

## ***“Puzzled? Puzzle!”***

*By Rev. Dr. Jeffrey A. Schooley*

I’m always on the lookout for some sort of small, accessible hobby that can slot into the category of activities that goes by the name “self-care” in my mind. Lawn work, walking the dog, going to the movies, stand-up comedy... these have all found their way onto this list and if we’ve ever chit-chatted about nothing in particular, then you’ve probably heard me talking about one or more of these things. It’s a neat little basket of activities that helps distract my brain from whatever perceived fire it is inevitably trying to put out. Lately, I’ve happily added “puzzling” (or, putting together a puzzle because I’m not sure “puzzling” is a word in the way I’m using it) to this list.



I shouldn’t be surprised. I’ve always enjoyed puzzles. Indeed, some of my formative memories are of going to my aunt and uncle’s when I was four, five, six years old on Friday nights and being gifted a puzzle to complete. My uncle Larry, who passed away in late October last year and was my closest, most formative uncle, really got a kick out of my affinity for and skill in puzzling. (It’s worth noting that he had two teenage daughters when I was this age and I suspect he enjoyed the simplicity of a five-year-old at work on a puzzle over the complexity of navigating teenage hormones and moods). But nearly every week I was gifted a new puzzle. My favorite was a 50-piece puzzle of all the states in the United States. It also listed each state’s capital, and I thought it was just the coolest puzzle. (Side note: I suspect being six years old and having a favorite puzzle is a symptom of EONS – Early Onset Nerd Syndrome).

This love of puzzling has probably laid dormant for most of my adult years, only popping out on occasion or when helping my niece and nephew work on a puzzle when they were younger. (They’re both very cool and I do not believe ever had a favorite puzzle; Natalie is an artist and Carson is an athlete, which means both avoided an EONS diagnosis). But over this past Christmas holiday and following, I’ve rekindled this love of puzzling. In the spirit of my recent oeuvre in my preaching life of looking for reflections of our God and this faith in the ordinary, mundane parts of life, I submit that when we’re puzzled, we might find relief in puzzling. Here’s a few reflections to demonstrate this thesis.

Any sane person begins puzzling by, naturally, seeking out all the edge pieces. These pieces serve as the boundary for the puzzle. Our lives tend to flourish within healthy boundaries, not beyond

them. Boundaries are always in service to relationships; relationships flourish where boundaries are set and respected. Of course, as anyone who has put together a puzzle knows, you can very carefully open up the box, free the pieces, and search through them diligently to find every edge piece, only to discover once you've put the frame of the puzzle together that you're missing three of them! It's so annoying! Like, I know I touched literally every piece, how did three of them with flat edges sneak by?

When this happens, there is no choice but to just get started on the rest of the puzzle, trusting that you'll find those missing edge pieces as you journey on. And this leads us to our next reflection: Boundaries are great for relationships, but in reality, we often must proceed without a full complement of them. That's life. It's messy.

Of course, you might be wondering what boundaries have to do with our relationship with our God in/through Jesus Christ? Surely, if any relationship could dispense with healthy boundaries it's this one, right? In fact, isn't setting boundaries with God both faithless and futile? After all, God claims all of us in our baptisms and God already knows us better than we know ourselves, so why not reject boundaries in this relationship? Right! I agree, and yet... we still do anyway and inevitably because we are small, frail, and vulnerable, maybe most especially before God.

Indeed, while a number of images tend to ground my relationship with God in my own mind, one of them is most certainly Job standing before God in whirlwind form, inevitably clutching his garments closely to his body while slightly averting his gaze so as to protect his eyes, all while hearing these thunder peals that make up God's voice. It is an intentionally unsettling image meant to remind us of God's overwhelming majesty and our overwhelming frailty. To be sure, softer, more nurturing images also apply – Jesus washing His disciples feet or His doodling in the dirt when the woman caught in adultery is brought to Him for judgment – but the honest part of my brain can't shake the clear and obvious power differential between us and God as it is revealed in that image of Job before God.

