

The Witness

ISSUE V

MAY 2019

Portage First United Methodist Church

Pastors Michael Lawson & Tara Keehn

MAY NEWSLETTER





From Pastor Michael...

Sacramental Life

A friend of mine is a pastor in Pennsylvania. He sent me a text saying that one of his church members had informed him that he skipped Easter services because he “prefers a traditional Easter service without all the extra stuff like communion and baptism.” As I read the text I could hear and feel the disappointment from my friend as he wrote but I admit I was unable to console him. You see...I was already adrift in a terrible rage at what that congregant had said.

Despite this congregant’s rancid and sickening ignorance of the fact that Easter Day is the most traditional time to perform baptisms and partake in Holy Communion, there is also the insulting proposition that baptism and Holy Communion are “extras”. How dare this congregant speak so about the Sacraments of the church! These are our most holy rites and rituals! Holy Baptism and Holy Communion are living embodiments, revelatory signs given by God, that encompass the entire Gospel story.

The truth is though, even though I find myself practically breaking my keyboard in half by typing with such rage, I cannot lay all the blame on this unknown and faceless man several states over. Instead I must ask myself, what has he been taught? How has the church failed him in understanding what these holy rituals mean? How did he in all the sermons and Sunday School classes through the years miss that baptism and communion are expressed commands of Jesus? Jesus Christ himself instituted these acts and Jesus Christ himself COMMANDS that we partake in them. Communion in particular was to be a regular practice among the people who followed and believed in Jesus.

However, in every congregation I know there are people who disobey Jesus by skipping communion Sundays. The divine mystery of communion, the holy and powerful initiation that is baptism, are supposed to underline all that we do. They are like touch stones or living reminders of the Christian life. What does it mean for the soul of the person for whom communion is unnecessary and baptism is merely “extra”?

So as the pastoral authority of Portage First United Methodist Church I am going to state this as clearly I possibly can. Baptism and Communion, the sacraments of the church are not extras, they are central to our life and what we do. They are divine meeting places were Christ is present and we literally touch and taste the story of God. If you find yourself skipping communion Sundays, you need to examine your soul. You are willfully disobeying Jesus’ commands. You are treating with disregard a sign from God. You are failing to appreciate the mysterious and powerful connection that God is offering us.

For more information on United Methodist teaching on the baptism and communion please check out the church’s free resources. The Church office will gladly print you a copy of:

[This Holy Mystery: United Methodist Teaching on Communion](#)
[By Water and Spirit: United Methodist Teaching on Baptism](#)

You can also find both documents at the following link:

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/sacraments>



Note from Pastor Tara...

Hello! Hope you had a great Easter! Great things are happening in May! Including the rummage sale, there is also Star Wars Day (my personal favorite, May the 4th be with you!) and of course, Mother's Day and Memorial Day! The following are a few things I would like to draw your attention to:

There are two new beautiful pamphlets on the Connection Center. One is for new visitors titled "Welcome" and the other is for everyone. It has a bright green front with multi-colored hands on it and is titled "Portage First UMC Volunteer Guide." This is great for old and new attendees alike to find out who to contact and how to get involved in ministry at our church! It also has our 2019 Leadership roster on the back for handy reference!

Congregational Care Ministry meeting will be held Monday, May 13th at 7:00 PM. I encourage all Congregational Care Ministers to attend if you would like to be involved, even if it's been a while! Hope to see you there! If you are a CCM who does not get text messages about the meeting schedules, text Pastor Tara (219) 608-6150 to get on the text list via Remind!

The Blood Drive will be held Friday, May 24th from 1:30-6:30 PM. Save a life, donate! You can sign up to donate by going to www.redcrossblood.org or calling 1-800-RED-CROSS (1-800-733-2767).

