New Ways of Being Together
A Message from the Pastor

Dear Friends in Christ,

YOU ARE MISSED!

As I look at the articles in this issue of "The Connector" I see pictures of you, a church teeming with activity.

Now I walk into the sanctuary to worship and there is no one in the pews. It feels cavernous. The friendship pads haven't been touched in weeks. Fellowship Hall is dark and vacant with no trace of the smell of coffee or children at the Lego table. The buzzer on the front door has mostly gone silent. The halls are always dark because no one is ever in them to trigger the automatic lighting. It feels a bit like walking through a ghost town.

Yet at the same time, I am aware of an extraordinarily successful mask ministry which has made over 700 masks to help our community. I know of the increase in prayer requests for our prayer circle and the countless zoom meetings going on each week. Mission commission continues to meet the needs of many of our mission partners. Children’s, youth and adult Christian education continues. The session meetings go on, the deacon's, trustees and commission meetings too. Email never wanes.

All this leads me to understand the church has risen! You have risen! You have risen to meet these times with love and care and commitment. It is inspiring to witness. But I have an even greater appreciation for what it means to be the incarnational church. Seeing one another "in the flesh" has never been more meaningful. The deeds of Christ we enact are important to be sure, but the relationships, the friendships, the laughs and tears we share with one another in person are a true gift of joy from God. Never again will I take them for granted. Seeing you again here at church, in person, incarnate, will be Easter all over again!

We are still a church teeming with activity, but I look forward to God ensuring we will again be a church delighting in the presence of one another!

Peace and the blessings of God be upon you!

— ED
Masks in the making

What began as “a little nibbling of an idea” just over a month ago has turned into a ministry of service that has produced more than 700 masks to help provide protection from COVID-19, said Diana Likely, organizer.

Amy Castagno gave Diana Likely some inspiration.

“Amy set me off. She had started making masks for herself, her family and her daughter’s office. She posted a picture of herself online with the masks,” Diana said.

WGPC member Betsy Wacker was also making masks. She started making HEPA masks from vacuum cleaner bags.

“I saw there was a need and I wanted to make the masks, but I had such a hard time getting supplies. Once I saw the video about masks made with vacuum bags, I went online and ordered 35 bags. I can get five masks from each bag,” she said.

Diana then heard that Manor Grove, a nursing home in Kirkwood, needed masks. They did not have the virus in the building but wanted to protect residents and be prepared.

“They were desperate. They had 100 masks and needed 500,” Diana said.

Diana began making masks and in short order there were five women on the team. Betsy continued making the HEPA masks for medical personnel. Others made cloth masks for the public. The group quickly grew until there were 20 people on the team, most of them sewing, some cutting and some delivering masks. Most are members of WGPC, but some just heard what members were doing and joined in.

Diana said what attracted her and many of those on the team is the knowledge that they are filling a need, and feeling useful and giving back.

“It makes me think of World War II. The analogy is -- this is a war too. We have a unity of purpose and everybody is pitching in,” she said.

Betsy agrees.

“Many of us have a need to serve others and it is fulfilling for us to do that,” she said.

On April 9, the team delivered 60 masks to Manor Grove. Another group also had begun making masks for Manor Grove, so when WGPC’s team reached 100 masks for the facility, they turned their sights on Home Sweet Home, one of the church’s partners. One hundred masks were delivered to outfit the nonprofit’s volunteers and clients.

The team then made masks for WGPC’s staff and members who requested them. They also targeted Beyond Housing, a nonprofit that works with the Normandy School District community. The team, as we go to print, is working with Webster-Rock Hill Ministries, and once that group is outfitted, they will circle back and connect with the other groups again, Diana said.

As for Betsy, she single-handedly completed 75 HEPA masks which were donated to the Visiting Nurses Association (VNA). She continues to make masks for the organization.

Betsy said she is thankful for Diana’s leadership of the group.

“She’s pretty phenomenal,” she said.

