



From the Pastor

When I was praying and discerning where to take us in worship and literature this Lent, I struggled. I came to worship planning from a place of personal exhaustion from the daily bombardment of cruelty, the loss of long-standing protections, and all the while proponents trying to rebrand the mistreatment of people as “Christlike.” My heart breaks and my brain is stuck in compassion fatigue. It doesn’t feel like what we are doing is enough and I wondered if it is time to take a step back to heal again or is it time to stop procrastinating, lean in, and be explicitly clear where I see God at work and not. Spirit seemed to say that while nostalgia can serve a purpose, we are called to be comforters today. We are being called to make memories today that will linger in the next generation who needs our wisdom.

With that answer Spirit flamed sermons in my mind around light in dark places, the stubborn work of prophets awakening the people, witnessing the prayers God hears soberly, the reality that God is working now, and God’s ways will come in final victory. Spirit gave me the energy I needed to swim with you upwards toward the fresh water we were born within. I pray that you too will be moved this Lent from the common place of fatigue to a place where God’s energy rolls throughout your entire self as you swim with the stream of holy justice and in the opposite direction of evilness.

We will eat so we have the energy to rise, jump and press on. We will not sing songs that remind us of brighter days in the big ocean. Rather we will sing songs that were born in dry deserts reminding us that we are called to bring God’s kingdom here on earth. Our Lenten series, “Roll Down Justice” is inspired by Amos, a prophet whose message is that God calls us

hate, I reject your festivals; I don’t enjoy your joyous assemblies... Take away the noise of your songs. I won’t listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

Our illumination hymn we will sing each Sunday through Easter and on Easter is “Roll Down, Justice!” This song was written by Mark Miller. Mark Miller is a well-known graduate of Julliard and now a professor of music at Yale. Miller adheres to Cornel West’s belief that “Justice is what love looks like in public.” As we sing this hymn publicly, we renew our baptismal covenant to reject evil in all its forms.

Let us worship together with a message that is genuinely pleasing to God. A message our soul yearns to live out. Let justice roll down for all and may we find joy in not being the ones in control. May this Season of Lent change each of us, empower us, and equip us for the difficult ministry God is calling each of us into in this time and place. May we have a foretaste of heaven to come.

Pastor Catherine

From the Pastor

Protecting the Sacred: Faith and Freedom

As a Reverend of Sandpoint United Methodist Church and Interim pastor for the First Presbyterian Church of Sandpoint, I've been reflecting on the enduring tension between faith and governance – a tension deeply rooted in the very foundation of our nation. On July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence wasn't just a statement of separation; it was a deliberate reaction to the overreach of religious power seen across Europe, a legacy echoing even within my own Irish Catholic family's history. The 1704 Popery Act in Ireland, forcing Catholics to divide their land or pretend Protestantism, helped fuel a desire for a government built on individual liberty rather than dictated by religious preferences.

Our Founding Fathers recognized this danger and designed a system prioritizing the “free choices of the people.” They trusted in the “Spirit of God” to be present in America, contingent on our respect for each other's autonomy and rights. – This concept is deeply intertwined with the teachings of Jesus, particularly his emphasis on loving our neighbors as ourselves. Thomas Jefferson, in "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth," articulated this powerfully, arguing that judging others in our lifetime contradicts the core belief of God's ultimate judgment. Jefferson was emphasizing Matthew 13:29 when Jesus instructs the new disciples not to separate the thistles from the wheat. Pulling the weeds would disrupt the newly growing wheat that God had planted. Thus, reminding the followers of Jesus that it is not up to them to weed out others, even if planted by an enemy. As Christians practice their faith, they need to trust God and let others be free to grow where they are planted.

This foundational principle – the separation of church and state – blossomed over time, extending protections to Indigenous populations, immigrants from other countries besides Europe, women, and eventually children. By fostering a diverse landscape of belief, and demanding respect for differing viewpoints, we've cultivated a safe society for people to connect with God when they are ready and in a way that feels most authentic to them.

