board in Fellowship Hall for your use and is also itemized below:

Post it notes 3x3 or larger, yellow	Index cards	Large boxes of tissues	Hand unscented sanitizer
Chlorox bleach wipes	Yellow and pink highlighters	Expo dry erase markers, black, red, blue, green	Large cotton socks (to erase dry erase boards)
Glue sticks	Pencils	Packs of lined paper	Ruler with centimeters and inches
2 pocket folders, yellow, red, blue, green, orange, purple	Child sized scissors	Crayons 24 and 48 size box	Colored pencils 12 size box
Ball point pens, red, blue, black	Markers, washable, thick or thin, some permanent	Pencil sharpener that holds shavings	Erasers (large)
Scotch tape	Composition notebooks	Three subject wide ruled spiral notebooks with 70-80 pages	Pencil box or bag 5 x 8
Water bottles	Dry erase board	Ear buds or small headphones in zipper plastic bag	

Core Values Survey

1. Please start your response with prayer, asking God to guide you in your effort to discern what you believe to be the behaviors and attitudes most essential to a community living out its calling of guiding people to become disciples of Christ.
2. Please review the lists of core values below developed from earlier events. What patterns surface for you? What do these patterns reveal about us as a congregation?

Acceptance	Love	Spirituality	Mission	Humility
Respect	Honesty	Loyalty	Wisdom	Family
Responsibility	Compassion	Kindness	Inner-peace	Self-Control
Flexibility	Growth	Character	Belonging	Joy
Courage	Truthfulness	Knowledge	Community	

3. Choose a time when you perceived a stressful time in the life of this congregation. What caused the stress? How did people react to the stress? (No names please) What resulted from the stressful time?
4. Complete the following sentence:
In times of stress, this congregation seems to naturally do certain things—and these natural reactions seem to reveal certain values. This is what we tend to do:
5. Please denote in some way your understanding of the most essential values, limiting yourself to 12. Feel free to add any core value you believe needs to be on this list. You may combine two or more values into one larger idea.
6. Please mail, scan and email, or bring this survey by the church. The results will be anonymously tabulated and shared in future bulletins and on newsprint in the fellowship hall.

Bedrock Beliefs Survey

1. Please access the "Brief Statement of Faith," either through this link, <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/what-we-believe/brief-statement-of-faith/>, or through our Facebook Group Page, or by obtaining a printed copy from our Welcome table or by requesting one from the office.
2. Circle the words or phrases most important to you in this statement of faith.
3. Distill these words down to their most essential nature for you.
4. Which of the Bedrock Beliefs below are most important to you? To which have you clung in the times of your life that have been most difficult for you? Please feel free to add any that are not listed.

Forgiveness	Trust	Community	Service
Eternity	Gratitude	Justice	Belief
Faith	Sin	Scripture	Love
Ten Commandments	Belonging	Equality	Grace

5. What symbols of faith, or artwork, or depictions of stories or nature sustain you in difficult or challenging times?
6. What words, or phrases, or stories, or images from hymns or songs, and/or from scriptures do you find to be most helpful to you as you work to live out your faith?
7. Create for yourself your own top ten list of Bedrock Beliefs
8. Please mail, scan and email, or bring this survey by the church. The results will be anonymously tabulated and shared in future bulletins and on newsprint in the fellowship hall.

TREASURER'S REPORT	June, 2021				
	Beginning Balance	Receipts	Disbursements	Transfers	Ending Balance
General	1,360.17	5,434.61	10,964.58	1,095.00	(3,074.80)
Memorial	9,470.00				9,470.00
Memorial - Lyons Troop 304	-				-
Manse	-				-
Special gift	15,300.02			2,500.00	17,800.02
Special projects	4,695.36			(2,500.00)	2,195.36
Mission					
Per capita	360.60				360.60
Two-coins-a-meal	-	72.00			72.00
Food baskets	237.52				237.52
Heifer proj (Church School)	-				-
UCC/PCU/Blankets	220.00				220.00
Good Samaritan	2,347.28				2,347.28
Muriel Lakey Scholarship	7,206.52				7,206.52
Womens Association	-				-
Local	892.00	245.00			1,137.00
Bricks	1,335.85				1,335.85
	43,425.32	5,751.61	10,964.58	1,095.00	39,307.35
Minister Compensation	94,717.95			(535.00)	94,182.95
Endowment	250,951.96	6,606.31		(560.00)	256,998.27
	389,095.23	12,357.92	10,964.58	-	390,488.57



Betty Burr Samaritas Senior Living	Joan Comstock @ Home	Dawn Curtis @ Home
Betty Hauk Wellspring Ind. Living	Floyd & Lois Krzak @ Home	Doug and Marilyn Leffler New Hope Valley
Bob & Marie Lemmer Wellspring Assisted Living	Fern Evon Little Swan Haven Manor	Judy Lorenz St. Francis Home
Virginia Lyon @ Home	Ruth Marsh @ Home	Norma Meacham New Hope Valley
Elaine Miner @ Home	Fran Prueter @ Home	Helen Reynolds Wellspring Independent Living
Shirley Roof Wellspring Assisted Living		



AUGUST BIRTHDAYS

- 2 Taylor Hansen (M=Dana Woodke)
- 4 Marianne Bird
- 4 Kathryn Barnum
- 5 Dan Groom
- 8 Chad Parker
- 10 Randy Jacob
- 12 Fran Prueter
- 13 Kyle Redfield
- 15 Ainslee Mahan
- 15 Aubree Mahan
- 17 Joan Comstock
- 21 Karla Parker
- 21 Casey Redfield
- 22 Brooke Vernon
- 31 Jim Lorenz

SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS

- 1 Becky Pequignot
- 3 Rob Halase
- 3 Dora Fitzgerald
- 5 Charles Davis
- 6 Jerry Brachear
- 8 Lindsey Groom
- 13 Louis Diechman

SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS

CONTINUED

- 14 Michael Patrick Groom
- 17 Lois Krzak
- 20 Liz Saperstein
- 22 Amanda Dean Groom
- 25 Thomas Kennedy
- 28 Brant Piper
- 29 Tom Ladner
- 30 Vincent Martinez

OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS

- 1 Zachary Plater
- 2 Drew Pequignot
- 2 Dan Groom
- 3 Joseph Ruth
- 5 Mary Longstreth
- 6 Amanda Josephine Groom
- 11 Dick Easlick
- 11 Jerry Paquette
- 13 Ethan Parker
- 13 Ruth Marsh
- 13 Charlotte Armstrong
- 14 Mike Yusaf
- 14 Tania Yusaf
- 16 Randy Groom

- 17 Elizabeth Jacob
- 19 Christopher Davis
- 22 Jean Anne Miller
- 22 Pat Denno
- 25 Ezra Yusaf
- 25 Aaron Plater
- 26 Ashley Huizar (Scovill)
- 27 Marie Lemmer
- 29 Scott Jacob
- 29 Lori Halase

AUGUST ANNIVERSARIES

- 11 Dan & Barb Groom
- 17 Dallas & Jackie Williams
- 29 Darren & Joann Woodke
- 29 Duncan & Sandy Redfield

SEPTEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

- 9 Roy and Nancy Erndt
- 9 Shirlee & Roger Scovill
- 16 Peter & Isabella Dominguez

OCTOBER ANNIVERSARIES

- 2 Aaron & Paula Plater
- 8 Robert & Marie Lemmer
- 10 Eric & Sue Smith