Diana said this was a special project for her.

“It’s the sort of thing that doesn’t happen to me very often,” Diana said. “My thoughts and feelings started pretty small and kept on growing.”

She said she is grateful to Sue Scott and Beth Kazlauskas for their expertise and communication with their nonprofit contacts, and of course, she is thankful for the mask makers themselves.

Fabric provided by Home Sweet Home, and other donors, elastic for ear loops and metal nose pieces from Diana are available at the church for those making the masks.

More mask makers are welcome, she said.

“The primary reward is that we’re doing something useful,” Diana said. “Being of service keeps your mind off what’s going on. You’re not sitting around being bored or binge-watching Netflix. You are working with a group of people for a common purpose.”

She said the group will sew on.

“I have no idea where this is going but we will try to adapt as it goes, try to serve as many people as possible, members, underserved populations in urban areas especially those in north city and county, elderly people and those who have less access to the protection that’s needed,” she said.
Getting into the stream of things
New technology will keep members connected

WGPC will soon enter the stream. New streaming equipment was recently installed in the sanctuary that will give our online services more clarity, better sound, new angles and more pizzazz. Better yet, it will keep those at home and faraway connected to the church.

Pastor Ed Zumwinkel said the addition of the streaming equipment was planned quite some time ago, before the pandemic made online services essential. Its purpose is to give access to our worship services to members who cannot attend church for one reason or another throughout the year.

“People who are sick, who are homebound or cannot get out in bad weather will still be able to be part of the community,” he said. “The biggest impetus of this was when we realized how important it was to Sandy Buschmann to see the services (when she was ill). We watched as her daughter Julie “FaceTimed” the services from the pew.”

The plan is to stream the service each Sunday in real time and then record it for playback for those who choose to watch the service at other times, he said.

Pastor Ed also realized shortly after online worship began that access to the services keeps members in faraway places part of the community.

“It’s a great opportunity to help Webster Groves members who are spread out in other places stay connected,” he said. “With our services online, some of our members have been emailing me and letting me know how much they are enjoying the services. It’s a great tool for helping us stay connected.”

The equipment cost $10,000, which was paid for with money from the Meyer donation, he said.

“This is one of the wonderful results of benefit gifts and a fine example of how those gifts help ministry happen in ways people can’t even imagine when they give them,” Pastor Ed said.

The BoxCast system with the RoboSHOT camera was installed on the balcony by Chris Sauer of the AVID Group in early April. It consists of a live streaming camera with multiple settings that can be preset for different shots that are controlled by a computer, said Brian Kuhn, director of Youth and Family Ministries.

For example, someone directing the camera from a laptop can hit “sermon” and the camera will be directed to where it is preset for a visual of the pastor giving the sermon. Other shots might include a wide angle of the sanctuary, image of the liturgist, or a zoom on the baptismal font, Brian said.

The sound of the service will be greatly improved because the recording is tied directly into the church’s sound system, he said.

“Right now, we’re using the ambient sound in the room and it’s picking up echo. The direct connection will dramatically increase the sound quality for both the music and speech,” he said.

Both the sound and the camera can be controlled by an iPad or a computer, Brian said.

Currently, some staff members are learning how to use the equipment. Opportunities also exist for those who enjoy working with technology to learn the system and help run it in the future. Contact Pastor Ed, if you are interested.

He said, for now, as long as the church is closed, staff will continue to record services ahead of time using the Go Pro software and upload the video to You Tube, but once the church reopens, the new equipment will be put into use.

“Whenever we go back to public worship, we will live stream and record at the same time,” he said.

Members will be able to see the worship service while it is happening. After the service is over, the recording will be uploaded, Brian said.

“It will still take time for it to be uploaded. There will be some lag time,” he said. “If you don’t watch it live, it will take a couple hours before you will be able to watch the recording.”

