



SUMMER

— REVIEW —

FIRST &
CALVARY

a house of prayer for every generation

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FIRST & CALVARY (AND ISAIAH'S!) VISION: A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR EVERY GENERATION

I'll never forget the first time I encountered Isaiah's vision of the Mountain of the Lord. I had been reading my Bible for decades at the time, but something new jumped off the page as I turned the page from Isaiah 1 to Isaiah 2.

I suppose I must have read Isaiah 2 (and Isaiah 56) previously. I must have read this clear description of what would happen in the age of the Messiah: the Mountain of the Lord being lifted up above all other mountains, people streaming up to the mountain to be with God and learn from him and begin to walk in his ways.

I must have previously read the beautiful words about people dwelling with God, in the House of the Lord, and the memorable words about God's house being a House of Prayer for every nation.

But none of that had ever stuck in my head. None of these images had ever fired up my imagination, until that one day that I turned to Isaiah 2 and the words leapt off the page. I remember thinking: Has this always been in my Bible? How have I missed this?!

Since then, this image (and its implications) has floated around in my imagination. I am motivated to see people stream into glad fellowship with God. I'm willing to sacrifice to welcome people into the House of the Lord. And I long for the day when all God's people will come home once and for all in the new creation.

So, imagine my excitement when I saw Jesus' reference to Isaiah 2's image right there in our main stained glass. And imagine my smile when my visits to our History Room revealed to me that for about 30 years First & Calvary had "The House of Prayer" at the top of every worship bulletin!

In this quarter's edition of The Review, I invite you to read story after story of what it looks like for us to pursue this vision of being "a house of prayer for every generation." May God make all of us more joyful in his house of prayer!

Rev. Don Everts



FASTER EGGSTRAVAGANZA PRAISES!

What a blessed day we had on Saturday, April 1! We had over 50 volunteers who helped prepare and run this special community event. So, it was a joy to welcome over 120 children and families onto our church grounds. One sweet girl was observed shouting, "This is the best day of my life!" Between the inflatable obstacle course and jumpy, face painting, games, petting zoo, egg hunts, cookie decorating, crafts, etc., everyone was feeling the fun!

Christ's love and the gospel were part of this special day. Our team was very intentional in being the hands and feet of Jesus to every family with kindness and hospitality. And there was a special Bible Story and Praise Song station where kids heard the Easter story and learned a song about the resurrection.

Every family received a gift bag with candy, an Easter Bible tract, and a flier about our ministries for families. And when families registered online or in person, they had an opportunity to opt into our weekly family emails or learn more about ministries like MOPS, the Agape League Musical, and more, which we followed up with after the event. Families also could ask for prayer through their registration, and several people shared tender requests that were prayed for by our prayer team, staff, and volunteers.

One prayer request came from a military spouse who shared that she found this event as they traveled through the area to their next destination and as her husband was on a special assignment out of the country. She asked for prayer for their situation. Then, another volunteer who met her heard her story the day of the Eggstravaganza and directed her to talk to me since I have been a military spouse. What a joy it was to meet her then and tell her I'd been praying for her and offer her support.

This day will always be special in my heart, and I cannot wait for future opportunities to love our community like this. I am so thankful for everyone who served and donated to make this day possible. I especially want to thank my incredible wing-woman, Kiki Elderidge, who co-led this event with me. Please continue to pray for every family that came that God would grow the gospel seeds planted that day and give us more opportunities to share God's love with them.

In Christ,
Rev. Jamie Swope
Associate Pastor of Discipleship



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“CHRIST’S LOVE
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COUNCIL of CHURCHES

On July 10th, First & Calvary Church participated in All Church Volunteer Day at the Council of Churches. In preparation for that day of service the congregation donated more than 4000 diapers destined for the Council's Diaper Bank of the Ozarks. By the day of the event, additional donations from F&C put that total over 5000 individual diapers donated.

The Diaper Bank was established in 2012 and distributes diapers – disposable and cloth – through partner agencies and to families in need throughout the Ozarks. Since 2012 the Diaper Drive has distributed 6,523,816 diapers!



The afternoon began with a presentation of the success of the F&C diaper drive and the grateful acknowledgement of that success by the Council.