This delicate balance is being challenged again by the rise of “Christian nationalism” – the belief that American identity is inherently tied to a specific, often conservative, interpretation of Christianity. This seeks to dismantle this separation, imposing and/or forcing religious values onto the public. This movement in our community threatens religious freedom as they advocate for limiting the rights and protections of the larger population.

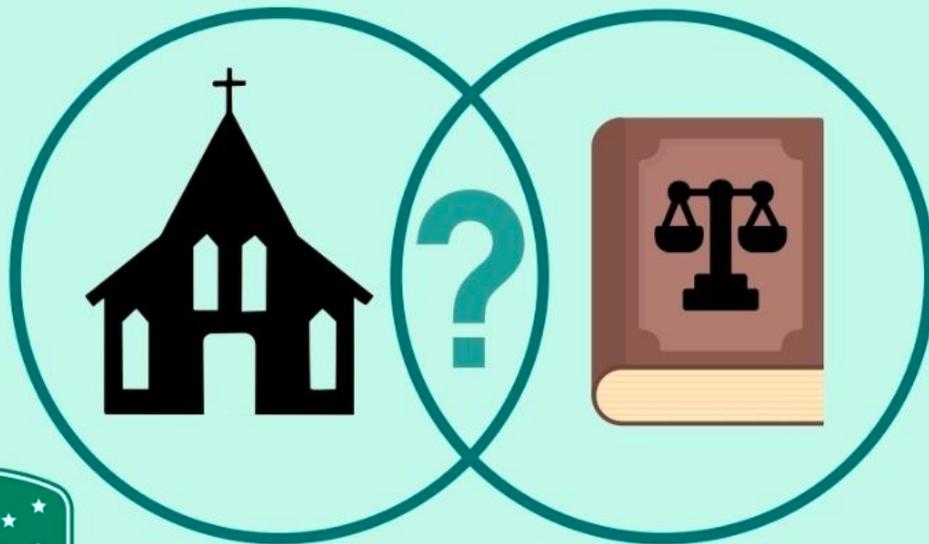
Religious authoritarianism creates instability as political leaders limit the rights of the populous and/or are hypocritical on whom the penal laws are enforced. The natural combative response that follows from those whose religious rights are no longer protected by their government finds causes to initiate a holy war of sorts. They can then claim that dismantling the government (and/or overtaking) is their moral objective and ordained by whomever they worship with whatever means their doctrine permits. Without their rights to worship as they see fit, an unending religious/political tug of war ensues so long as one religion is favored and/or weaponized over the others.

Many local clergy along with the Bonner Human Rights Task Force, faithfully and with reverence for our country strongly support the separation of church and state, upholding the wisdom of our founders. They understand that a healthy society requires protecting institutions – religious and secular – from undue influence.

Christian nationalists may try to silence dissenting voices, but we will not be deterred. We believe that our founders were wise to keep religion and government separate, and we will continue to uphold this principle for generations to come. Join us in this endeavor, and together, let us protect the institutions of religion and government from extremist influences.

I invite you to join us at Sandpoint UMC (711 Main Street) on Saturday, March 7th at 3:00 PM for a discussion regarding these deep issues with a panel of local faith leaders.

All are invited to a panel discussion by
FAITH LEADERS WHO SUPPORT
THE SEPARATION
OF CHURCH AND STATE
on the impacts of Christian Nationalism



March 7th • 3pm

presented by

Bonner County Human Rights Task Force

held at

Sandpoint United Methodist Church

711 Main St., Sandpoint, ID

Session Notes February 18, 2026

The February Session meeting typically involves a transition as one or two current elders' terms expire and new elders come onboard. This oftentimes results in changes of responsibilities and committee assignments.

Our church by-laws specify that an elder can only serve six-years consecutively on Session. One elder, Paula Vincent, termed-out at the end of 2025 and deserves a well-earned rest along with our thanks for an outstanding job during an ever-changing fiscal environment.

Paula led our finance team, consisting of Susie Haskins and Natalie Miller, through seen and unforeseen changes over the past six years. These included a global pandemic, transitioning from a full-time to part-time pastor, a pastor's sabbatical, a pastor's retirement and calling an interim pastor. This required amending annual church budgets nearly as often as we rotate parament colors in our sanctuary.