I will be finishing up my first semester of Seminary in May, Hallelujah! This semester I took two classes, one about Church History from Jesus through the 4th Century, and the other called "Person in Community" talking about issues of human sexuality, and all the -ism's (racism, sexism, ageism, heterosexism, you name it we discussed it!) I will be taking a two-week intensive class in June on the New Testament, so I will be staying on Campus in Evanston, Illinois from June 17th-28th.

Thank you and God Bless!



From Heather Schulz...

Music Notes

Phew! What a wonderful whirlwind this Holy Season has been. Choir is wrapping up and summer special music opportunities are around the corner. Please see Matt or Heather to arrange a Sunday to share your musical talent with the congregation.

Christy Cawthra has graciously volunteered to help lead a children's singalong group. Elementary aged students will gather in the sanctuary from 10:05-10:15 AM (after 1st service and before Sunday School) and sing some old, familiar bible songs with motions. They will share a song one Sunday a month with the congregation at both services. Families can pick up CDs at the Connection Center to listen to and sing along with at home or in the car.





From Kate Blakely, Director of Spiritual Formation...

Here are some upcoming events for Portage First Students:

Do you like to sing? See Heather Schulz to get a CD of Bible Singalong songs. Every Sunday from 10:05-10:15, elementary students can join together and practice the songs and silly motions for these songs. They will perform a song once a month during both services.

May 5: Cinco de Mayo Taco Fiesta —

Join us after services on Sunday May 5th as our MPK: Mission Portage Kids and youth group host a taco fundraiser to raise money for the youth's upcoming Summer of Service Mission Trip.

May 19: Trip to the Portage IMAX to see Breakthrough —

We'll be journeying together to see the new film Breakthrough. Time TBD closer to trip date. We'll pay for your ticket, just bring money for snacks. You must have a signed release form on file to attend. See Kate Blakely if you need a form.

Friday, May 31: Back to Summer Bash, 5:30-7:30 PM —

Come celebrate the beginning of summer with pizza, games, and your fellow Wise Guys cast members. Invite a friend or two!

June 2: Annual Fishing Trip at Countryside Park, 12:30-2ish —

Come join us for an afternoon of food and fishing. We'll eat lunch here before heading over to Countryside park for our annual fishing trip. Prizes for anyone who kisses a fish! You must have a signed release form on file to attend. See Kate Blakely if you need a form.

Thursday June 13 - Sunday June 16: Summer of Service Youth Mission Trip —



Summer of Service (SOS) is a collaborative effort between area churches and community partnerships to impact Michiana with the life-changing love of God through various kindness activities.

SOS is open to incoming 6th graders through graduating 12th graders. See Kate Blakely for forms. Registration ends May 19.

Impact 2818 Summer Camps —

It's not too late to sign up for summer camp through Impact 2818! For one year only the Bishop has extended the early bird registration rates until May 15. There are multiple camps - Camp Lakewood (3rd-5th), Camp Adventure (6th-8th), and Epworth Forest (9th-12th). Many families are attending Family Camp August 2nd-4th. For more information, visit beacamper.org or contact Kate Blakely at portageumcyouth@gmail.com or (574) 621-0070.

Save the Date! Vacation Bible School: Camping with Christ —

This year's VBS will be July 14th-18th, open to K-5th. Older students are welcome to volunteer & earn some of your PTS community service hours.

For more information on these or any of our youth and children's events, please contact:

Kate Blakely at portageumcyouth@gmail.com or (574) 621-0070



Trustees Corner...

The month of April has been a busy one for the trustees. The tile floors throughout the church including restrooms have now been professionally stripped and waxed. We hope you have noticed the new shine. We ask that everyone be mindful of protecting the floor's waxed surfaces by not dragging tables and chairs across the floors and avoiding using harsh chemicals on the floors. Good old soap and water is all that is needed now to maintain our floors. Please wipe up spills and report any major floor issues to the trustees.