The coordinator for the Council of Churches Diaper Campaign, Tranna Shaughnessy, explained that 1/3 of all babies in the Ozarks don't have enough diapers, which leads to UT infections and other health issues, and that prior to the F&C diaper drive donation the diaper bank was running low because of an increased need for them this year.

She was brought to tears when Rev. Don Everts presented the Council with a check on behalf of the Mission Committee to purchase an additional 30,000 diapers because she realized she was going to have enough diapers to meet the current need.



Following the presentation, the volunteers were provided with a tour of the new facility on Division Street that included a look at the New Unused Clothing room for adults and children that offers clients of the Council a unique opportunity to select their own new, unused apparel. The Council believes that this unique opportunity simulates one of life's enjoyable experiences and signals the respect with which the Council views all clients.

Teams were created to count and package 10 diapers into a bundle, packaging a total of 12,000 diapers...

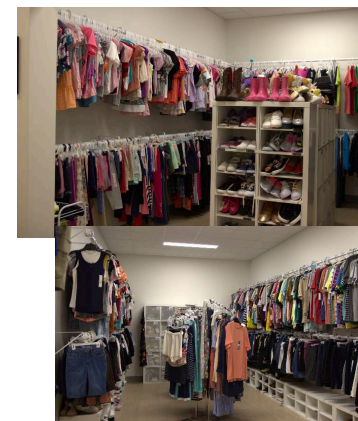


Wrapping Diapers

Sort, cap and disinfect donated water bottles...



And fill water bottles with laundry detergent donated by laundry detergent manufacturers.



Adult and Children Unused Clothing Rooms



The tour concluded with a visit to the Break Room donated by First & Calvary Church where directions were given for the day's volunteer activities.

The positivity and enthusiasm of the volunteers was matched with the genuine gratitude of the staff of the Council of Churches. All who attend First & Calvary Church are invited to attend All Church Volunteer Day in 2024, regardless of church membership. Hope to see you there!

CELEBRATE

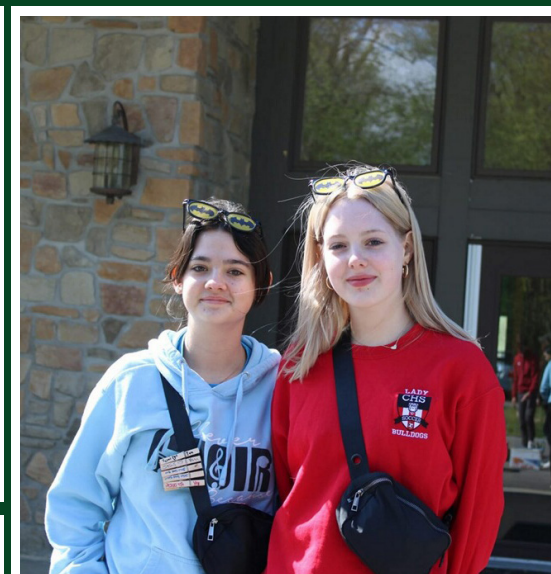
Wendy Everts, Minister of Outreach, traveled to St. Louis with four of our youth to join the Bonhomme Presbyterian Church youth group in attending Celebrate, a student-led retreat. Designed as an opportunity for prayer and fellowship, the retreat is designed to be entirely student lead. Once students attend as participants, they enter the leadership team on the next retreat to assist following groups of students.

This year's participants heard the gospel and were showered with love and surprises. Many reported that they couldn't wait to invite their friends next year.

On the drive back to Springfield, the students talked for three hours straight about their time, their excitement at making the retreat a reality, and their sincere desire to bring their friends along next year. Because the retreat is fully student-led, it allows all of them to lead their friends to Christ. So, let's pray in advance for Celebrate happening in 2024.

May God advance the kingdom through our students!!!
Wendy Everts, Minister of Outreach

Wendy Everts is second from the left.



BAPTISM



Pictured above is Rev. Don Everts and Walker Rathe.



Pictured is Rev. Jamie Swope and her daughter Charlotte Swope

As Christians we celebrate baptism as a communal act of public worship, and it is one of the most joyous occasions that we at First & Calvary Presbyterian Church have the honor to witness.

Baptism is an important part of making disciples of Jesus. In Matthew 28, Jesus said: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father, and the son, and the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." According to Jesus, then, baptism is an important part of making disciples.

