



The Allegan Congregationalist

June 2023

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

Celebrating & Confident

by Greg Carlson



Calendar Events:

- 6/4 Graduate Recognition
- 6/11 165th Anniversary Celebration
- 7/10, 11, 12 Joint VBS at the River Church from 6-8:30 PM
- 7/30 Annual Picnic & Outdoor Service

Celebrating 165 Years of God’s Blessing Confident of His Blessing ‘til He Returns

“For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness is to all generations” (Psalm 100:5).

The celebration of a church anniversary reminds us to look simultaneously forward and backward. Our look back at 165 years of this congregation’s life gives us confidence and hope for the next 165, should the Lord delay His return for His Church.

There have been many who have been born, saved, baptized, married, and buried in this fellowship called First Congregational Church of Allegan, MI. God has worked in many lives. Traditions have been created. These factors have made us who we are. In a sense, we are defined by our history, our heritage, our tradition.

Our faith is born and nurtured in a historical experience, in what God has done for us in the past. But our faith always leads us into a confident future. Jesus made that plain to His disciples. He told them to remember what He had done, but he also directed their attention to the future task for which His ministry was preparing them. “Go and be my witnesses,” He told them, “Go and make disciples.” Our Savior never let His disciples rest on what had been done.

And what confidence Christ instilled in them. He would be with them and empower them until the task was complete. They could hardly wait to get going. Fear? No fear! Boldness? Yes, with assurance in the enablement of God. God calls us to the same confident future. Same goal. Same enablement.

Jesus has sent us into the world with a mission. You have fulfilled that mission in the past and are fulfilling it now. As is true in any healthy church, some are praying and thinking about how that mission will be fulfilled in the future.

We have a responsibility to the community around us, to proclaim the good news of salvation and model Christ’s love, acceptance, and forgiveness. We have a responsibility to our young people and new believers, to help prepare them for what they will face in life.

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We are obligated to have a part in sending the gospel around the globe. We have the duty of edifying one another so that, together, we live holy lives in our families and community.

How does that ministry look? Well, the ministry will be based on the foundation of the Word of God as it always has been. But the methods used will be different than they were 165 years ago, or 15 years ago for that matter. The world is changing rapidly. Our call is to minister in ways relevant to the culture. I trust the same God that has led this church for these many years will lead in the years to come.

See the photos and documents in the display provided by Sue Belden. Check out the concise history of the church at <http://fccofallegan.weebly.com/history.html>. There is more to learn in the larger history available in the church office. See the faith, commitment, and service of the past to strengthen, prepare, and propel you into the next generation of ministry in this place.

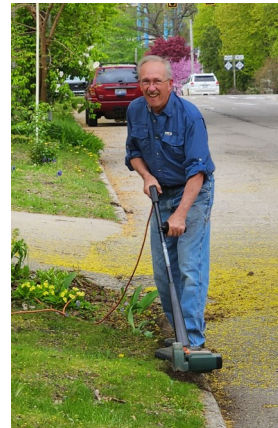
Above all, we are forward looking and forward moving. Confidently. 'Til He returns. - Pastor Greg

Church Cleanup

On any Sunday morning, our Cutler St. neighbors are used to the sound of church bells, hymns of praise and music. On Saturday, May 6, the church was a buzz with a cacophony of other sounds, such as the roar of a blower, the purr of an edger, the blast of a water nozzle, and a few hoots of laughter and good conversation. Throughout the year, we are thankful that the grounds of the church and parsonage are cared for by a few willing volunteers and some hired labor. Around a dozen participants met to spruce up our grounds in a coordinated effort.

Tasks included raking, weeding, pruning, edging, and cleaning gutters.

Once the work was completed, Todd fired up the grill in order that the many hands that made light work could share a meal together.



What Does it Mean?

by Todd Wagner

Romans 9:11-12 is said to be one of the most difficult passages to understand when it comes to the issue of salvation and for good reason. As we read this section, we quickly notice the phrase in verse 11 which says, “...**in order that God’s purpose in election might stand.**” (NIV) What does that mean? What is God’s purpose in ‘election’? Does God choose who is saved and who is not? For us to understand what Paul is saying to the people in the first century, we must look closer at the context and the words he uses.

When we examine the original Greek text, the word used by Paul for election here is the Greek word *eklogē*, which comes from the Greek *eklegomai* meaning “to choose”. This comes from the Greek root word *legō* which means to call. In other Bible translations, such as the NASB, Legacy Standard, the Amplified Bible, and the Aramaic Bible in English we see the word “election” is presented as “choice”. Knowing the meaning of election as used in the text, we can better understand the phrase as God’s purpose in His choice (or calling) might stand.