The narthex also received a new coat of paint just in time for our Easter season. Some finishing touches will be done including new signage for the connection center and our sanctuary. Our IT project is 99.9% complete. We have new phones and some changes in security procedures so a training session will be held for those most affected by the recent technology upgrades. Push/pull steel plates have been placed on the restroom doors in the fellowship hall. New rechargeable batteries were installed in the restroom's emergency lights along with additional fire extinguishers hung in the narthex, education wing, and fellowship hall. A new junior sized toilet was installed in our nursery. We have scheduled professional carpet cleaning of the sanctuary and classrooms on Monday, May 13. Signage has been put up to discourage cigarette butts and other foreign objects from being put in the flower beds, grass, and bushes. Two more cigarette disposal containers have been purchased. One for the north door entrance and one for the back door leading out of the fellowship hall.

We are asking everyone to help us keep our church grounds looking nice. Please pick up discarded items found around the church and dispose of them in a proper container. The kitchen facelift is moving forward. The committee has selected the flooring and will be making decisions on counter tops, ceiling lights and color of paint for the walls. Funding for new ovens and stove/grill is still being worked on. We hope to move forward with purchasing new appliances sometime this summer. We welcome donations towards this project. Please clearly mark your donation as the "kitchen" project.

Connie Ellefson, Trustee chairperson



The Beauty of a Memorial Garden ...

The landscaping committee is working to create a memorial garden by enhancing our existing flower beds with perennials in the memory of a loved one. We are looking for individuals who would make a minimum \$10.00 donation to this project for the purchase of a perennial to be planted in a loved one's name. We want to grow beautiful and meaningful flowers around the church building. We hope that the memorial flower beds would be a symbolic place to remember our loved ones. We can also incorporate angel and dove figurines that symbolize love, peace and heaven. We hope to attract butterflies which are symbols of hope, growth and transcendence. There would also be a name plate provided. A sign up sheet will be on the connection center. Please indicate your interest in this project. The month of May will be a great time to begin the beautification of our church property with perennials reflecting the cherished memories of our loved ones.



Missions and Outreach Committee...

The Missions and Outreach team would like to thank Melinda Metz and Minuteman Press for the beautiful tablecloth for the church to use at outreach events, and for providing support and giveaways so that we could have a booth at the 2019 Portage Community and Business Night which took place April 18! If your ears were itching that night, it might be because Robin and Randy Wilkening, Kate Blakely, Dan and Bobbi McCoy, Cara Reeder, and Chris and Kim Adkins volunteered to spend the evening there talking with folks about the great things our church is doing. Some good conversations took place! Thanks to everyone for representing Portage First!

Also, we will be collecting canned vegetables for the food pantry during the month of May. These donations go into the shopping cart. Independent of that, food donations are requested for the Portage Township Trustees Office. This food helps people who need emergency food before the next day the food pantry is open. This food should be placed in the bin under the table near the north door in the Narthex.

*With Blessings and Gratitude,
Your friends on the Missions and Outreach Committee*



Operation Christmas Child (Shoe Box Ministry) ...

Operation Christmas Child for children who are affected by war, disease, natural disasters, poverty, and famine — ages 2 to 14.

Thank you to everyone who has been continually filling our Christmas box with children's items for our shoe box ministry. Every item is appreciated. We will continue this collection process up until the end of October. Then the "stuff the box" event will take place in the fellowship hall on Saturday, November 2 from 9am to 2pm. The basic box items for all children should include a toothbrush (no toothpaste), wash cloth, bar of soap, notebook at least 5 x 7 inches and pens/pencils. We also try to include a piece of clothing (t-shirts, underwear, socks, sundresses, shorts, flip flops) and deodorant. Then the fun begins by stuffing the box with age appropriate items such as stuffed animals, animal figurines, balls, marbles, coloring books, markers, glue sticks, scissors, dolls, craft kits, first aid items (Q-tips, alcohol wipes, safety pins, band aids), fishing stuff (line, sinkers, worms, hooks), pocket size flashlights, anything for a girl's hair, travel size Kleenex, puzzles, matchbox size cars, sewing items (needles, thread, buttons, 1 yard material, stick pins), stickers or story books and toys that will fit in a shoe box (we cannot use anything that looks military-like). We collect and recycle see-through medicine bottles (amber, green, & blue) — the bigger the better, and make first aid kits, fishing kits, jewelry kits, sewing kits, and holders for crayons and marbles.



