



The Allegan Congregationalist

March 2023

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

An Introduction, Part Three by Greg Carlson



Upcoming Events:

- 4/9 Christ Is Risen! Easter Sunday
- 5/9 Ladies' Banquet
- 5/12 CCCC Spring Conference
- 7/30 Annual Picnic & Outdoor Service

Now that you know a little about me, I wanted to give you a big picture view of what I see as my responsibilities as your interim pastor. In meeting with the FCC leadership team, I drew up the following outline.

- ✚ Get acquainted and earn trust
- ✚ Steady the church by focusing on Christ and commitment to His Word
- ✚ Figure out who is responsible for what in church structure in an organizational sense
- ✚ Form teaching agenda with church leadership for Sunday 10:30AM services
- ✚ Address any conflict in the church. The interim pastor group I work with (IMI/SOS) is available to help here if needed.
- ✚ Focus on church's mission of doing discipleship together
- ✚ See how introducing people to Jesus Christ and training those who know him can best be accomplished by those who are currently a part of FCC
- ✚ Encourage further leadership development
- ✚ Develop intentional strategic plan that evaluates current and future processes and ministries so that church is aligned with God's vision for it
- ✚ Communicate strategic progress and regular updates about pastoral search to congregation for prayer
- ✚ Celebrate God's provision for the church during interim
- ✚ Call a biblically qualified pastor who fits the vision and strategic initiative

Obviously, all this work requires prayer. I daily pray for the church as a whole. I use the church directory to lift up a few people each morning. Please join me in prayer as God continues to use FCC for his glory. .

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First Things First

by Todd Wagner

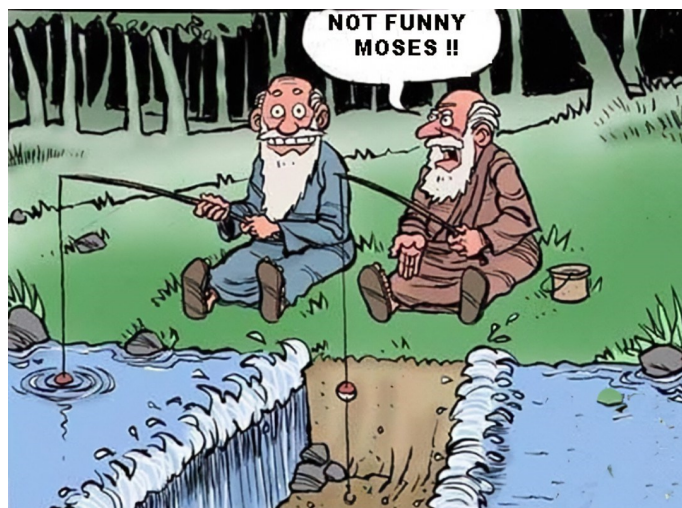
Face it, we all have priorities. Our world keeps us busier than ever causing us to be constantly on the go. Unfortunately, being so overloaded causes stress and anxiety. Whether it is responsibilities with home, work, school, church, and volunteering; or kids and grandkids, doctor appointments, and finances, we set priorities. Even in our downtime, we establish priorities.

In the book of Ezekiel, we read, “The best of all first fruits and all your special gifts will belong to the priests. You are to give them the first portion of your ground meal so that a blessing may rest on your household.” Ezekiel 44:30. This is the instruction God provided when restoring Israel and the priesthood. God had enough of the people’s detestable practices. Right now, I’m sure you’re wondering what this has to do with us today and our priorities in life. Well, hang in there, I promise I will tie this in shortly. Now, I am going to shift gears a little and talk about stewardship. This a topic that hasn’t been addressed much here in the church, and no, I am not going to bring up money. I will address the stewardship of time, which will soon tie into Ezekiel.

We know that from the beginning of time, God created everything (Genesis 1-2). This means that everything God has created belongs to Him and that He allows us to have things here on earth and requires good stewardship. In this, we're not only to take care of earthly possessions but also the time God has given every one of us. We are to use our time wisely because the days on which we live are evil, and we do not know the day or hour when our Lord comes (Matthew 25:13). To use our time wisely means to use it to prepare for eternity. How is your relationship with God? With Jesus? If God demanded your life from you right now, are you prepared to stand before His throne of judgment? Before the bema seat? The point is: time is short and uncertain. Solomon declares in Ecclesiastes 3:1-2, “There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heavens, a time to be born and a time to die.” Solomon’s wisdom teaches us that our life is a vapor that is here one minute and gone the next.