When reading this phrase in context, we see that Paul is talking about Rebekah’s children Jacob and Esau. Paul uses this illustration to show how God, in His divine sovereignty and foreknowledge, chooses who would be receptive to His call of redemption and salvation. To make his argument clear, in v.13 Paul refers to Scripture in **Malachi 1:2-3**. Paul explains God’s choice when he says, “**Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.**” Theologian and Bible commentator Douglas Moo explains, “That context is clearly covenantal, so that “love” means, in effect, “choose,” while “hate” means “reject”. We must understand here that God is not selecting people for salvation, rather His purpose is to choose those who would be receptive to His call for salvation. Going back to Jacob and Esau, Manfred Gutzke, author of “Plain Talk on Romans”, puts it this way. “He calls, and those who respond are the “elect”. Jacob would respond to the call...Esau would not...” (105). God knew Jacob would be responsive to His will and He also knew Esau would sell out his birth write for a simple meal. Jacob would endure to receive a later reward, but Esau lived for the here and now. Esau rejected God’s will, just like many Jews rejected their Messiah, Christ Jesus. Esau walked in the flesh, but Jacob would respond to God and later place his faith in Him. So, God chose who would receive the blessing. He changed the order of things.

So, we come to the question, does God choose who is saved and who is not? Absolutely not. He calls all people and nations to come to repentance and belief in His Son, Christ Jesus. We know this because Scripture tells us in **2 Peter 3:9** which states, “**The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**” But

knowing who will respond, God freely chooses. Because all but a few Jews rejected Christ, God chose the Gentiles to receive salvation. His purpose, and Paul’s desire, was that Israel’s behavior would change. That they would want this gift and come to receive their Messiah. Douglas Moo says Paul’s theology is practical, He teaches that the “Truth about God is that which must change our perspective and, ultimately, our behavior.” This is what Paul was trying to do also. To change the behavior of his people, the people of Israel. To put this in a modern-day perspective, let’s say a plane carrying 50 people crashed in a remote area. Later, a rescue team arrived to take all 50



You know, predestination would speed things up on Judgment Day.

What Does It Mean? (cont.)

by Todd Wagner

to safety, but 10 refused to leave. Then a second crew came for the 10 and pleaded with them to come, but they still refused. As a result, the 10 would eventually perish. The second crew tried to change their behavior, but they freely chose to reject rescue. Because God knows all things, He chose to bring the other 40 to safety. God chooses whom He wishes, but He calls all of us to believe in His Son, Jesus Christ. Our actions determine our fate. To believe or to reject Jesus will lead to God's choice when it comes to salvation.

So, what is our responsibility as believers? Clearly, it is to embrace the Gospel message and maintain our faith and trust in Jesus. But I challenge you to do much more. I challenge you to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to those who need to hear it. It's not our job to make others believe, but it is our job as sons and daughters of God to proclaim the Gospel. Once you've done this, then it'll be up to the individual to accept God's call, or to reject it. Only God knows who will do so.



YOU SEEM TO HAVE SOME HARDENING OF THE HEART, WHICH COULD BE PROBLEMATIC IF NOT CORRECTED

Ladies' Banquet 2023

What a blessing to gather with 60 ladies for the annual Ladies' Banquet on Tuesday, May 9th. Dinner and desserts donated by Jessica Hernandez of Bit of Swiss (and Susan Lucas's daughter) were served. Dorr prizes and table favors were whimsical fairy gardens and décor. Pam Johnson donated several fairy figurines in memory of her mother, Gloria Lane. Elsie Jones captured the memory by offering complimentary group photos. Becky Wallace encouraged the audience to live by JOY: Jesus first, others next, and yourself last. Her humor and examples of faith helped to encourage hearts.



Each week following service, the Women's Fellowship hosts coffee and snacks to help foster community within our church family. How can you participate? Please stay after and join us Sunday mornings. Also, let Julie (269-673-4071) know if you would like to host one Sunday to celebrate a special occasion. We'll be right along side you to help with the coffee, set-up, & clean up.



The Key

On May 21, FCC hosted a special Homecoming Service. The celebration was inspired with the thought that “Jesus is the Key.” He alone gives us hope and strengthens us with His glorious power. The ceremony combined beautiful music from the congregation, choir, our Word of God youth, the ukulele band and an organ/piano duet. Pastor Greg reminded us that “The key from moving on up from trouble to triumph is in Jesus Christ. It is in Him that we have strength. It is in Him that we have victory.” Our prayer was that this special homecoming service would help those heal from the lasting effects of loss, grief, loneliness, and difficulty experienced through the pandemic.



Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Phil 4:4

Picture Top Right: The FCC choir sing *On Eagle’s Wings* directed by Elaine Cochran and accompanied by Phil Siegler. Photo credit: Mark Lovett. **Below (clockwise from top)** Finn & Madds Luedecking singing *Jesus Loves Me* with Sue Belden & Julie DeHaan. Laying down and letting go our burdens at the base of the cross. Scripture reading by our diaconate: Jeff Polonowski, Joanie Townsend, Amy Hansen, Rick Allen, Sue Belden, Todd Wagner, & Jeff Brown. The Ukulele Band accompanying Alida Letts & Olivia Belden singing *Marvelous Light*. The day concluded with pool fun at the Allegan Aquatic Center. Photo credit: Elsie Jones





Mission Update

It's graduation season here. Can you hear the pomp & circumstance? Can you see the rows of caps & gowns, the smiles, maybe a few tears? There is recognition of achievement and well wishes for much success in the future. It is the conclusion of the chapter of undergraduate education. Graduation in Hungary looks a bit different. The students of Will Dickerson had their final school day on May 4. This was followed by a formal farewell ceremony called *Ballagás*. He explains, "The students will walk slowly through the building, while friends and family weigh them down with bouquets of flowers and other mementos. The students will end up in the courtyard, where they will listen to speeches, poems, and songs sung in their honor." This is followed by written and oral exams in five subjects through the end of June. The results of these exams determine what paths students may take in the future.

Prayer Requests:

- Please continue praying for Will's testimony to reach his students' hearts and for the fellowship that will take place as the students visit the Dickersons for pizza & movie nights.
- Praise for reconnecting with former students
- Continue praying for the relationship building with Balázs and Janka
- Upcoming summer evangelistic English camp ministry in late June and July. "You can pray that God would give wisdom and guidance to those who are putting together the curriculum. You can pray that God would bring together a great staff. We are still looking for a few more Hungarians who can help translate. You can pray, too, that the students would come with open hearts. Pray that the seeds that are planted this summer would find fertile soil and would grow and produce a many-fold crop."

Community Events: 2023 Walk4Life

On June 24th, 2023, Walk4life prayer walk at Jaycee Park brings together the pro-abundant life community to celebrate the recent overturning of Roe vs. Wade and to continue our mission of advocating for the protection of innocent life. Walk for Life is a simple way for people of all ages to get involved by actively demonstrating support for the value of human life. By raising funds and walking yourself or sponsoring another, you help the ministry of Positive Options advance its mission to love people to life before, during, and after a pregnancy decision.



Other events in downtown Allegan:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Friday evening concerts 6:30-9:30 | Food Truck Rally on Monday evenings |
| Bridgefest 6/10 | Jubilee 7/3 |

Want a future community event listed? Contact the office to let us know.



Happy Anniversary






17 Terry & Pam Johnson
 21 Jim & Cathy Morgan
 Gary & Dawn Henningson
 26 Doug & Marty Nooney
 28 Phil & Janet Siegler

01 Gerry Harris
 10 Susan Lucas
 12 George Viening
 13 Carson Wagner
 23 Rick Allen
 25 Phil Siegler



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 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Dinner	2 8 Food Warehouse	3
4 9 Breakfast 10:30 Worship CE Mtg 	5	6	7 5:45 Prayer Mtg	8 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Dinner	9 8 Food Warehouse	10 8:30 Men's Breakfast
11 9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship 	12 5:30 Women's Fellowship Mtg	13 7 Diaconate Mtg	14 10 Grief Group 5:45 Prayer Mtg	15 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Take-out Dinner	16 8 Food Warehouse	17
18 9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship 	19	20	21 5:45 Prayer Mtg	22 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Take-out Dinner	23 8 Food Warehouse	24
25 9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship	26	27	28 10 Grief Group 5:45 Prayer Mtg	29	30	



The First Congregational Church of Allegan

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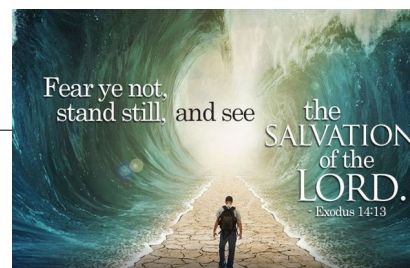
Worship with us on Sundays at 10:30 AM!

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Stand Still

Excerpted from *Streams in the Desert*

God's command in Exodus 14:13 to the believer when he is reduced to great straits and brought into extraordinary difficulties: Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord...



Despair whispers, "Lie down and die; give it all up." But God would have us put on a cheerful courage, and even in our worst times, rejoice in His love and faithfulness.

Cowardice says, "Retreat; go back to the worldling's way of action; you cannot play the Christian's part; it is too difficult. Relinquish your principles." But, however much Satan may urge this course upon you, you cannot follow it, if you are a child of God. His Divine fiat has bid thee go from strength to strength, and so thou shalt, and neither death nor hell shall turn thee from thy course.

Precipitancy cries, "Do something; stir yourself; to stand still and wait is sheer idleness." We must be doing something at once instead of looking to the Lord, who will not only do something, but will do everything.

Presumption boasts, "If the sea be before you, march into it, and expect a miracle." But faith listens neither to Presumption, nor to Despair, nor to Cowardice, nor to Precipitancy, but it hears God say, "Stand still," and immovable as a rock it stands.

"Stand still" - keep the posture of an upright man, ready for action, expecting further orders, cheerfully and patiently awaiting the directing voice; and it will not be long ere God shall say to you, as distinctly as Moses said it to the people of Israel, "Go forward."