



The Allegan Congregationalist

January 2024

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

Expect God in the New Year by Greg Carlson



Upcoming Events:

- 1/19 Annual Reports due to the office
- 1/20 Men's Breakfast
- 1/21 Teen Game Night
- 1/22 Secret Sister Reveal Party
- 1/28 Annual Meeting

Inside this issue:

Expect God in the New Year	1, 5
Update on our Journey	2
Therefore, Be It Resolved	3-4
Announcements	6
Missionary Updates	7-8
Calendar & Birthdays	9

Dear reader, what do you think of with the words,

Expect God in the New Year?

If you respond, "Anticipate that Jesus is coming again in 2024," that would be a good answer. But I'm actually thinking about a different expectation. Hear the affirmation of the Psalmist, "My soul, wait only upon God. For my expectation is from Him" (Psalm 62:5).

As you submissively follow the Lord Jesus throughout this new year, your life will be saturated with His presence and working in all things. You may not always understand or feel comfortable with what He is doing. But His glory, your good, and the good of those with whom you live will be the truth of your existence. So, believers, "Expect God."

I have seen throughout my life that God "works all things after the counsel of His own will" (Ephesians 1:11). It is always interesting to see his unseen hand at work. As we determine to expect God, we'll plant deeply within our hearts the belief that *all* things truly are working together for good. Our hearts will be full regardless of circumstance because we are anticipating that the living God will be awaiting us in every moment, and He will be who He is in the blessed, the difficult, and the mundane.

The world, the devil, and the flesh will constantly tempt us to expect everything but God. If we respond in such unbelief, our Heavenly Father may allow us to reap the consequences of our carnal anticipation. If, however, we put to death fleshly and devilish expectations, we will harvest the fruit of the Spirit God has planted. We will find our Lord and know Him because we are believing the Bible that declares that "to live is Christ."

Hear the Apostle Paul's expectation in the following verse:

"For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ." (Philippians 1:21).

(continued pg. 5)

Update on our Journey-2024 Edition

Well, here we are, another year has passed, and it still amazes me how time flies by so quickly, though it shouldn't since Solomon spoke of time and life as a vapor in Ecclesiastes. Last July, I took the opportunity to address First Congregational Church with a plan that was developed between Pastor Greg, the church council, and the deacons. If you recall, this was a detailed five-phase plan that would address not only the health of the church but also lay out a clear path forward to calling a new full-time pastor. As a refresher, this is what the plan looks like:

1. Phase One was the introductory phase where Pastor Greg would get settled in the church.
2. Phase Two involved Pastor Greg rolling up his sleeves, and analyzing our policies, constitution, and by-laws.
3. Phase Three is our church development survey and implementation of the S.W.O.T. analysis – strengthening our weaknesses and capitalizing on our strengths.
4. Phase Four is where the search committee digs in and searches to find and call the next pastor for First Congregational Church.
5. Phase Five is the transitional period where Pastor Greg and pastor-next exchange the torch of leadership as the new pastor is guided into his role here.

Though church leadership had hoped to be in phase three by this time, phase two took longer than anticipated. This is not a bad thing, because it allowed us to carefully and meticulously study and develop a solid revision to our constitution and by-laws, making them biblically sound and intelligible. Right now, we believe we have finally come to the completion of six months' worth of hard work that involved much prayer, many meetings, and countless hours of discussion. Moving forward, it is our hope and prayer we'll be able to present to the congregation the work that has been done, and that the recommended revisions can be presented to the congregation at our annual meeting. Once this is done, and God willing, approved by the congregation, we'll be ready to jump immediately into Phases three and four, completing the survey and study of the church and gearing up the search committee to begin its task.

I ask everyone here at F.C.C. to pray for continued progress in these endeavors. Pray for wisdom for those involved in these committees, and pray for God's will to be done, so we can continue to please Him in everything we say and do.

Membership Classes

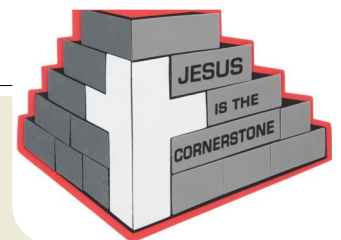
Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

1 Cor 12 :27

Membership is not participation in a club, but a scriptural expression of covenant connectedness in the body of Christ.

1. Membership reflects what the church actually is, members of one another.
2. The Bible teaches covenant community.
3. Membership declares accountability and obedience to spiritual leaders as they follow Christ.
4. Membership offers the benefit of correction with loving church discipline.

Please see Pastor Greg if you are interested in learning more about membership at the First Congregational Church. He recently preached on this topic (the video is now available on our YouTube channel.) A new members' class will soon be offered. Participants will learn more about what it means to be a Congregationalist and what we believe. There is no obligation to join upon completion of the class.