We ended 2025 in good financial condition thanks to your generosity, income from community use of our facilities, a federal payroll grant, frugal spending, careful monitoring by the finance team and your generosity. (That's an intentional duplication of generosity.)

As I recently mentioned to Paula as she begins her session sabbatical, "When the Presbyterian Church dials 911, it will ring on your phone as we will be calling for financial advice." Thank you, Paula, for your outstanding leadership.

In doing our annual session "who does what role," Dyno Wahl will transition from Fellowship Elder to become Finance Elder. This is a familiar position for Dyno as she understands our financial system. Sylvia Humes will take over fellowship duties, again. Rotating and recycling session positions is like playing musical chairs in which there is a seat at the table for everyone! We will gladly welcome others to join our game.

Now for a couple other aspects of our February meeting:

Session has purposely waited to begin the process of calling a permanent pastor. Pastor Catherine joined us last June as she began juggling two churches of different denominations. We Presbyterians required her to take our interim pastor training while, at the same time, she was completing the comprehensive Methodist ordination process. Missions Accomplished!

It's a Presbyterian tradition to conduct affairs in a decent and orderly fashion. Calling a pastor is no exception. The first phase of the process calls for session to prepare a Church Mission Study which includes a detailed check under the hood of both our church and community. It's imperative that a prospective pastor fully understand who we are and what makes us tick. Judy Labrie dug out our last effort from 2009 to remind us of the importance of this document.

Fortunately, our involvement with the Ezra Project, under Judy McComish's leadership, has produced excellent information about both our church and our community that will prove useful for preparing the mission study. Moreover, we conducted a planning effort several years ago while transitioning from a full-time to part-time pastor that contains useful information. However, it will still take time to complete this important requirement.

Session Notes February 18, 2026

The next phase of the process calls for forming a Pastor Nominating Committee which will include a balance of current elders and church members. Our denomination, PC USA, utilizes an on-line system in which prospective pastors access our mission study to learn about us and submit a Pastor Information Form for us to learn about them.

All in all, this process takes time, but it's intended to ensure that both the church as well as the prospective pastor discern God's call ... in a decent and orderly fashion.

Well, that's all for now. Peace and all good.

Bill L., Clerk of Session



Fellowship

If anyone has greeting cards that they are not using, it would be appreciated if you could bring them to the church office during Office Hours (Monday and Wednesday, 9-12).

We also need volunteers for Fellowship on March 15, 22, and 29. Sign up on the clipboard that is available during Fellowship after church each week or in the office during office hours.

With much appreciation,

Sylvia H., Elder



Missions

One Great Hour of Sharing Special Offering:

The One great Hour of Sharing Offering is collected each year during Lent, typically on Easter Sunday. Around the world, millions of people lack access to sustainable food sources, clean water, sanitation, education, and opportunity. The One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) offering supports work in disaster relief, hunger, poverty, climate change, and immigration/migration and refugees. It provides people with safety, sustenance, and hope by supporting people facing these challenging situations.

St. Patrick's Day Dinner:

The St. Patrick's Day Dinner will held at FPC on March 14 in collaboration with the Sandpoint Senior Center (SASi). Doors open at 5:30, dinner served at 6 PM. Dinner is free, a donation is requested. Reservations are required for this FUN event – call SASi at 208-263-6860.

Ezra 3 Project Update

The Presbytery of the Inland Northwest (PINW) received a grant from the Lilly Endowment: *Thriving Congregations Initiative*, entitled the Ezra 3 Project. Through the Ezra 3 Project, the Presbytery is exploring how we can steward our land and buildings for community impact in a way that aligns with the mission of the church – how we can use our buildings in ways that help the community flourish.

In August 2025, our church joined Cohort 2 of this project which will continue through summer of 2026. Churches with 100 or fewer members are included in Cohort 2, which includes Bethany, Post Falls, Sandpoint, Washtucna, and Whitworth. The FPC design team for this project is Rev. Catherine, Paula V., Mary S., and Judy M.