All this to say, of course we set boundaries with God! This may not be the pinnacle of our faithfulness, but it happens all the same, so rather than act like a real thing isn't a real thing, maybe we should own the fact that we do set boundaries with God and that at least part of growing in this faith is to entrust God with more and more of our life over the weeks, months, and years of it. And in this way, then, those missing edge pieces are a testimony to the fact that we continue to pursue the relationship even with incomplete boundaries because that's life, but also because the slow erasure of those boundaries is the goal of our discipleship in general.

Once the flat-edged boundary pieces are put into place, we now have to focus on the messy middle. I'm not sure your strategy, but I just let my eyes begin to wander for pattern recognition. In one recent puzzle that was text heavy, this took the form of looking for lettering with the same font/color/size and bringing them together. In another recent puzzle that had these obnoxious dark blue stairs with only slight variation in color to demonstrate the curvature of each step, I had to collect all of these like-colored pieces and just keep twisting them around to see which tabs met which blanks. (Yes, I'm even

learning the puzzling lingo; “tabs” are the protruding part and “blanks” are holes. That EONS diagnosis was spot-on!).

This act of pattern recognition reminds me most of our relationship with sacred scripture. We keep reading the Bible over and over and by combining different passages from different eras and testaments as a way of seeking pattern recognition. We listen for intertextual echoes between Old and New Testaments; we look for recurring themes in the parables or in Paul’s letters. “Theology,” as a discipline, may be little more than the thoughtful description of certain recognized patterns. And when we read certain passages – maybe most especially the parables – we are all but forced to keep twisting them around in our minds, seeking ways their tabs and blanks align with our past understanding and thus grow the picture of this faith in our minds.

On and on this process goes until the final piece finds its way home and the picture is complete and even more resplendent than its likeness on the cover of the box. And the end is just the best, of course. Not only because it’s the completion of a goal, but because puzzling reaches us at a fundamental place in our souls: our need to belong. When that last piece drops into place, it is a reminder that each of our lives are part of a HUGE puzzle God is putting together, wherein we are made part of a mosaic that reveals and reflects the loving, gracious character of our God.

And a quick word about that final piece: I always write the date I’m finishing the puzzle on the back of that piece and I’ve come to notice that it is always either an odd piece or a boring-bordering-on-generic piece. That is, it is either a piece of such a weird shape that I could never figure out where it was meant to go or a piece of such banal image that it could never stand out as distinct. Even this reveals something about our God as the weird or boring pieces have their place too. And, in fact, once they’re nestled against all the rest, they’re not so weird after all. They are just serving their purpose of revealing their little piece of God’s love and grace – and isn’t that all we really want for our lives?

Undoubtedly, puzzling works for me because it helps “keep me present,” as my counselor Judy continues to encourage in my life. That is, it keeps my mind and body present in the same moment together (rather than my body being here and my mind wandering to some worry about the future or some embarrassment about the past). And learning to be present is its own sort of holy encounter in the lives of the anxious. And if this is all puzzling was, then that would be enough (and then some!). But our God is good and God loves to reveal God’s self in even the silliest of ways as we go about our pattern recognition tasks of being human wherein we might just discover that prayer and puzzling ain’t all the different from one another.

While these cold, gray days persist, do yourself a favor: Go buy a puzzle and let it help connect a little piece of you with a little piece of God. Our blanks always find their satisfaction in God’s tabs. Amen.

# FEBRUARY FYMS PAGE

*Family and Youth Ministry Monthly Updates*

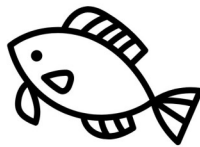
**WE MEET** *A Wednesday time of community and learning*

We Meet will begin again February 25<sup>th</sup>. As we did for for the fall sessions, help is needed again to assist with meals each week. If you can help, please let Amanda or Michael Botts (the new head of Christian Nurture) know!