Time is easily lost and is one thing that we can never regain. We should value every minute. Time is also something for which we are held accountable. In Romans 14:11-12, Paul reminds us, “It is written: As surely as I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow before Me, every tongue will acknowledge God. So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.” When you go through your day, how much of the time God has given you do you spend with Him? How much time do you spend in prayer, song, praise, or worship? The more time you spend with God, with Christ Jesus who is our Savior and advocate before the Father, the stronger relationship you will have with Him.

Getting back to Ezekiel... God said, “the best of all first fruits and all your special gifts will belong to the priests.... You are to give them the first portion”. The application of this passage for us today is this: When



you go through your day, what portion of time do you give to God, and when do you give it to Him? Jesus is our High Priest. We should be good stewards and give Him our first fruits, the first portion of our time. We should adjust our priorities to spend time with Him. Instead of getting our coffee, flipping on the tv news, or jumping on our phones or social media apps, shouldn't we spend a little time with our Lord? It would be a wise investment of time now for eternity to come. Wouldn't you rather enter God's kingdom as a well-known child of God than a stranger who barely has a relationship with Jesus?

Proverbs 27:1 says, "Do not boast about tomorrow, you do not know what a day may bring." Don't fall under the illusion that you can save, buy, borrow, or makeup time. You can't. Pastor and author Donald Whitney says that giving to God is measured in the heart, and the standard of measurement that is used is the depth of love for God. As you go throughout your days, think about where your priorities lie. Are you putting non-necessities before God? Do you use Sunday as a day to stay and sleep-in to relieve yourself of your stress and anxiety? Do you put other activities before God? Maybe it's time to re-prioritize. Jesus made us His priority; shouldn't we make Him ours? Even the first ten minutes of our day? I think the High Priest is most deserving of the first fruits of our time. Let's invest in eternity and strengthen our relationship with Jesus and the Father. With that first portion, God's blessing will be on your household. What a promise to receive! Biblical giving, whether time, talent, or treasure, displays a heart that worships God. Where will your priorities lie?

The Role of a Deacon, Part Two

by Todd Wagner

In last month's newsletter, I wanted to share with everyone a better understanding of what a deacon is within the Congregational Church setting and their role in ministry. I felt this fitting since we're in a pastoral transition period, and your deacons will be working carefully and diligently with our Intentional Interim Pastor Greg Carlson over the next several months to explore our church, its mission, values, and vision for the future. Not to mention, examining areas within the church that require healing or improvement which leads to growth. Again, 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.



Last month, I covered the attributes, responsibilities, and qualifications of a deacon. This month, we'll examine the role of relationships. Individuals in positions of lay leadership are and can be influential. If a pastor is to ever succeed in a church, he needs advocates and not adversaries. The deacon helps to foster a productive environment within the church and with the pastor, so the church is welcoming, pleasant, and affirming. A church where people are appreciated and encouraged cultivates growth. They help each other identify weaknesses and foster solutions. The deacon is part of mutual support not only with the pastor but also with other deacons. They engage in continuing education together, delegate and share responsibilities and use their gifts for the ministry, whether that involves visiting sick or homebound members, scheduling activities, or hosting and leading Bible study. Whatever occurs in the church, the deacon ensures it aligns with the mission of the church. Above all else, the deacon prays. They pray for members of the church, for each other, and for other lay leaders and the pastor.

The Role of a Deacon, Part Two

by Todd Wagner

Now we come to the more visual piece which many of you are accustomed to which involves the duties performed by the deacon. As we all know, the deacon is involved with regular participation in worship, but this doesn't mean just on Sunday. The deacon must be involved with matters such as, "Why are we doing this in worship?," and "Why are we doing this now?" The deacon must know and understand the Scriptures, church doctrine, and traditions. The deacon is responsible for the Lord's Supper which you experience every month. They prepare the sacred meal, set the table, and help serve during worship. The deacon must be prepared to speak on this subject and why it is practiced within the church.

The deacon also participates in lay ministry which includes the reading of Scripture, prayer (both public and private), and even preaching. The deacon is involved with music, working with the music committee to ensure that it is appropriate for proper worship and aligns with Scripture. In the absence of the pastor, the deacon is responsible for pulpit supply. They're to know resources within the community and the church. A deacon has the responsibility to encourage and support their pastor in Bible study activities. Deacons and lay leadership should strive to teach and lead Bible study along with the pastor. A deacon is a person who is ready to discuss spiritual needs if the opportunity arises, which may include sharing faith statements or personal testimony. The deacon must be a person who grows in the assurance of personal faith and helps others within the congregation grow in theirs. When it comes to growth, the deacon is involved with growing the church with prospective new members. As you can see, there's a lot to be accomplished by someone who is a deacon and I've only given you a closer look without getting deep into all the smaller details. Above all else, the deacon is a servant. Words alone are not enough. Action is required, as explained by the apostle James 2:15-17.