In the baptism of infants, we live out our confidence that disciples are made because God takes the initiative. It was Jesus who said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." (John 6:44) And so even helpless infants can be claimed as members of the covenant community. In the baptism of adults, we live out our confidence that disciples are made as we respond to God's initiative with a confession of faith. Again, it was Jesus who said, "Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

We baptized with water, not because water saves, but because water points to a deeper reality: that in God's grace we are washed clean of all our sins. This is part of what makes witnessing a baptism so moving and powerful for us as a congregation.

This year, First & Calvary Presbyterian Church witnessed the baptisms of Carl Heck IV, Benjamin Hensen, Walker Rathe, and Charlotte Swope. Carl Heck, Benjamin Hensen and Walker Rathe were baptized by Rev. Don Everts, and the congregation was blessed to see Charlotte Swope baptized by her mother Rev. Jamie Swope. congregation was blessed to see Charlotte Swope baptized by her mother Rev. Jamie Swope on Date.

For those who are baptized, witnessing the sacrament is a poignant reminder of our own salvation, and the grace that God has on each of us. Let us join together in prayer that in the coming year we may have even more baptisms.

Rev. Don Everts

GENERATIONAL LEARNING



“CHILDREN SEE CONNECTIONS TO CHRIST
AND THE GOSPEL AND HOW IT APPLIES TO
THEIR LIVES”



Ages three years to 5th grade have been learning from the New Testament from their incredible team of teachers. Our elementary-aged children have finished a three-year cycle of lessons from the Gospel Project Curriculum that started in Genesis and finished in Revelation.

Throughout this chronological journey through God’s word, children see connections to Christ and the gospel and how it applies to their lives.

During Lent, families were given special Pretzel Prayer devotional kits.

After Easter, preschool and elementary children have been learning about the fruit of the Spirit and historical faith “superheroes” as part of our Agape League Musical program. Examples of these heroes include Harriet Tubman, William Tyndall, and Amy Carmichael.

Our middle school and high school youth finished a 12-week inductive and reformed Bible study for teens called “The Christian Mind”. Then they began a similar inductive study on Philippians. Finally, we invited youth to participate in the church-wide Lenten study on prayer. Several students from the Youth class attended the Sunday night Lenten experience, leading in worship and bringing friends.

Rev. Jamie Swope
Associate Pastor of Discipleship



A HOUSE of PRAYER

Here in 2023, we at First & Calvary Presbyterian Church are pursuing our vision of being “A House of Prayer for Every Generation.” To help us lean into prayer in new and fresh ways, we held a Lenten Sunday Evening Experience rooted in Richard Foster’s book, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*.

Each Sunday we would learn about different types of prayer and then pray in those new ways. During one of those evening sessions, God met Shari Gerke in a powerful way. Here’s her story:



“For nearly four decades, I have asked God to heal my sister, only to be met with silence. As years passed without healing, my prayers changed to ‘If not healing, please ease her physical pain and suffering.’ Still, there was no healing, only the progression of her Multiple Sclerosis. God has clearly answered my prayers before, but there was silence in this most important one.

I have asked why I continue receiving His blessings while only suffering increases for her. I have felt guilt over what He has given me and withheld her. Health, children, grandchildren, travel, everything. My home is my sanctuary, hers a prison.

During the Lenten Sunday night prayer experience, we did an exercise in Intercessory Prayer. I heard God clearly ask, “Do you trust me?” I have trusted Him, knowing this illness is for this life only, and there is a great blessing ahead for her. But it is a long life trapped in a body filled with unrelenting pain. However, hearing that question directed toward me changed everything for me personally.

I still don’t understand why some people must suffer while others don’t, but hearing those words from God so clearly lifted a burden God did not intend me to carry. Sunday nights certainly were a blessing to so many, and I thank God that I walk out of the Lenten season lifted and lighter; praise be to God.”

-Shari Gerke



As Foster explains in his book, prayer has a way of changing the one praying as much as it does the one being prayed for. This shouldn’t be too surprising. In prayer we spend time with our Heavenly Father. Even when we are praying intercessory prayers focused on others (as Shari was) we are talking with our God in those prayers. We are spending time with him.