Repair / Replace or Needs Servicing Request Forms...

Do you know of something that needs attention such as a repair or replacement in or around our church? Please fill out a request form with the information and place the form in the Trustee's mailbox. Forms are available in the Trustee's mailbox. Thank you!



All Church Cleanup...

ALL church cleanup day is scheduled for Saturday, May 4 from 8 to noon. There is a signup sheet on the connection center listing the areas that need some attention.



From SPRC ...

God's House & Your Church Home

Isn't it wonderful to have such a place that we call home? It's all so wonderful that there are so many caring and hard-working people that keep this home beautiful inside and out.

Many of us come and go within our church walls from Bible study groups, AA groups, Boy Scouts, committee meetings, showers, and funeral dinners, etc. The list goes on. Again, IT IS WONDERFUL we have a place that we call home, a Church home that we can share and be used by so many others.

But, because there is so much activity here at our church home, it becomes SO VERY IMPORTANT for EACH of us to become more aware of taking care of it, especially PICKING UP AFTER OURSELVES, and even taking it a step further by being observant when areas of our home need attention — wiping off counters, tables, taking garbage out, (when needed), even picking up something off the floor. Yes, we do have a custodian, yes. He's doing the best he can, but with each of us pitching in a little it will lighten Ed's workload so he can concentrate on the PRIORITIES of his checklist with the hours provided.

Proverbs 3:9 says honor the Lord with your possessions.....

Since God owns everything and we get to manage it for Him, let's be mindful to be good stewards of what we have received — a BEAUTIFUL campus we call our Portage First "HOME!"

Respectfully submitted, by Steve Massow, SPRC chair

***Thank you for supporting Family Promise! The taco/hot dog lunch was a success.
A special thank you to Connie King for cooking and organizing the lunch.***

Save the date for May 18th at 6:00 PM. The Blues Project will be performing at Living Hope Community Church. There will be a free will offering to support Family Promise. The Blues Project is a local group of middle and high school musicians who play the blues. It was a lot of fun last year and we hope you can come check it out. Fliers are on the connection center.

Interested in learning more about Family Promise after hearing from Jill Hostetter in April? There are brochures and some other handouts at the connection center. Amanda Jennings is our church's liaison and can be reached at ajennings21@hotmail.com or (219) 781-1924. Also, make sure to check out the new Family Promise of Porter County website at www.familypromisepcin.org.



From the Finance Committee...

Portage First United Methodist Church Finance Update		Year to Date 2019	
		Operating Expenses	\$83,402.34
		Net Year To Date	\$6,165.86
March 2019		Debt Reduction Giving	\$5,579.00
Non Designated Giving	\$35,157.70	Debt Reduction Expense	\$6,242.76
Operating Expenses	\$28,755.33	Net Debt Reduction	(\$663.76)
Debt Reduction Giving	\$2,007.00		
Debt Reduction Expense	\$2,080.92	Overall Net Current & Debt	\$5,502.10
Apportionment Paid	\$3,096.68	Apportionment Paid	\$10,062.35

What is 'Apportionment'? From www.umc.org —

The main way we support the ministries of the church is through our apportioned funds, a method of giving that proportionally allocates the churchwide budget to conferences and local churches.

For United Methodists this method of giving has become a strong, generous tradition.

Together, through our connected congregations, we accomplish what no single church, district or annual conference ever could hope to do alone.

In this way, each individual, each family, each congregation gives a fair share for the church's work. We combine our prayers, presence, gifts and service to make a significant difference in the lives of God's people.