Sounds like a lot of work, doesn't it? To be candid, it is a lot of work, but when the work is spread out and Christ is in the middle of it all, the work becomes easy and rewarding. So, what are the rewards of being a deacon?

1. There is spiritual growth. When deacons get out of their comfort zone and allow God complete control, His wisdom and power flow through them as God then uses them as He wills to His glory.
2. There is the satisfaction of deepening relationships with people.
3. A deacon is a witness to miracles. Miracles of when the impossible is accomplished and whenever lives are opened to the power of the gospel and people come to Christ.

So, do you have what it takes? Would you desire such a calling? It can be demanding and uncomfortable at times. When we allow God to lead us, the rewards are much more than anyone could ask for. Now you should have a better idea of what your deacons do within the Congregational Church. Over this next year, they will continue learning, leading, teaching, and preaching. They'll be encouraging, serving, and working with our Pastor Carlson. If this appeals to you, seek God, and pray. Ask Him for guidance and to speak to your heart. Get into His word and listen to His calling for you. Let me close with a word from Hebrews 13:17-18a which says, "Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you. Pray for us."

Happenings in Hungary

by Will Dickerson



March is here! It is not quite spring yet, but we have seen some definite signs that it is on its way. Despite the fact that February was a short month, it was a very full month for us. For one thing, I had several medical appointments and underwent a multitude of tests. Somehow, I managed to contract an infection in my left eye. So, I had to make several trips to an ophthalmologist. She prescribed some antibiotic eye drops that helped clear things up. However, she said the infection in my eye was probably a secondary infection. She then sent me to an ENT. The ENT checked me out and found some swelling in my sinuses, but she couldn't say for sure if I had an infection. She prescribed some medicine and ordered a CT scan of my head. The CT scan didn't find anything in my cranium. I am not sure if that is good or bad. The CT scan, however, did detect some irregularities in my thyroid, so my family doctor ordered two high-definition ultrasound examinations of my thyroid and of the arteries in my neck. So far, none of the doctors and none of the tests have found anything that can't be explained by age-related decrepitude. My next encounter with the Hungarian medical system is coming up next week, when I have my quarterly PSA test (following up on last year's cancer surgery.) After that, I really hope I won't have to deal with the medical system for a while.

As many of you know, I teach English at Szent László Gimnázium. This is one of Budapest's elite public secondary schools. My "seniors" will have their last day of class on April 28. After that, they will spend the months of May and June taking their final exams/university entrance exams. They will have to take written and oral exams in five subjects. The results of these tests will go a long way in determining whether or not they get into university. As you can imagine, this is a time of high anxiety for these teenagers. Over the last several months, we have watched several films and read some material on the topics of faith, hope, and love. In the time that I have remaining with these students, I hope to tie the three topics together by looking at 1 Corinthians 13. I also hope to share with them in a very clear way why I am a follower of Christ. I would very much appreciate your prayers for this during the weeks ahead.



Meanwhile, Julia continues to teach Sunday School to the school-aged children in our congregation. She was encouraged recently when one of the children told her mother how much she enjoyed coming to church because she loved Julia's lessons. In February, Julia also played a leading role when the Mama-Baba Klub (MOPS ministry) met. The topic was "Fighting Fair in Marriage." Several of the mothers present listened very intently as Julia shared from her experiences. The Mama-Baba Klub will meet again on Wednesday, March 8. The topic will be "Purpose-Driven Moms." Please remember to pray for this meeting. Julia continues to bake up a storm on a regular basis. In addition to whipping up an assortment of goodies for the Mama-Baba Klub once a month, she also bakes treats for the weekly English Club. She rarely comes home with any leftovers. I am not sure, but I think the one young man, Simon, comes primarily in the expectation of sampling Julia's baked goods.

Last week, our congregation held its first Sunday afternoon luncheon since COVID disrupted everyone's lives. It was good to eat and fellowship together once again after the worship service. As expected, there was some very fine fare offered. Julia supplied a broccoli salad that drew raves, as well as some freshly-baked "spoon rolls" (from my grandmother's recipe.)

