



The Allegan Congregationalist

February 2023

Our church exists to introduce people to Jesus Christ and train those who already know Him.

An Introduction, Part Two

by Greg Carlson



Upcoming Events:

- 2/10 Ladies' Night
- 2/11 Lamb of God—Miller Auditorium
- 2/22 Lent begins
- 4/9 Resurrection Sunday
- 5/12 CCCC Spring Conference

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Relationships are developed by spending time together and learning about one another. Pastor Greg has tried to anticipate some questions we may have and answered them in the following Q&A format. Keep the conversation going as you chat with him before or after our worship service or in the community.

Q: What are few instances of God's leading in your life, where circumstances were a "God thing?"

A: God has thoroughly changed my life. I committed sin in my youth that I still deeply regret. Although I am not yet what I will one day be, thank God I am not what I was.

We engaged in a building program at the church in the U.P. to further our ministries in many ways. It was a program too big, actually, for our congregation. We found, however, that we have a big God. We saw God provide skilled labor, volunteers and finances so that a quality building was dedicated debt free.

God has led me to person after person who has been hungry for God's Word and salvation. I have been privileged to lead many to Christ and disciple them in both pastoral and hospice ministry. Many of these contacts came simply as I am involved in the community in one way or another. God has used me as an ordinary and flawed human to introduce others to Christ.

In hindsight, God has directed in each chapter of my life. I believe he has brought me to First Congregational Church for particular reasons.

Q: How many hospice and palliative patients do you see?

A: At any given time, I am providing spiritual care for 50 patients and families. As you might imagine, I officiate many funerals. I present We Honor Veterans ceremonies to patients and groups throughout SW Michigan. I am also available for support to Wings of Hope employees and volunteers.

Q: What education have you?

A: I graduated from Grand Rapids Baptist College in 1987 with a Bachelors of Religious

Education and from Carolina Bible Institute in 1996 with an in-service Masters of Biblical Studies degree. I was ordained by the First Baptist Church of Cedar Springs, MI in 1987 after an internship there.

Q: How should the Pastor be held accountable? What relationships do you currently cultivate that provide accountability for responsible attitudes and behavior, personally and as pastor?

A: I am accountable to my wife for every moment of my life. We decided to take this safeguarding measure from the start of our marriage. She trusts me and I her. There has never been cause for question. I discuss temptation and my spiritual condition with my wife and a few men friends. I have found it wise to take practical measures to avoid falling into sin: Wings of Hope monitors my phone, laptop and tablet; I stay as far away from the church money as possible; and treat the women as sisters (1 Tm. 5:2). In each church, I've worked along side the church leadership as a brother, not an out-in-front dominant decision maker. I believe we need the contribution of each leader in making decisions and maintaining accountability. I'm pleased to see this collaboration evidently taking place at FCC.

Q: How do you use your time on the road between hospice patients?

A: I rarely have the radio on. I am often talking on the phone or praying for parishioners, hospice patients and church leadership teams. I regularly thank God for his blessings. Occasionally I succumb to the temptation to get a vanilla milk shake from a fast-food drive in window.

Q: Do you have pets at the Carlson household?

A: No, I have allergies to animals with sometimes severe reaction.

Q: What do you enjoy reading?

A: I do enjoy reading and keep up on world and local events. I usually read three or four books a year according to my interest at the time.

Q: What are your passions in ministry?

A: My passions in church ministry are Bible teaching and visiting with parishioners.

Q: What are your theological priorities in regard to pastoral ministry?

I want the church to be regularly enamored of the majestic person, work, and presence of God through Scripture saturated worship. I am so pleased with the worship format of FCC in emphasizing these things Sunday after Sunday. The redemptive work of the Christ of Calvary is central in my life and teaching. I work toward a balance of truth and grace in teaching the Word. I seek to compassionately minister biblical truth in the context of God's enabling provision through His Spirit and Word for victory in specific areas of our lives as individuals and as a church. While seeing the value of expository book studies as a settled pastor, I have seen the value of topical teaching according to the needs of the churches I have served as an interim pastor. I want to be a part of a church family where we all humble ourselves before the God of grace. From Him we may "receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

The Role of the Deacon

by Todd Wagner

As we travel into this new year and begin the work set before us, your deacons will be involved with many tasks in the church. Certain tasks involve planning and scheduling to enhance our Sunday worship throughout the year. Others involve watching over members of our congregation. Some tasks encompass continued spiritual training and working with Pastor Carlson on a review of the church to analyze where we currently are, where we want to go, and how we're going to get there.

