

presbyterian *profiles*

A PUBLICATION OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH FEBRUARY 2021



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Rev. Linda K. Male

Interim Pastor

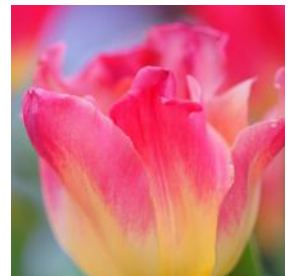
Hello!

Dear Sisters and Brothers at First Presbyterian Church of Holland,

I am very eager to meet all of you—in person or virtually—as we move forward in ministry together. I am thankful for the invitation to join you as your Interim Pastor and Head of Staff. But, how do we get to know one another during a pandemic?

I have been reading your history, and I already know a few of you because of my work as your liaison for the Commission on Ministry (COM) for the Presbytery of Lake Michigan. I also functioned as the Transition Counselor for the APNC who introduced you to your current Associate Pastor Paul Van Kempen. Last, but not least, is my gratitude to your recent Pastor Linda Knieriemen who walked with me through my candidacy process and preached my ordination sermon in 2007.

Holland has always had a warm place in my heart. As a ten year old, I lived for a year in Holland, met my first lifelong friend, and marched in the children's parade during Tulip Time wearing a Dutch costume (no wooden shoes, though).



My call has been to interim pastor positions; I have never been an installed pastor with a long pastorate. I have found that I enjoy new situations and challenges, meeting new people, and helping congregations through changes. COVID-19 makes sure that we all have higher than normal anxiety, but I believe that God walks alongside all our situations in life, holds us close in all joys and sorrows, and leads us into the future as the Light on our way.

I hold a Masters of Church Education from Calvin Theological Seminary and a Master of Divinity from Western Theological Seminary with additional classwork in the Master of Theology program. I taught high school for several years before my ordination. You might call me a third

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#BigQuestions

One of the best episodes of television ever written is the "Two Cathedrals" episodes of "The West Wing." In the episode, after a funeral for the president's secretary, President Jed Bartlett stands in the National Cathedral and has harsh words with God. He is frustrated with God after a series of troubling events - the death of his secretary, a shooting that injured his staff and him, and a storm bearing down on the country. It is an uncomfortable conversation, but it is a beautiful and real example of faith.

It seems like Jed is being disrespectful in the Cathedral, but as my mom always said to me -- God is big enough to handle your questions.

This semester, the Youth Group is using a confirmation curriculum called "Big God, Big Questions." It is a curriculum from the



denomination that encourages the youth to ask the big questions of God and to come to their own understanding of the faith and what exactly they believe. So far, the conversations we have

been having have been engaging and encouraging.

As the youth are participating in this curriculum, I would encourage you to pray for them. This is an important time in their lives of faith and the encouragement of the church is vital.





Lori Klienesteker

Children's
Ministry Leader

Worship Centers: Keeping In Touch

~ Written by Lauren Stouffer

In the middle of winter in Michigan, we don't often see much growing outside. Winter can certainly be beautiful when tree branches are coated with fresh snow and ice, but signs of growth and life are harder to see. Growth happens, though.

Underground, roots and bulbs are having a bit of a winter slumber party. They sleep, sort of. The tulips, daffodils, crocuses and hyacinths are getting ready to sprout and bloom, and even while we can't see it happening, chemicals inside the bulbs are changing and preparing for new growth.

We see growth in children much more obviously. They grow in height, in ability, and in curiosity.



*Photos courtesy of
Lauren Stouffer.*

When we are able to meet again in person for worship, perhaps the most obvious changes will be in how much the children at FPC have grown up. We all have room for growth, even when the climate around us feels too cold or too hostile; even when realities of the world around us make it necessary for us to hibernate or cocoon or quarantine for a season.

This month in Worship Center, our children will hear the stories of Jesus calling his disciples and blessing the children. We will enter into the season of Lent together as we wait and prepare for the joy of Easter. Join us virtually each week to hear and live into the stories together. FPC's children will also be receiving a special bag this month to help them enter into this season of waiting, preparing, and growing, helping us stay connected even while we worship apart from each other. May we continue to let Christ's light shine.



Mission and Outreach

70x7Life, Feeling God's Presence!

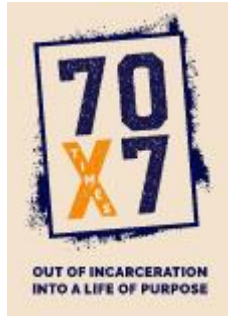
As we near the end of a challenging year, feeling God's presence is crucial.

Here is a story of a man who felt the hand of God upon him in the darkest of places. Jim Gessner was released from prison January 7 and was ready to face 2020 with an optimistic outlook and an obedient change of heart. Nothing was going to stop him with God beautifully and divinely sewing his story together! Not even 2020!