Happenings in Hungary, continued

by Will Dickerson

Your prayers for strength and good health would be much appreciated! I am somewhat weary of dealing with the Hungarian medical system. My preference would be to avoid future contact as much as possible. Please pray, too, for Julia's eyesight. She suffers from retinitis pigmentosa, and she has noticed a significant decline in her vision over the last year or so. Ask God to grant her good, clear vision.

As mentioned in a previous letter, you can also pray for a woman by the name of Goddard Zsuzsanna (Zsuzsi) who has come off-and-on to the Mama-Baba Klub and to church. Her husband passed away very suddenly about 8 months ago, and Zsuzsi has been struggling greatly ever since. It turns out she is a neighbor of ours, and we have had her over here once already. You can ask God to give her comfort, and also to give us wisdom to know how best to minister to her many needs. Zsuzsi also has a 14-year-old adopted son named Marcel, who could also use your prayers.

Once again, we would like to express our deep thanks and appreciation to you for all your prayers and support. We are most grateful for the kindness and generosity shown to us by so many of you as we try to let our light shine. We could not do what we are doing here if it were not for you standing behind us in so many ways. Thank you!

Ladies' Banquet

The ladies' fellowship is making plans for our annual Ladies' Banquet. The event will be hosted in the church fellowship hall on Tuesday, May 9th. The evening begins with dinner and concludes with a program. Over the years, we've had much fun creating memories for women of all ages. Past themes have included:

- 2007 We are Pearls for Christ
- 2008 A Mother's Love—Bob Lucas
- 2009 & 2014 Queen for a Day—
Sentimental Journey
- 2011 Hat Theme—God's Helping Hands
- 2012 & 2013 Blessings of Spring —
Renee Hudson, Magician
- 2015 Memories of Yesteryear—FCC talent
- 2016 Tea Pot
- 2017 On Butterfly Wings—Uncle Tim Marsh
- 2018 Bedtime Stories—FCC talent program
- 2019 Adventure Awaits—Joannie Brummel
- 2021 Grace Spilled Over—Kristi Husby

Do you have ideas for this year's event? Do you know of a guest speaker or entertainer? We meet Monday 3/13 at 5:30 to formulate ideas. Please join us or see Theresa Prolo.



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.



Happy Anniversary

25 Bob & Joan Simmons

31 Ted & Julie DeHaan



- 01 Al Trutsch
- 06 Finn Luedecking
- 07 Ally Brown
Barb Brower
- 13 Dawn Henningson
- 24 Marty Nooney
- 29 Mark Lovett



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

MARCH 2023

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 5:45 Prayer Mtg	3 8 Food Warehouse	4
5 9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship Noon CE Mtg	6	7	8 10 Grief Group 5:45 Prayer Mtg	9 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Take-out Dinner	10 8 Food Warehouse	11 8:30 Men's Breakfast 
12 9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship Noon Trustee Mtg	13 5:30 Women's Fellowship Mtg	14 7 Diaconate Mtg	15 5:45 Prayer Mtg	16 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Take-out Dinner	17 8 Food Warehouse	18
19 9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship	20	21	22 10 Grief Group 5:45 Prayer Mtg	23 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Take-out Dinner	24 8 Food Warehouse	25
26 9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship	27	28	29	30	31	LITURGIST: Jeff Polonowski GREETER: Rick Allen

The First Congregational Church of Allegan



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Worship with us on Sundays at 10:30 AM!

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Cultivate a Yes-life!

Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash. Matthew 7:24-27

Where is your foundation? Are you getting daily reinforcements and delight from God's word? Last year, missionary Kristi Huseby was our guest speaker at the Ladies' Banquet. In her new Bible study, *She Who Dares*, Kristi asks, "Is it possible to live a life in tune with God—ready to go, do, say, and be whatever He desires? Where fear no longer has the last word in every discussion? Where we continually lean into Him and listen to His voice instead of the myriad of voices around us? Is it possible? I believe it is!"

Would you join me in prayer to seek God's help in cultivating a Yes-life? Father, I remember times when I was closer to You. I see Your fingerprints in my life and in nature and praise you for past trials and triumphs. Lord, it's harder to see in now-vision, to listen to Your quiet, still voice, to hush the busy and the self. Help me. Help me to remember you are my first love. Help me to remember you are for my good and know me best. Help me to lie down my life, take up my cross, and follow You. Help me to not fear, but to listen, to trust You, to be in step and follow You through life's dance. Amen.