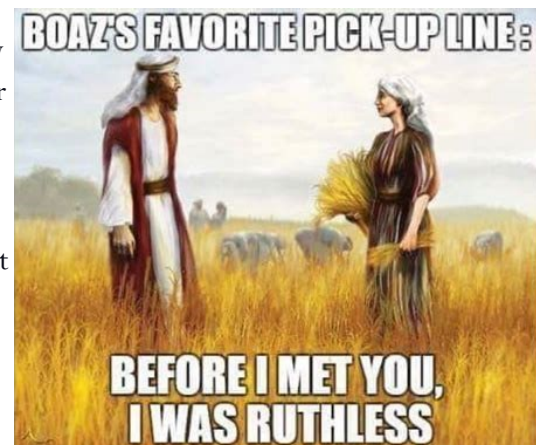
Recently it occurred to me that some of you in the church may not know what the deacons do, or even their role in the church. Therefore, I thought I would take a moment to break down and explain the role of the deacon in the church. My goal is not only to inform you of what a deacon does but also to inspire you to consider whether serving as a deacon may be something you wish to do in the church. Since there are a lot of territories to cover, I'll break this down into two parts. I will cover part one now and finish up in our March newsletter. So, here we go –

First, let me preface by saying **ALL ministry centers on God and Jesus Christ**. Our entire Christian community is an active participant in His ministry as we see in **Ephesians 4:1-7**. Second, every believer has been given gifts by the Holy Spirit. We're to use these gifts in the church for the common good of the body of Christ. Gifts given by the Holy Spirit to the believer are in the Bible in **Romans 12: 6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4 -11 and v. 28**.

Deacons have many responsibilities aside from reading the Sunday welcome and serving you the sacraments every third Sunday. First and foremost, a deacon must be a servant. Second, a deacon must be engrained in God's word, studying the Scriptures, praying with and over others, worshiping, giving both time and treasure, and serving. Deacons are to be encouragers. They are to encourage others in the Christian faith to develop and grow their relationship with Christ. In addition to encouragement, deacons are to arm other believers to carry out Christ's mission by evangelizing and spreading the gospel.

In **1 Timothy 3:8-10**, we see the qualifications a deacon must possess. They are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. Most importantly, before anyone can even aspire to become a deacon, they must be tested. If nothing is found against them, they may serve as a deacon. Does this mean a deacon has to be perfect? No, because nobody is perfect. We are all sinners who've been saved by grace through faith. Simply, they are people of integrity and credibility, worthy of respect in the church and community. Their integrity is revealed in their speech and actions. A deacon should be temperate in living and responsible with money and relationships. They also possess spiritual integrity and growth, able to show what God is doing in their life. They should be able to speak with ease about Christ.

**I will close with a request. Pray for us (Heb.13:18).
Pray we may live honorably & serve well.**



ALOHA! A STAY-CATION Hawaiian Luau



ALOHA to all from the sunny shores of FCC! On Sunday, January 29th, our fellowship hall was transformed into a tropical fun zone complete with sand, palm trees, leis, grass skirting, and games.

A feast of pulled pork, cheesy poi-tatoes, lava baked beans, tropical fruit and assorted desserts was served. In worship prior to our party, Pastor Greg spoke on Luke 15, the prodigal son, working through the text to expose the son's selfishness, sinfulness, and sorrow. Sin always brings isolation and disintegration. The story doesn't end there. The Father is looking for his son and saw his return from a long way off. Just like our luau was a party, a celebration, the father called for a feast and celebration. (As well, as party clothes—check out the livestream if you missed it!) While the luau has been packed away, the celebration of God's word continues every Sunday. If you come each week or have been out of fellowship for awhile, the message is the same. Do not be isolated in sorrow. Return to the Father, he is looking. Be integrated in joy.





The band dusted off their ukuleles and played several favorites.



How low can you go? Limbo contests for all ages.



Photo credit: Elsie Jones (pictured with Joanie Townsend) Thanks for capturing the memories!



Hula contests put a smile on many faces.