Jim was raised in a middle-class family in West Michigan in the 1970's. He was born with a severely lazy eye and endured ridicule for years. Eventually, he turned to substance use as his coping mechanism. Jim's continued substance abuse became a vicious cycle of repeated incarcerations and at 46 years-old, he awaited yet another prison sentence in the Allegan County Corrections Center. In early 2017, Jim found himself in the faith-based unit or affectionately referred to as the "God Pod," and met Brian Stauffer, 70x7's Director of the Allegan office. Brian would teach our Changes Class to inmates to give them a leg up before release. Unfortunately, Jim was sentenced to prison, but fortunately, the "God Pod" is where his true freedom began.

Entering prison again, this time with a holy focus, Jim applied for entry into the only faith-based unit in the State of Michigan, located in the Muskegon Correctional Facility. There, he met a group facilitator who had a heart for the incarcerated, Keith Woodman. Just prior to the class graduation, Keith informed the class that he would not be back as he had taken a position with an organization that assisted re-entry in the name of Christ, 70x7 Life Recovery.

Upon release, Jim tried finding employment on his own with no success. Prior to release, he had gotten a flyer about 70x7 and thought maybe they could help. When he showed up for his appointment, Sarah, his Relationship Manager, signed him up for



the program, and he soon found the unconditional love of Christ manifested in the staff. In hearing his story, Sarah connected the dots and Keith was matched with Jim as his one-on-one mentor. As Keith reflects, "It's amazing to see how God put this all together. Jim was in my class at Muskegon Correctional. I didn't know where he'd be returning home. Turns out, it

was Grand Rapids where he enrolled in the 70x7 program. And it was there that I reconnected while he was in class. Of course, I leapt at the chance to serve as Jim's mentor." He graduated the class, was blessed with a bike, and was able to ride to his new job at Granite Transformations!

In May, through mutual friends and a love for God, Jim met the love of his life, Stacey. They were married in October and live in Grand Haven. Jim is not content with "happily ever after," but rather "joyfully ever after," and for him that means being the hands and feet of Jesus in his new life. Jim returns to the Changes Class in Grand Rapids armed with pizza and encouragement for new participants. He re-donated his bike when he got a new one. He started a Facebook fundraiser with proceeds going to 70x7 and is doing the final editing of his book "Taking Every Thought Captive," written while in the faith-based unit in prison.

The tapestry of Jim's new life has a common thread – 70x7 Life Recovery. He prayed for wisdom and obedience. In a season of global struggle, Jim continued to prayerfully live and work in the solution and has made 2020 the best year of his life. What an extraordinary example of resilience.

Your past gifts made sure that Jim met 70x7 and continued his walk with Christ. Your current gifts will sustain and propel us forward. Your future gifts will ensure that there are more stories like Jim's.

Thank you,
Tim Koning
CEO

Mission and Outreach

Children's Advocacy Center

A big thank you to everyone who contributed to the coat drive for Children's Advocacy Center. We were concerned that the response wouldn't be as great while not gathering at the church, but you really stepped up. Thank You! CAC received over 50 donations of coats, pants, boots, hats & mittens from the church drive, plus an additional 8 coats purchased from the Children's Worship Center offerings. CAC reports that most have already been given to children. We were also able to give an additional \$400 from our Outreach Funds at the end of the year to purchase supplies for Cora's Care



Closet. The closet meets the emergency needs of the children and non-offending family members that the center serves. Children that leave home because of abuse or neglect, often leave with nothing but the clothes on their backs and this closet helps to cover those needs.

For questions or more information on how to donate, contact Andrea Torres (atorres@cac-ottawa.org) or feel free to drop items off at the center.

Janet Hostetler
Outreach Committee

News from Out On The Lakeshore

Recently OOTL (Out On The Lakeshore) announced that they will soon join with PFLAG Holland Lakeshore (Parents/Friends of Lesbians and Gays), and Gender S.A.F.E. (Supporting All For Equality—a transgender group) into a single organizational structure. These three separate groups have worked collaboratively for several years, and PFLAG and Gender S.A.F.E. will become program branches with OOTL uniting under one roof.

First Presbyterian supports OOTL through our Outreach Council and is providing support to their Community Campaign to help raise \$35,000. In the past, OOTL has received grants from the Holland Zeeland Community Foundation and the Grand Rapids Community Foundation's Our LGBT Fund. They hope for continuing financial support from those organizations as these three LGBT groups merge into one.



CONNECT TOGETHER

First 2021 Small Group Opportunity

Movie theaters opened February 1st and there are a couple of ideas for a small group activity: For \$150 a theater can be reserved for up to 25 people OR Monday & Tuesday specials for \$5 for any movie that day. Please let Chris Urbaniak know if you are interested in the concept of going. Once we know the interest, we will then select a day and time.