Therefore, be it resolved. . .

by Todd Wagner

My title this month is a common phrase used in many documents, and one that I have come to be very familiar with over the years. It is used regularly in legal documents by city, township, or state governments when new laws are drafted and put into effect. This phrase is also commonly used in corporate resolutions, written meeting minutes, or other legal documents where certain decisions are documented. It is a simple statement that says a problem was recognized, and a solution was developed giving birth to a resolution implemented in corporate policy, local ordinance, or law.

This phrase is even in the Bible. We first see it in the book of Genesis. The “Be it resolved” statement is in **Gen. 3:14** where God says, “*Because you have done this...*” This is where the first Gospel (The Protoevangelium) is mentioned, where mankind's salvation is determined. Other examples are found in the OT books where we read, “*Thus says the LORD...*”, and we again see it throughout the NT, with the most well-known passage of **John 3:16-21**. As finite sinful beings, we are filled with problems, but God always has a resolution to our problems.

As we enter a new year, many will make their “New Year's resolutions” based on reflection of the previous year, or where they feel they have problems they want to fix or resolve. A quick Google search reveals several of these “New Year's resolutions”, many of which are repeats, just worded differently. For example, the old resolutions of going on a diet or losing weight can now be seen as, “Eat mindfully” or “Focus on why you're eating.” The problem remains, and changing the wording won't fix it. Other resolutions consist of “Focus on your financial health,” “Find one thing you like about yourself,” “Improve your financial well-being,” and the list goes on. The common theme here is focusing on oneself. It's no wonder why these resolutions usually end in failure and people give up on them within the first 3 months. When our focus in life is skewed or misdirected, our ability to make positive change fails. However, when our focus is clear and steady, remarkable things happen.

While many resolutions are focused on oneself, some turn our focus toward the One who brings us love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness (**Gal. 5:22**). For example, one of the popular resolutions for 2024 is “Read one book per month from diverse genres.” Now you can choose to read whatever you desire, but I challenge you to read from one book that contains 66 other books. Yep, the Bible. Nowhere else will you find a selection of diverse genres all in one place. Another 2024 resolution is to “Learn and grow.” Guess what, no matter how old you are and how many times you read it, reading God's Word

REVERENDFUN.COM COPYRIGHT BIBLE GATEWAY



12-29-2014

MY NEW YEARS RESOLUTION THIS YEAR IS
TO DO THE THINGS I SHOULD HAVE BEEN
DOING LAST YEAR

Therefore, be it resolved. . . (cont.)

will help you learn and grow – especially spiritually! Instead of “improving your financial well-being,” how about improving your spiritual well-being? ***“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matt 6:21; Lk 12:34).*** Other popular resolutions for 2024 include “Engage more socially with your community” and “Strengthen your family relationships.” Many have yet to return to worship with their church family. Why not make this the year of new beginnings and take that bold step of faith to worship God with fellow believers? How long will you or someone you know hold onto problems that no longer exist? How long will you wait to find healing? There’s a reason why the apostle Paul carefully explains the importance of being an active part of the body of Christ (**1 Cor 12:12-27**) and why the writer of Hebrews calls us to persevere and not to neglect meeting together (**Heb 10:19-25**). Do not throw away your confidence but persevere in the days ahead so you will have done the will of God (**Heb 10:35-36**).

Finally, a 2024 resolution many have made is to choose a “word of the year.” While this seems open-ended, and somewhat quirky, I would challenge each of you to do this. I challenge everyone reading this to choose the word “Gospel.” Make the Gospel your priority this year, and share it with others, beginning right in your own homes and with your own family. Share it in the workplace, and the coffee shops. Share it in a card sent to a friend or share it while volunteering. God’s Word and the Gospel of Jesus are our lamp to our feet and a light to our path (**Psalm 18:28; 119:105**). In these last days, give someone the hope they desire and need! The hope that surpasses all their failed New Year’s resolutions for a better New Year. The word is near you, the word of faith that we as believers proclaim; ***“...that if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord”, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with your heart you believe, and are justified, and with your mouth you confess and are saved” (Rom 10:9-10).***

Therefore, be it resolved – let us put God first and do His will, not ours, in 2024.



The FCC Annual Meeting will be held on Sunday, 1/28, following our worship service. In this meeting, we will review what has happened in our various committees over the past year as well as elect those who will serve in the future. Please come. If you are a board chair, your written report is due to the office no later than Friday, January 19th.

Expect God in the New Year (cont.)



Secret Sister Gathering



Listen to how Mary Fairchild expresses the thought in the following poem.

A New Year's Plan

I tried to think of a clever new phrase—
A slogan to inspire the next 365 days,
A motto to live by this coming New Year,
But the catchy words fell flat to my ear.

And then I heard His still small voice
Saying, "Consider this simple, daily choice:
With each new dawn and close of day
Make new your resolve to trust and obey."