FPC has been very busy over the past six months. Our congregation, along with the design team, has completed online surveys, engaged in interviews both with members of the congregation and with others who are actively involved in our church, explored our neighborhood (I Spy) to “see” our community in a new way, met with community leaders and a consultant team from Partners for Sacred Places (Community Conversation, November 2025). All of these activities were focused on identifying needs in the community and ideas for ways we can use our building to help meet those needs. In early January 2026, we received the report from the Partners for Sacred Places that summarized the needs identified in the Community Conversation and made recommendations for moving forward. Copies of this report are available in the church office. Finally, at the January 29, 2026, Cohort meeting, our design team developed a Property Mission Statement that was presented to and approved at a special meeting of Session on February 1, 2026. The Property Mission Statement builds on the FPC Mission Statement and will be used to guide our thinking as we go forward and engage with potential partners for future project(s). The complete text of the FPC Mission Statement and the Property Mission Statement are attached in an Appendix.

Strengths of our church: We are a church that welcomes everyone, is engaged in building community, and committed to taking the love of Christ into the world. Our Vision is: Living, Loving, and Learning the Joy of Faith. Music is and has always been an important avenue for expressing our faith within the community.

The needs and challenges identified in the Community Conversation were consistent with those identified by our design team and congregation (see p. 7 of PSP Report).

Missions

Needs:

- Affordable meeting space
- Affordable preschool/childcare
- Affordable housing
- Desire to stave off the loneliness epidemic

Challenges:

- Lack of accessible restrooms
- Lack of temperature regulation
- Lack of parking

Next steps: At the January 29, 2026, Cohort meeting, each team was asked to identify our top three ideas for an Ezra project. Partners for Sacred Spaces has labeled these projects as a “Social Enterprise.” The FPC team stated that we are not at that point yet, and we were reassured that we can proceed at the pace that seems right for our church. Our design team met on February 16 to begin to refine our ideas about a Social Enterprise that addresses the identified needs and will help our community flourish. Our current thinking is that we may be able to address needs in the following areas and we have some tentative ideas for consideration:

- Child drop off, short-term daycare (e.g., 2-3 hours/week)
- Socialization (e.g., coffee club, men’s group, game day, etc.)
- Music groups (e.g., Youth Bell Choir)
- Peace Garden enterprises

To be able to increase use of our church space we must first address the challenges that were identified. The area that we currently plan to address is accessibility. Two areas where this is needed:

- Creation of an accessible restroom
- Access to the chancel so that people (such as musicians) with mobility limitations can utilize our sanctuary

Our design team looks forward to continued discussions with the congregation to help us refine our ideas and identify community partners who can help us design a Social Enterprise that we can move forward in late summer for potential funding.

Respectfully submitted,

Ezra Design Team, Pastor Catherine, Mary S., Paula V., Judy M.

Thank you for your continued interest in and support of this important project!

Missions

APPENDIX — FPC PROPERTY MISSION STATEMENT

FPC MISSION: *We are called to take the Light and Love of Christ into the world!*

We carry out our mission by:

- NURTURING people on their faith journeys
- WITNESSING to our faith in ministry and mission beyond ourselves and
- PROVIDING meaningful, life changing worship every week.

EZRA Project

As participants with the Presbytery of the Inland Northwest Ezra project, we are exploring ideas for stewarding our land and buildings in ways that align with our mission and contribute to a flourishing community.

Tag Line: *“Building Community in the Heart of Sandpoint”*

Property Mission/Purpose

The property mission of the First Presbyterian Church of Sandpoint is to demonstrate the Love of Christ through

- the creation and care of welcoming, affordable and accessible space for community use
- the development of partnerships with others to serve the common good, and
- the promotion of an inclusive, compassionate, and just world.

Approved February 1, 2026

Earth Care

Throughout March we will be journeying along our Lenten path and turning closer to God. We intentionally invite God to heal and clean our hearts from the ways of greed and sin. I invite all of you to take at least one sabbath day when you cancel going to that day’s events (guilt free). A day you don’t drive your car or buy something. A day of grace, which we bless the earth by being content with less. A day we eat leftovers and if bored we mend an old piece of clothing or fix a broken item with items you already have. Throughout the day may God speak to you in that small still voice. May you be assured of God’s ways. May a gentle peace be the balm that lends you the strength to keep turning towards the way of God. Amen.