## LENTEN STUDY

*40 Days of Reflection*

Our daily lenten study will begin February 18th. There will be a daily verse and reflection posted on our Facebook page as well as an ask to put so many coins in your One Great Hour of Sharing boxes based on each reflection. Boxes and study calendars can be picked up at the church starting February 15th. If you do not have access to Facebook but still would like the daily reflections. Ask Amanda to be put on the daily e-mail list.

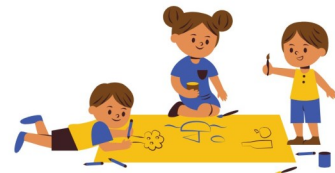


*"For dust you are and to dust you shall return."*



## ASH WEDNESDAY MEAL AND SERVICE

Ash Wednesday is February 18th. Join us in the fellowship hall for a very simple meal of soup and bread at 6:00pm before the 7:00pm Ash Wednesday service.



## CHILDREN'S CHURCH!

Children's Church will start a Lenten study as we complete a project during Moment for Ed and learn more about each part of the project during CC. Join us during Lent!



## SUBSTITUTES WANTED

Children's Church and the Nursery could use some people to be on call to be the lead teacher if Araya or Amanda are sick or off. If you think you can help please let Amanda know!



Join us for the **Choral Scholars' Fundraising Dinner at 6:00 PM on Saturday, February 21!** This year's theme, "***Willkommen to the Golden Age: A Night at the Cabaret,***" is a playful welcome ("Willkommen" means welcome in German) to a sparkling era of songs and musicals from roughly 1920–1940, when Broadway, operetta, and cabaret were full of memorable melodies and witty storytelling.

Enjoy dinner, fellowship, and performances by our Choral Scholars, as they sing to raise support for the Choral Scholars' Fund, which allows us to pay these student section leaders throughout the year—an essential part of the music ministry at First Presbyterian Church. There is no cost to attend, and we invite you to give generously in support of this vital program. **Please RSVP to Nancy Hess by Wednesday, February 18: 419-806-4788 or [nhess1581@yahoo.com](mailto:nhess1581@yahoo.com).**

## Staff at First Presbyterian

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Araya Musselman

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**The office is closed daily for  
lunch 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.**



## Helping Hands

**The next Helping Hands hygiene and cleaning item distribution is February 13th.** Last month, we served 125 dinners and distributed groceries and hygiene items to area families and individuals. There were a lot of new people looking for assistance last month. Our stock of all hygiene and cleaning items was depleted. If you would like to donate products, we need the following items.

- Toilet paper
- Facial Tissues
- Paper towels
- Dish soap
- Laundry detergent/dryer sheets
- Body wash/shampoo
- Deodorant
- Toothbrushes (individually wrapped)
- Feminine Hygiene Pads
- Baby diapers (sizes 3, 4, 5, 6)

Please place donations in the box located in the church lobby by February 8<sup>th</sup>. The items will be taken to First Christian Church for distribution on February 13th. If you want to contribute but don't have time to shop, a monetary donation can be made. We'll do the shopping.

If you would like to help with the distribution of the cleaning and hygiene items, just show up on February 13th from 4 to 6 pm at First Christian Church, corner of Poe and Haskins Roads. You will see familiar faces.

We are making a difference in people's lives. Thank you for supporting this community project.

**DACONS** Ellyn Stout, Scotty Huntington, Libby Dachik,  
Kathy Sweeney, Lee Liebetreu, Anna Beeker,  
*Following to Lead | Leading to Serve* Terri McNamara

## Witte's Words

*Note from the Editor: Karen Witte (said "witty") has been a member of FPCBG for 50+ years. She currently resides at BG Manor and isn't able to make it to church, but would still like to bless her church using her God-given gift with words. She used these gifts in her career as a proofreader for the Sentinel-Tribune. Make sure to check out "Witte's Words" each month in the pages of this newsletter. This month's offering while not in a poem format compares Christ's actions to one of the most famous American presidents, Abraham Lincoln.*

### **Abraham Lincoln Modern Martyr**

Research has determined the top 3 subjects of books throughout the world are Jesus Christ, William Shakespeare and Abraham Lincoln. They're all worth subjects; Jesus, God in human form; Shakespeare, the greatest writer in the English language; and Lincoln, considered by many America's greatest President and, I would say, the most Christ like of America's Presidents. Both were born into poor families; both had siblings; both became famous throughout their homelands; both have been referred to as a man of sorrows.