"Don't look back, caught in regret
Or dwell on the sorrow of dreams unmet;
Don't stare forward anchored by fear,
No, live in this moment, for I Am here."

"I am all you need. Everything. I Am.
You are held secure by my strong hand.
Give me this one thing—your all in all;
Into my grace, let yourself fall."

So, at last, I'm ready; I see the way.
It's to daily follow, trust, and obey.
I enter the New Year armed with a plan,
To give Him my everything—all that I am.



MAY THE *God* OF *hope*
FILL YOU WITH *all joy* AND *peace*
AS YOU *trust* IN *Him*, SO THAT
YOU MAY *overflow* WITH *hope*
BY THE *power* OF THE *Holy Spirit*.
Romans 15:13

The Secret Sister program is a ministry of encouragement amongst women at FCC. Participants have been paired with a sister in Christ who has offered encouragement and prayer throughout the past year. Our goal has been to foster deeper connections with one another and the time has come for the Reveal Gathering!

An Invitation

Date: Monday, January 22

Time: 6:30 PM

Location: At the Church Dining Room

We'll gather for a sweet time of fellowship over dinner and find out who our secret sister has been.

PS If you are interested in ladies' programming at FCC but were not able to participate in the program, you are welcome to gather with us.

To our church family: Just want you to know how grateful I am for all your love, prayers, and support through this very difficult year with the passing of my Dad, and daughter, Elaina. I am so very thankful for each and everyone and thank you for welcoming my mom to our congregation. I'm wishing everyone had a very Merry Christmas and blessed New Year.

With love,

Paul and Lisa





Teen Game Night

Hey Teens!

Engaging Families to Grow Kids in the Gospel

We're looking forward to
GAME NIGHT with you at FCC!

Sunday, 1/21 at 5:30 PM

Subs, Mac 'n Cheese, desserts and more provided.
INVITE your friends, girlfriends, boyfriends!



Get your Monday preparations done early so we can get together and have food and fun!

Please RSVP to Mrs. B @ 269-806-8993 so we can plan accordingly.

Proposed Constitution and Bylaws Update



On Sunday, January 7, church membership voted unanimously to approve the quorum amendment.

Moving forward, we will have a vote on Sunday, January 28 regarding the proposed revisions and updates to our constitution and bylaws. This will conclude almost a year's worth of work, long hours, and many meetings by the church leadership and Pastor Greg. The diaconate and church council are unanimous in their support of the proposed revisions.

Digital copies were emailed on 1/12. Paper copies are available during church office hours. In order to address and respond to questions, we would appreciate your questions to be submitted within the week of 1/14. Questions should be directed to Pastor Greg, Todd Wagner, or Mark Lovett.



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.



Update from the Dickerson's

Excerpt from Will's
Jan. newsletter

We hope that you and your families had a very merry Christmas and that the New Year has gotten off to a good start for you. For us, December was an interesting mixture of weird and wonderful. On the weird side, it turns out the last thing Julia's father bequeathed to his family was scabies. Unbeknownst to us, last summer there was a scabies outbreak in the nursing home where Julia's father had been staying. He probably passed the scabies to Julia's mom, who was then misdiagnosed for 6 months, and to Julia's daughter. Fortunately, a dermatologist in Budapest properly diagnosed the problem. (And this led to a proper diagnosis for Julia's mom.) For treatment, Julia and I had to smear ourselves from our chins to the soles of our feet with a medicated cream called "InfectoScab." We then had to get another prescription cream concocted by the pharmacist. This regimen lasted 7 days and was accompanied by a very deep house clean. After one week, we had to repeat the whole process. Based on the odor, consistency, and texture of the pharmacist's concoction, I am guessing the two main ingredients were lard and citronella. In case you are feeling jealous and you wish you could experience similar adventures in healthcare, it really wasn't as fun as it sounds.



Unfortunately, in December, we learned that a friend of ours, Kee Jae Shin, a Korean missionary in Budapest has pancreatic cancer. Kee Jae and his wife, Kyung Sook, lead a small congregation in Budapest. It seems that his cancer is advancing rapidly, and he is experiencing a lot of pain. Please keep him, his family, and his congregation in your prayers. He asked me to preach for him on Sunday 12/3. He said it would be preferable if I could do so in Hungarian. With some help, I was able to do so. For the foreseeable future, I will be preaching at this church on a monthly basis. I am scheduled to speak again on 1/28. I would appreciate your prayers as I prepare.

In December, we hosted pizza/movie parties for three of my classes. Over the course of the three evenings, 43 teenagers consumed ten large trays of pizza, three crockpots of mulled apple cider, a large amount of fruit salad, numerous bas of chips, nachos, salsa, and lots and lots of homemade cookies. We watched the old classic *It's A Wonderful Life*. Afterward, many stayed and chatted with us.