SAINT PATRICK'S

Family Fundraiser Night

SATURDAY, MARCH 14TH

FOOD - FELLOWSHIP - FUN -
LIVE AUCTION AND RAFFLE

Traditional corned beef and cabbage

First Presbyterian Church
417 N. 4th Ave

Doors Open
at 5:30 pm

Dinner at
6:00 pm

Reservations required call the
Senior Center (208) 263-6860
Donations at the door

Family Favorites

Do you have a treasured (non-copyrighted!) family recipe that you'd like to share with the church family? Drop them off in the church office or email them to Dana at Office@fpcsandpoint.org. Please share a little info about the person who created the recipe, if you can.

Since Mom passed away last fall, I have decided to honor her memory and indulge in my love of cooking at the same time by working my way through her recipe box. For Ash Wednesday, I dusted off her Easy Cherry-Chocolate Cake recipe, which she clipped off a cake mix box when I was a kid many years ago. It was a big hit at Ash Wednesday and again at Fellowship the following Sunday, so I decided to share it with you here. —Dana S.

Easy Cherry-Chocolate Cake

3 eggs or 3/4 c cholesterol-free egg product
1 package devil's food cake mix (I actually used a triple-fudge cake mix)
1 can (21 oz) cherry pie filling orlite cherry pie filling
1/3 c vegetable oil
1 package (4-serving size) chocolate or chocolate sugar-free instant pudding and pie filling

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour rectangular pan, 13x9x2 inches. Beat eggs in large bowl. Stir in cake mix (dry), cherry pie filling, and oil until blended. Spread in pan. Bake 35-40 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. (Surface of cake will be bumpy.) Cool completely. Prepare pudding/pie filling as directed on package for pie. Let stand about 5 minutes or until thickened. Spread over cake. Store covered in refrigerator.

High Altitude (3500 to 6500 ft): Heat oven to 375 degrees. Use lite cherry pie filling only. Stir 2 tbsp all-purpose flour into cake mix (dry). Bake about 35 minutes. Cholesterol-free egg product no recommended.

Dana's notes:

It took about 37 minutes in my oven. Not a fan of pudding? You could sprinkle a little powdered sugar over the top instead. I'm sure other flavor profiles are possible: spice cake mix with apple pie filling, perhaps???





MARCH BIRTHDAYS

3/1 Kathleen H.
3/13 Chuck H.
3/25 Dick S.
3/28 Cathy E.

Did we miss your birthday or get the date wrong? Please let the office know at office@fpcsandpoint.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS



3/8 Daylight Saving Time begins - Spring Forward!
3/13 Suzuki Strings concert in the sanctuary, 5:00
3/14 Saint Patrick's Day fundraiser dinner in fellowship hall.
Doors open at 5:30, Supper at 6:00
3/18 Ezra Cohort Meeting, all day at our church
3/23 April Grapevine articles due, 9:00 a.m.
3/29 Palm Sunday

Regular Monthly Events



Sunday

- 11:00 a.m. Worship, In-Person and Livestream
- (<https://www.youtube.com/@firstpresbyteriansandpoint>)
- 7:00 p.m. AA meeting

Monday-Saturday

- 7:00 a.m. AA meeting

Monday

- 9:00 a.m. TOPS meeting (Take Off Pounds Sensibly)
- 6:00 p.m. Al-Anon meeting

Tuesday

- 12:30 p.m. Book Study and Contemplative Prayer Group
- 7:00 p.m. AA meeting

Wednesday

- 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Rainbow Soup Kitchen community meal
- 12:00 p.m. Church choir practice
- 7:00 p.m. AA meeting

Thursday

- 12:00 p.m. Al-Anon meeting
- 7:00 p.m. AA meeting



First Presbyterian Church

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208-263-2047

office@fpcsandpoint.org

www.fpcsandpoint.org

Ministers

Members and Friends

Pastor Catherine Lyle

Pastor Cell phone: 509-570-3938

Office Hours

Monday 9:00-12:00

Wednesday 9:00-12:00