Jesus was misunderstood, reviled, and seen as a threat to the religious leaders of his time. Lincoln lost two children at young ages and had a mentally unstable wife. He was scorned for his looks and political beliefs, and he presided over the bitterest war American every fought – The Civil War, fought over the issue of slavery. Lincoln wept for the Southern losses as well as the North and prayed for a swift end to the bitterness and bloodshed of his beloved Union.

Jesus freed mankind from the slavery of their sins. Lincoln freed the literal slaves, who loved and called him, "Father Abraham." When the terrible conflict ended Lincoln showed great compassion for the vanquished South, allowing them re-entry to the Union on very lenient terms, as Christ welcomed repentant sinners back into his good graces. In his personal life, Lincoln patiently bore the torments of his wife's mental illness, saying, "Poor Mary. She's not well."

But to me the best example of Lincoln's Christ-like compassion and forgiveness of wrongs was in his Second Inaugural Address, in which he said the task ahead was "To bind up the nations wounds", "To care for the widows and orphans of those who had borne the brunt of the battle... with malice towards none and charity for all..."

And like Jesus, who preached the gospel of Peace and Love only to die violently on a Roman cross, Lincoln was killed by a man bent on revenge. He might not have been a church goer, but Lincoln lived as Christ taught. His melancholy face showed the sorrow he felt as Christ did for his wayward and stubborn people.