Masks are to be worn. The concession stand is open if you choose to purchase something. Contact Chris: cmurbaniak@comcast.net or 616-836-9293

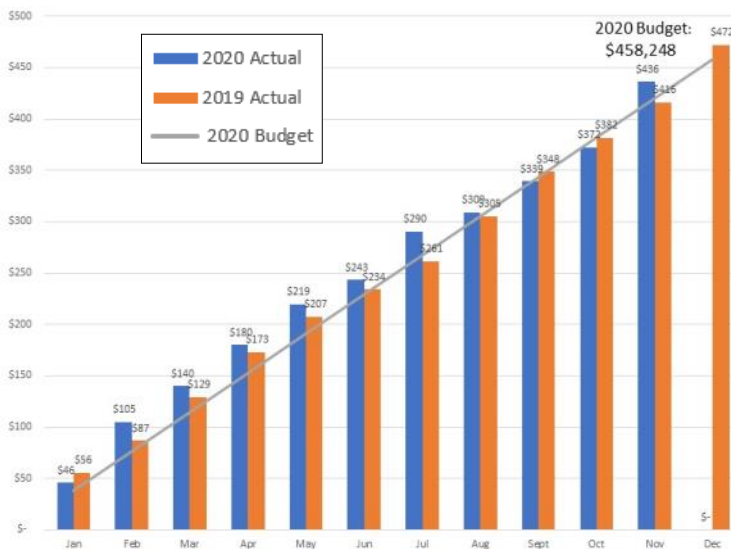
Please give to the Deacons' Fund!

During the pandemic, your deacons have been challenged to find new ways to support our congregation, while at the same time meeting needs that crop up even during normal times. Please consider donating to the Deacons' Fund, so that we are able to show God's love through serving our church family.

Since our congregation is not currently meeting in person, please mail your donations to the church office, clearly marked "Deacons' Fund." Thank you!

FPC Giving Revenue Update

Year to date Giving through December
Thousands of Dollars



The 2020 FPC Annual Report including financial reports can be found online: www.fpcholland.org/news



Session Highlights

- Session approved the 2021 Budget.
- Received and approved recommendation from Personnel for hiring of and contract for Interim Pastor.
- Welcomed incoming Class of 2024 Ruling Elders: Linda Clark, Sherry Martens, Tim Staal, and Amy VanderMeer. Recognition, appreciation, and blessings to retiring Ruling Elders: Don Cowie, Ben DeWaard, Bob Gansen, Bill Haines, and Cassie Kregger.

Hello!continued from page 2

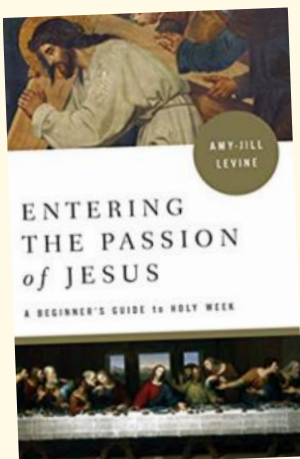
career person in addition to being a volunteer mom in church and school when my children were young.

I am married to David Male, a retired Grand Rapids Public Schools teacher; we have a son and family in Rockford, a son and family in Denver, and a daughter and family in Hudsonville. Our grandchildren total eight: three boys and five girls. Our home is in Blendon Township, which is about a 25 minute drive from the church building. When we meet, feel free to ask me questions about the grandchildren!!

My favorite at home activities are knitting and reading; when it is possible again, we will take road trips to see family, friends, and national parks.

My name is Linda, but I also answer to Pastor Lin or Rev. Male. I prefer Linda, but please choose the title you are most comfortable with. When I officially retired, I never expected to be called to another interim time. It is very exciting for me to again engage in shared ministry with your vibrant congregation. Thank you.

Grace and Peace,
Linda Male,
Interim Pastor



Lenten Book Study

Groups will meet online weekly using Zoom during Lent (February 17-April 3) to discuss Amy-Jill Levine's book *Entering the Passion: A beginner's guide to Holy Week*. Books will be available to pick up at the outdoor communion service on Sunday, February 7. Sign up by Feb 7 by emailing Lauren Stouffer: lauren.stouffer@gmail.com

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YOUNG FAMILIES

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A Virtual Retirement Celebration

Thank you. Thank you.

Although we couldn't be together face-to-face to say thank you and goodbye to one another, I felt your love and presence and generosity in the sanctuary on January 10 as Paul and the Celebration Committee led the Litany of Dissolution. (Dissolution! What a word! It brings to mind the melting of the Wicked Witch of the West.)

You all provided gifts I will treasure: emotional and humorous letters, a framed piece of art created by Lois Rodgers which I had selected at Lake Effect Gallery (with a framed companion poem in Chris Urbaniak's calligraphy), and a piece of classic Holland manufacturing -- a Herman Miller Eames Chair. I understand there will be a check presented to enable overseas travel when that again becomes possible. Wow.

This is all very humbling, and I am deeply grateful.

I'm told that when it is safe there will be a time of "live" gathering and eating to further mark our years together. I look forward to seeing you in the non-Zoom real world!

God bless you as you "worship, serve, and live with a fresh vision of God's vibrant energy and grace for all"!

Linda





*worshipping, serving, and living with a fresh
vision of God's vibrant energy and grace for all..*