We spent Christmas with Julia's family in Asheboro. This was the first Christmas since Julia's mom was 16 that Julia's dad was not a part of the celebration. Julia's mom turns 89 later this month. We had a great time with the family, and there was no shortage of fine fare, and frequent mentions of Charlie and of how much he enjoyed celebrating the holiday with his family. We then went to Washington DC to see my children and grandchildren. We had a wonderful time exploring the American History Museum and a night walk around the National Mall.

School starts on 1/8. Please pray for me as I return to the classroom. My "seniors" are becoming more and more focused on their final exams and on their futures. Normally, at this time of year, I have many good conversations with my seniors as they look at the future with a lot of uncertainty. You can pray too for Julia as the English Club and the MOPS ministry resume next week. Pray for good attendance and that those who come would hear, understand, and respond positively to the Gospel.

Update from the Johnsons in Indonesia

12/13/23 letter from
Ed Johnson

We are thankful for the ways that God has shown love and goodness over the last several months. We are thankful for continued progress on the Momuna Bible Translation. Final editing is about done, and 2024 brings preparation with the Indonesian Bible Society for the printing of the entire Bible in the Momuna language. Please pray for the funding to enable the book to be printed in 2024.

The Diuwe (among whom we lived for over 20 years) are traveling more to access education in neighboring towns and on the north coast. We currently have a young family and a single man at a discipleship center here in Sentani. Kirinius, Mona and family are now in the second year of the program. The Lord has provided for them to make a holiday visit to Obukain. Kirinius is looking forward to sharing some of what he has been learning. They will then have one more semester at the school in Sentani before returning to their home in Obukain.



Kris is unmarried and is in the middle of his first year at the discipleship program. Please pray that all of the students there will learn much about the Bible and how it should apply to our lives. Valerie has served this “fall” semester as the Middle school—High School Principal at Hillcrest School. We are grateful that this school continues to serve many missionary families by providing quality education in this remote area. The school needs more staff for the coming school year including: Elementary teacher, IT administrator, school nurse, science teacher, computer teacher and a lot more. If you, or someone you know is a teacher that would be interested in supporting missions by providing education for missionary’s children, please get in touch with us.

We are heading to the United States. Our last furlough was in the second half of 2019. We are planning to be back in the US for the first half of 2024. We look forward to spending time with family, friends, and with supporting churches. Along with the needed medical checkups, and dental work, we look forward to things like Subway sandwiches, snow, time with siblings, cousins and grandparents, camping, swimming and road trips.

Our Lord and Savior came, lived and died to provide a way to reconcile people to God. And now more than 2000 years later, there are still people, and groups of people around the world do not understand this life changing truth. We believe that God has given this task to all committed followers of Jesus.

Grateful for you!

Ed and Valerie

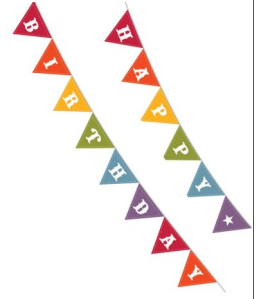
Ed and Valerie Johnson
Kotak Pos 222
Sentani, 99352, Papua,
INDONESIA

Ed.johnson@worldteam.org



World Team
1431 Stuckert Rd.
Warrington, PA 18976

<https://us.worldteam.org>



- 02 Julia Wolf
Matt Cochran
- 03 Aspen Hansen
Louann Cook
Alicia Olmstead
- 06 Josh Hansen
Jeremy Hansen
- 17 Maddie Wagner
- 19 Bob Simmons
- 21 Billie Lucas
Gwen Calkins
Tammy Thompson
- 24 Amy Hansen
- 25 JoJo Polonowski

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

January 2024

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

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

Answering God: The Psalms As Tools For Prayer

In his book, *Answering God*, Eugene Peterson observes that humans are tool-making creatures. He sees prayer as a “tool that is made, mostly, of words, but not less than a tool made of steel.” Consider the case he makes for the value of prayer in your spiritual toolchest . . .

- Prayers are not tools for doing or getting, but for being and becoming.
- Prayers are tools that God uses to work his will in our bodies and souls.
- Prayers are tools that we use to collaborate in his work with us.
- Psalms are the best tools available for working the faith – 150 carefully crafted prayers



The Psalms are our Biblical hymnal. Their poetic language are not wistful wishes cast upwards but declared truths about our “obedience-shaping, will-transforming, sin-revoking, praise releasing God.” Peterson encourages believers to use the Psalms to “train ourselves to pray with others who have prayed, and are praying: put our knees on the level with other bent knees; lift our hands in concert with other lifted hands; join our voices in lament and praise with other voices who weep and laugh. The primary use of prayer is not for expressing ourselves, but in becoming ourselves, and we cannot do that alone.”