Foster’s subtitle is meaningful: spending time with God is, really, what our heart’s most long for. It’s the “true home” of our hearts. May we all have powerful encounters with our God as we pursue our vision of being *a house of prayer for every generation!*

THE GARDEN of GETHSEMANE

During the week prior to Easter Sunday, the Art Committee invited the congregation to visit the Encounters with Jesus Prayer Room to take a contemplative walk through the Garden of Gethsemane. Designed by the committee to provide a peaceful and prayerful experience, they created three stations featuring the three prayers that Jesus prayed in the garden prior to being arrested.

The images and words evoked the suffering of Christ, and the depth of his love and sacrifice. Below Cathy and Chip Potts recall their experience visiting the Garden of Gethsemane.

“On a Sunday evening during Lent, Cathy and I decided to leave home a few minutes early and visit the “Garden of Gethsemane Walk.” On our way, we ran into Charlotte and Jason Swope and invited them to join us. What a treat to visit it with younger friends.

Everything in the Garden reminds you and draws you into a quiet conversation with God. The plants, soft lighting, and stained glass help you focus on the love of God and His reaching out to us during the Easter season.

Chairs were set up around the room to allow time for relaxing and quiet reflection.

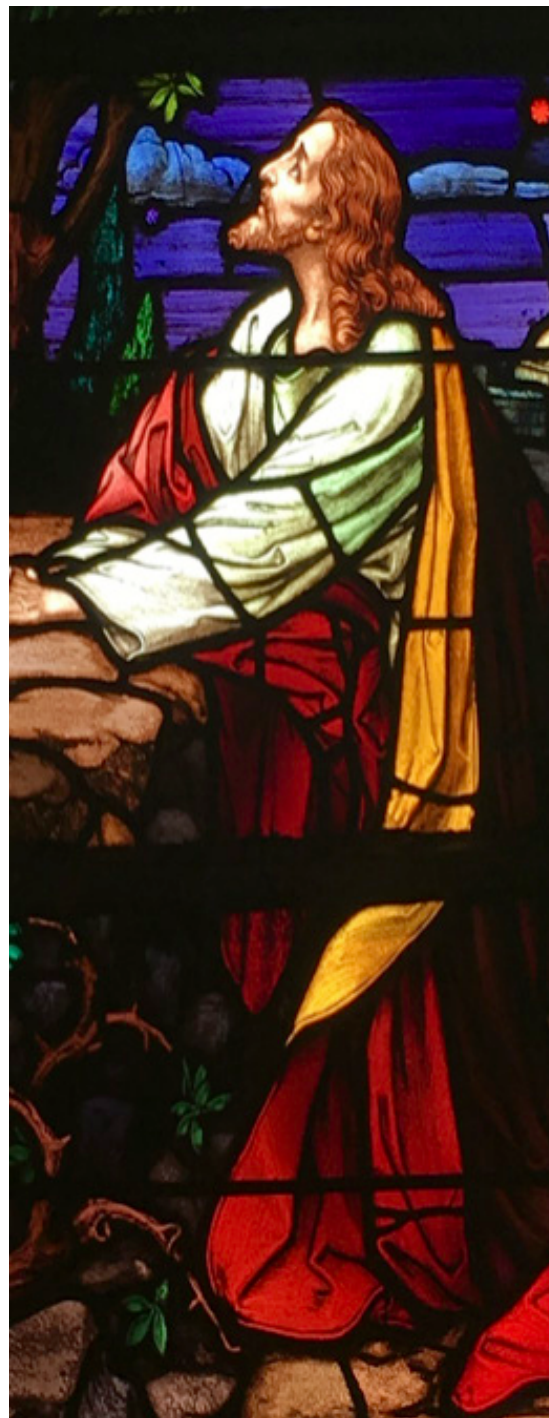
As we walked into the room, we visited the various stations independently. The setting was quiet and contemplative. After we had visited the stations, rather than leaving, we each sat down and listened to the quiet. It was easy to close our eyes and pray, relax, reflect on the room’s beauty, and understand the depth of God’s love. Then, after about 15 minutes, we each got up and walked out.

If you have the opportunity to visit the Garden of Gethsemane Walk next year, please do so. Regardless of age, there is something for everyone.

And on your way out, pick up one of the olive wood beads from Bethlehem. It’s a wonderful reminder of the Garden experience and God’s love for each of us.

Thank you to the Art Committee and all involved in putting the Garden together.”

Cathy and Chip Potts



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