**28**  
DAYS IN THE MONTH  
\*Except for  
Leap Year

Leap Day  
Every 4  
Years



Library  
Lovers Day



Presidents Day



Violets + Primrose  
February Flowers

# FEBRUARY FUN FACTS



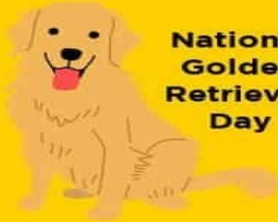
National  
Cherry  
Month

Random Act of  
Kindness Week

**KINDNESS**



Amethyst  
Birthstone



National  
Golden  
Retriever  
Day



National  
Tater Tot  
Month

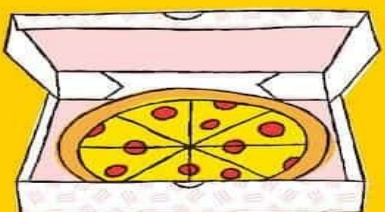
Most  
Romantic  
Month



Valentine's  
Day

National  
Pizza Day

Super Bowl  
2nd Sunday



# WINTER

Astrology Signs



Aquarius Pisces

Groundhog  
Day



Make a  
Friend Day




2nd Month  
of The Year



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# February 2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
ESL=English as a	YG=Youth	Med.	HYT=Horizon	CN=Chris. Nurture	TL= Trumpet	SC=Sort Clothes
<b>1 10 Worship</b> <b>11 Annual Mtg.</b> <b>11:30 Fellowship time</b> 3:30 Girl Scouts 7 MRG-GL	<b>2 Closed</b>  <b>Pastor Jeff is on study leave</b>	<b>3 1 Book Group in Library</b> 5:30 ESL Classes <b>7 Congregation Care</b> 8 AA in FH	<b>4 9 Sorting Clothes</b> 3-4 Trumpet Lessons	<b>5 9:30 Deacons' Shop is open</b> 5:30 ESL Classes <b>6 Bell Choir</b> <b>7 Choir</b> 7 MR in FH	<b>6</b>  <b>First Friday at BG Country Club</b>	<b>7</b>  
<b>8 10 Worship w/Amanda Ark</b> <b>11 Fellowship</b> <b>11 Mission mtg</b> 3:30 Girl Scouts 7 MRG-GL	<b>9 Closed</b>	<b>10 1 Book Group in Library</b> <b>2 Gr. Team mtg</b>  <b>5 Session mtg</b> 5:30 ESL Classes 8 AA in FH	<b>11 9 Sorting Clothes</b> 3-4 Trumpet Lessons <b>4:30 Trustees</b>	<b>12 9:30 Deacons' Shop is open &amp; Staff mtg.</b> 5:30 ESL Classes <b>6 Bell Choir</b> <b>7 Choir</b> 7 MR in FH	<b>13 Church office closed</b>  <b>4:30- Helping Hands at First Christian Church</b>	<b>14</b> <b>9-1:30 League of Women Voters in FH</b>
<b>15 10 Worship w/Communion</b> <b>11 Fellowship</b> <b>11:30 Deacons'</b> 3:30 Girl Scouts 7 MRG-GL	<b>16 Closed</b>  <b>4:30 Kindred Spirits Cir.</b>	<b>17 1 Book Group in Library</b>  5:30 ESL Classes 8 AA in FH	<b>18 9 Sorting Clothes</b> 3-4 Trumpet Lessons <b>6 Soup/Bread Supper</b> <b>7 Ash Weds. Service</b>	<b>19 9:30 Deacons' Shop is open &amp; Staff mtg. 5 Worship Mtg.</b> 5:30 ESL Classes <b>6 Bell Choir</b> <b>7 Choir</b> 7 MR in FH Tammy off	<b>20</b>  <b>4:30- Helping Hands at First Christian Church</b>	<b>21</b>  <b>5-9 FPC Choral Scholars Dinner &amp; Show—FH</b>
<b>22 10 Worship</b> <b>11 Fellowship</b> 3:30 Girl Scouts 7 MRG-GL	<b>23 Closed</b>	<b>24 March Newsletter Deadline</b> <b>1 Book Group in Library</b> 5:30 ESL Classes 7 Cong. Care & Christian Nurture mtgs 8 AA in FH	<b>25 9 Sorting Clothes</b> 3-4 Trumpet Lessons <b>5:30 We Meet Dinner</b> <b>6 "Build the Nest" in FH (WeMeet program)</b>	<b>26 9:30 Deacons' Shop is open &amp; Staff mtg.</b> 5:30 ESL Classes <b>6 Bell Choir</b> <b>7 Choir</b> 7 MR in FH	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>



February 06 Bob Vincent  
February 13 Dave Horger  
February 15 James Bachman  
February 22 Bonnie Stearns  
February 24 Phebe Shawver  
February 26 Tim Hammersmith, Patrick Halleck,  
Ashton Horton  
February 27 Pam Orr

(if your birthday doesn't appear here, please contact the office with your date of birth mm/dd/year)

## 2026 Officers of the Church

### SESSION

Class of 2026: Dar Bevelhymmer, Karla Geyman,  
Chris Williams  
Class of 2027: Anne Moser, Christine Guenther, Lisa Lawson  
Class of 2028: Jen Coddling, Michale Botts  
Moderator: Rev. Dr. Jeffrey A. Schooley: Clerk: Anne Moser

### DEACONS

Class of 2026: Kathy Sweeney, Lee Liebetreu  
Class of 2027: Libby Dachik, Scotty Huntington, Ellyn Stout  
Class of 2028 Anne Beeker , Terri McNamara  
Chair: Terri McNamara Secretary: Libby Dachik

### TRUSTEES

Class of 2026: Lowell Nees, Dana Nemeth  
Class of 2027: Rosemary Apple, Chet Marcin  
Class of 2028: Mike Evens, Joyce Kepke  
Chairs: Dana Nemeth

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