The Indiana Annual Conference asks that each church provide 11% of the prior month's income as their apportionment, 10% to the conference and 1% to the district.

First Friday Fellowship

FRIDAY, MAY 3, 2019

5:00 PM

BEACH CAFE

903 N. Shelby Street • Gary

Please RSVP to:

Sandra Robinson at (219) 764-8433
no later than Thursday, May 2

United Methodist Women

Please notice the date change!

*Because of the rummage sale,
our meeting is delayed one week.*

FRIDAY, MAY 10, 2019 • 9:30 AM

Fellowship, conversation, and breakfast snacks will start our morning. Then our speaker, Kris Bailey will be talking about her recent mission trip to Nicaragua.

Please join us! We hope to see you there!!

CAMPING WITH CHRIST

Vacation Bible School

July 14 - July 18 at 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM

Portage First United Methodist Church
2637 McCool Road • Portage, IN 46368
(219) 762-3846
www.portageumc.org



HAPPY Mother's DAY

MAY 12, 2019
10:15 AM

Mother's Day Brunch

Sponsored by UMM

Check us out on Facebook!

www.portageumc.org

Visit our YouTube channel for sermons and other videos.

The Portage Trustee's office is accepting donations of non perishable food items for their Emergency Food Pantry in the Narthex in the purple tub. This Pantry is utilized for those who need food in Portage Township when the pantries are not open. Thank you!



Connection Center and Greeters Sign-Up...

Looking for a way to serve? Have some time before services on Sunday? Consider serving as a greeter to those who come to worship at PFUMC. It is a great opportunity to welcome members, both those you know and may not know, and meet visitors! If you would like to volunteer, please sign up on the schedule at the Connection Center!



Would you like to be a part of Portage First's Relay for Life Team on Friday, June 7th?

Go to <https://secure.acevents.org>, click on "Join A Relay," search by zip code, choose "Relay For Life Portage," and click "Join This Relay." You may also install the American Cancer Society FUNdraising app on your phone and follow the same prompts. Paper registrations will be available soon.

Contact Amber Welch with questions.



***Here is a convenient way to tithe!
Try PushPay with your mobile device or online!***

Have you ever come to worship and realized you left your offering envelope at home or learned of a worthwhile mission you want to support only to realize you did not bring your checkbook? Wouldn't it be a blessing to be able to give back to God in a matter of seconds using your smartphone or tablet, laptop or desktop?

We have partnered with a company named Pushpay to help us move into the 21st Century with our financial stewardship. Fewer people write checks much less use cash, especially younger adults.

Pushpay will allow us to give one-time gifts, recurring gifts or special gifts using debit or credit cards or ACH transactions from our bank accounts. It is quite easy to get started. Simply text 'pfumc' to 77977 and follow the instructions on your screen. As part of the process you will be able to download the Pushpay app for either iPhone or Android.

Please note — When filling out envelopes for offering, altar flowers, etc., please write clearly both first and last names . Thank you.



Happy May Anniversary to...

01	John & Freda Black	23	Glenn & Martha Yerby
05	Rich & Patti Coates	26	Bennie & Vicky Wright
10	Joe & Sally Reynolds		

Happy May Birthday to...

01	Don Morgenroth	15	Ryan Kegley	24	Juliet Medina
02	Chuck Fowler	16	Sally Nohr	24	Richard Pinarski
04	Jaden Bright	17	Bev Fitzgerald	24	Annette Wray
06	Bruce Wilson	17	Paul Tarnow	24	Ethan Davenport
06	Jim Crisman	19	Andrew Karsten	27	Grant Monahan
07	Rob Blakely	20	Messiah Pinarski	28	Scott Holtzman
08	Riley Miller	21	Heather Burns	28	Zac Ryan
13	Linda Mills	22	Margi Hamstrom	30	Andrew English
15	Jim Helmecy	22	Chris Adkins	31	Donna Lenburg
15	Steve Massow	23	Jennifer Long	28	Scott Holtzman