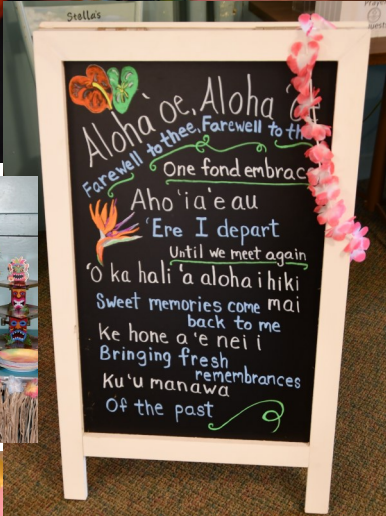




Sue & Leon Belden



Pictured above: Wayne Kooy.



Below: Julie DeHaan displays our scrumptious feast



Jeff Polonowski with Pastor Greg Carlson



Money Matters

by Julie DeHaan

At our annual & quarterly meetings, I have the privilege of giving the final report. I know there is an old adage about saving the best for last, but it doesn't apply. After thirteen reports, wowing an audience with lists of numbers and budgets is a mighty hard task. Yet, it is not my job to impress, but to highlight the faithfulness of God. For 164 years, He has provided for all the needs of the First Congregational Church through his body of believers. Praise the Lord and bless His holy name! As we begin a new year, I thought a few notes might be helpful.

How can one contribute to the church? Every Sunday an offering of checks and cash is collected as part of our worship. Tithing envelopes are available upon request. Some members choose to give electronically online through billpay. These checks are received through the mail at the church office. Occasionally, members have donated gifts of investments, such as stocks.

Can I designate how funds are spent? Yes. The best way to do this is write your designations on the memo line of your check. Some members wish to "pledge" a specific amount to the church and each week the contribution is divided the same way. With the start of a new year and a change in our tithing software, it is a great time to double check any automated pledges you have requested in the past. Monies that are not designated go to the church's general fund and are used where they are most needed. At the end of the year, contribution statements are mailed in January.

- ★ General
- ★ Christian Ed
- ★ Benevolence
- ★ Congregational Kitchen
- ★ Missions
- ★ Memorial
- ★ Building



FUNDS AT FCC

What is the difference between Financial Secretary and Financial Treasurer?

The Financial Secretary is Theresa Prolo, think "Money In." She is responsible for counting the weekly collection under dual control, recording donations, and making bank deposits. The Financial Treasurer is Julie DeHaan, think "Money Out." She is responsible for paying church bills, reporting financials, and preparing annual contribution statements.



A Girls' Night In



Friday, 2/10
 Girl's
 Night In
 7:00—9:00 PM

The Women's Fellowship is hosting a gathering at the fellowship hall on Friday, February 10 from 7 to 9 PM for FCC ladies of all ages.

Our hope is to encourage sisterhood and smiles. We'll have snacks and games. Hope you can join the fun.

FCC: A Year in Review 2022



Pastor Cory Klein announces his decision to take a call to ministry at New Hope Church of Oxford having served as minister from 12/2016 through 4/2022. Under his teaching ministry, we studied the books of Daniel, Philippians, Esther, Titus, Matthew, Haggai, Joel, and Ruth. In his final sermons, Pastor Cory encouraged us to Walk in the Truth. Only by knowing God's word will we be able to detect the lies of the deceiver. He urged us to work together to live out the holy scriptures. God's authoritative Word sustains, is sufficient, and timeless. It is both living and active and able to teach, rebuke, correct, and train in righteousness. The gospel was preached to us, we received it and must continue to stand firmly upon it. By this gospel alone are we saved. Hold firm.



In March, a ladies' retreat was hosted in Luther, MI.

In May, we rocked Sunset Lanes with an all age bowl-a-thon!



The Son-shined as our annual picnic in July moved indoors.



July 25-27 we teamed up with friends from The River Church and Christ Community Church to host VBS Hay Day. Lessons demonstrated Romans 5:11 *Our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends with God!*



The CE team kicks off our Sunday School with The Amazing Race to Jesus. Five teams completed a scavenger hunt set-up throughout the Allegan County Fairgrounds on 9/11.

Would you have the ability to sponsor a project in 2023?

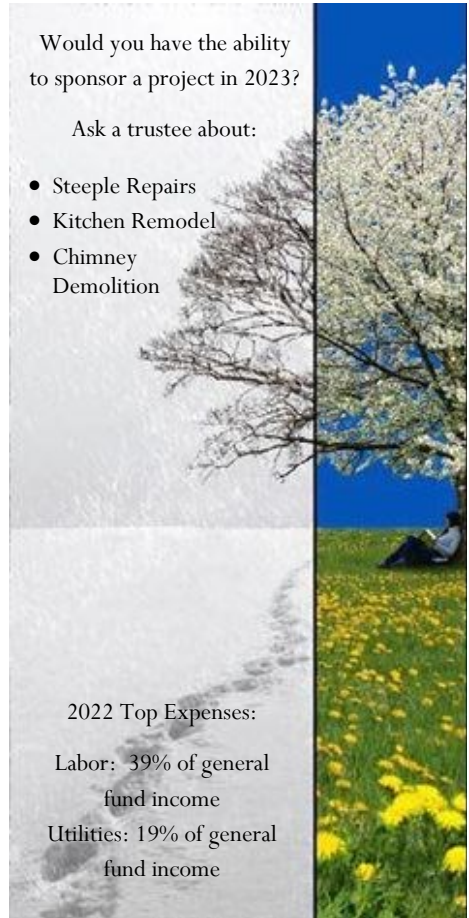
Ask a trustee about:

- Steeple Repairs
- Kitchen Remodel
- Chimney Demolition

2022 Top Expenses:

Labor: 39% of general fund income

Utilities: 19% of general fund income





God continues to lead the Congregational Kitchen. Having begun as a dream in a backyard amongst a handful of fellow believers in 2007, one could not imagine how this outreach would be grown by the hand of God. Each Thursday night, 450-500 meals are served. The gift of 2 warmers from Perrigo makes this task easier. A team of 4 organize

volunteers to pack 400 weekly care packages sent home with APS students. The Warehouse receives 2-3 trucks of food which is lifted, sorted, cleaned, and catalogued prior to being distributed amongst 31 food pantries. Looking ahead, The Congregational Kitchen is looking for a grant writer and fundraising coordinator.

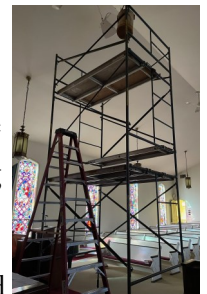


23% of our 2022 income supported missionary efforts locally & internationally.



On Monday 10/31, the CE and Diaconate host the first annual Trunk or Treat-spreading God's gospel light to our community.

Our audio system receives a needed upgrade with new speaker and microphones improving sound quality in our worship services and online.



In addition to leading the church, filling the pulpit, and shepherding flocks, the diaconate has been studying *Spiritual Discipline, A Critical Aspect for Every Christian* by Donald Whitney.



An annual delight is the Old Fashioned Hymn Sing held on November 12 with Elaine Cochran taking

favorite requests from the lectern and Pastor Greg Carlson leading on the organ.

The Women's Fellowship brought back the Fall Bazaar after a two-year hiatus. God is faithful even in a snowstorm and nearly \$1,500 was raised for church projects and ladies' ministry.



FCC enters into contract with IMI/SOS and welcomes Pastor Greg Carlson as our interim minister. We traveled through the advent season together and began 2023 in a Sermon Series *Flying High in the New Year*. Pastor Greg is grateful to be able to partner with us in the gospel. At our annual meeting, he encouraged us, saying "Much can be accomplished in a church during a transition between settled pastors. Confusion, grief, or anger over the previous pastor's leaving can be dealt with in a biblically healthy way. Fear of the future can be quelled with steady shepherding. A church can grow in conflict resolution skills. Individuals often step up and grow in responsibilities in which they had not previously engaged. The congregation can be encouraged in seeing its strengths. And you can enjoy an increased ministry to one another." **Join us as we introduce people to Jesus Christ and train those who already know Him.**

Prayers for our Missionaries

Through your faithful contributions, FCC was able to send \$9,000 in 2022 to our international mission partners. We thank you for your prayers as they help us to teach others about Jesus Christ in communities far from our own. Will you please join us in praying for these faithful servants? Perhaps you'd like to email them a note of encouragement!

Ed & Valerie Johnson in Indonesia ed.johnson@worldteam.org

- To see the complete translation of the Bible in the Momuna Tribal language in 2023
- Two diuwe families in discipleship training: Isak & Bakiawde & 4 children; Kirinius & Mona and two sons

John & Tricia Fraser in Hungary jfraser@teachbeyond.org

- The war between Russia & Ukraine
- Guidance for John as he explores new teaching opportunities and partnerships in apologetics

Will & Julia Dickerson in Hungary wwd2@cornell.edu

- Praise for visits with family—travel to the US over Christmas and a visit in Hungary from Julia's daughter, Stephanie, in early January
- Praise for good results from medical tests and continued prayers for strength and good health. As Will writes, "Age brings with it a greater degree of wisdom, but it also seems to entail more fragility."
- Students will see the love of Jesus through Will and Julia. Will's "seniors" are making decisions on further education and he will tie together discussion topics of "faith, hope, and love." Pray for upcoming conversations and that God would open the hearts of Will's students to see and understand His Word.
- MOPS ministry meeting on 2/8 will be discussing "How to fight cleanly in marriage."
- A neighboring widow, Goddard Zsuzsanna (Zsuzsi) and her adopted 14-year-old son, Marcel.

Community Connections

Our own Elaine Cochran will be part of the sacred musical retelling of the final days of the life of Jesus Christ. The Lamb of God tells the story of Jesus' death, atonement and resurrection through the eyes of those who loved Jesus and knew Him best. This choral event at Miller Auditorium on Saturday, February 11 begins at 7:30. Tickets are \$28 and available online.



A Heartfelt Thank You for Sponsorship

The cost of the newsletter is supplemented each year by the gifts of several of our readers. Last year's contributors included: Gwen Calkins, Ray & Gerry Harris, and Gloria Lane. Thank you. If you would like to contribute, mark your donation of \$25 for the "newsletter."

*thank
you*



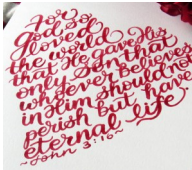
- 04 Aaron Siegler
- 05 Margaret Brown
- Olga Allen
- Carol Sneller
- 13 Alex Letts
- 16 Shirley Ross
- 21 Lisa Letts
- 22 Milo Brown
- 23 Leon Belden
- 25 Marilyn Kent
- Trevor Belden



FEBRUARY

2023

Please call the office if there is an anniversary or birthday you would like to add to the list.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2	3	4
			5:45 Prayer Mtg	9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Take-out Dinner	8 Food Warehouse	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship Noon CE Mtg	5:30 Women's Fellowship Mtg		10 Grief Group 5:45 Prayer Mtg	9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Take-out Dinner	8 Food Warehouse 7-9 Ladies Night In	8:30 Men's Breakfast 7:30 Lamb of God
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship Noon Trustee Mtg			5:45 Prayer Mtg	9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Take-out Dinner	8 Food Warehouse	
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship			10 Grief Group 5:45 Prayer Mtg	9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Take-out Dinner	8 Food Warehouse	
26	27	28				
9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship						LITURGIST: Jeff Polonowski GREETERS: Amy Hansen & Sue Belden

The First Congregational Church of Allegan



323 Cutler St - Allegan, MI 49010

Church Phone: 269-673-3139

Email: fccofallegan@gmail.com

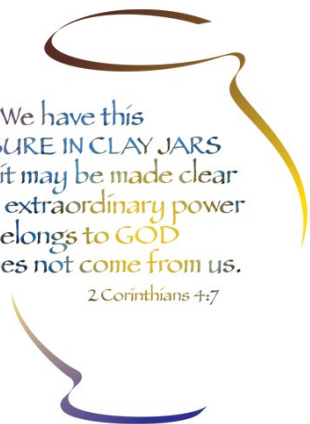
Website: fccofallegan.weebly.com

Worship with us on Sundays at 10:30 AM!

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Broken Vessels

In her devotional book, *Fighting Words*, Ellie Holcomb reminds us that “God doesn’t require us to be enough. He has more than enough to pour into us each day. Each moment. We mainly just need to be open to receiving His power, letting it flow through us. Why? Because we are not trophies designed for display. We’re jars...carriers and conduits of His light and His gospel and His love.”



We have this
TREASURE IN CLAY JARS
so that it may be made clear
that this extraordinary power
belongs to GOD
and does not come from us.
2 Corinthians 4:7

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 2 Cor 4:6-9

What a rich promise from God. He will be our power. He is more than enough. Though we pour out our time and energy and love, we never need be empty. Though our hearts may shatter as we sojourn in a world not our home, God is the Master Potter. He repairs and uses broken vessels. Through them, more of His light can shine out to a dark world.