Both Pastor Ed and Brian see the new equipment as a tool that doesn’t replace the joy of worshipping together in person but gives access to those who can’t be here and makes the community as a whole stronger.

“It’s a tool. It doesn’t replace anything. It’s a tool we use that hopefully makes things better,” Brian said.
Kids can be the church!
Family Worship Services brighten holy days

Families were introduced to a very special way to worship and made their own contribution to the joy of both Palm Sunday and Easter services this year with Family Worship services created by families and sent to church members in their email.

The idea was the brainchild of Pastor Hannah Zyla.

“I was looking to see what some of my friends were doing for services, and they were recording parts of the service and sending it in,” she said. “I thought it was an easy way for kids to get involved.”

The project, however, soon took on a life of its own as families created their own ways to voice Hosanna! and Christ is risen! Who would have thought such exclamations of praise would involve guinea pigs and trampolines?

“I sent some words for them to say and I was getting these wonderful videos back,” Pastor Hannah said. “It was fun to have people go all in and wear their Easter clothes.”

Liturgists gave their readings in the sunshine of their back yards. Parts of the service were accompanied by chalk drawings, and families voiced their praises together.

“It was fun for the kids. It kept them feeling like they were connected, and they all joined together in this family worship,” Pastor Hannah said.

The Mabie family’s guinea pigs made the procession into “Jerusalem” on Palm Sunday complete with Hosanna signs and were so popular they made a repeat appearance by special request on Easter to tell the disciples that Jesus had risen.

The venture has had a good response and Pastor Hannah’s inbox started filling up, she said.

“This allowed the church to get to know the children, and for the children to know that there is a place for them in the church and that they are part of the church,” she said. “This is their home. This is their place, even if they can’t be in this place.”

Patty Mabie, whose children Anne and Claire along with guinea pigs Flash and Gloria, contributed to the service, said her children enjoyed being a part of it.

“They had a little more buy into it. It was good for them to be a part of worship even from home,” she said.

Anne said she liked it, “because I got to do lots of things.”

Anne read prayers and got to read the part of Jesus in the scripture. Claire reminded everyone of their baptism with real water.

“It was a good way to stay connected,” Patty said. Then they were really excited to watch the service, and we watched it as a family. It was shorter, which was good for their attention span. It was on their level and they enjoyed seeing their friends participate in it too.”

Pastor Hannah said it was one of the good things to come out of the shut down due to the coronavirus.

“This is something everyone can enjoy. It is a God moment in a terrible situation,” she said.

Whether there will be more online Family Worship services is up in the air.

See Family Worship cont. on page 7
Holy Conversations podcast

Webster Groves Presbyterian Church has a new broadcasted program for its members – Holy Conversations, new podcasts that feature members’ discussions of topics in their areas of expertise.

Brian Kuhn, director of Youth and Family Ministries, said the idea has been in the works for a while.

“(Associate Pastor Hannah Zyla) and I have been kicking around a podcast for some time,” Brian said. "We have some amazingly interesting and smart and wise people in our faith community. We talked about ways to utilize and share them with the rest of the world.”

With the church shut down and fewer activities to think about, both Pastor Hannah and Brian finally found themselves with time to put the programs together.

The Stay Home situation also easily led to the topic of that first conversation.

The podcast entitled “Helping Parents and Children Keep their Mind, Body, Spirit, Health in a time of COVID-19” was launched April 6. The podcast featured WGPC members Dr. Pete Putnam, a general pediatrician and Amy Escott, a licensed professional counselor and outpatient therapist with Children’s Advocacy Services of St. Louis, along with Brian and Pastor Hannah.

“We needed to have a more intimate conversation about what we are going through,” Brian said. “We wanted to look at it from a holistic standpoint – how this is affecting us physically emotionally and spiritually.”

Pastor Hannah said the conversation’s intent was to provide a service.

“We were hoping to give people a few more resources from people in our church. People they know,” she said. The conversation dealt with facing the reality of the pandemic, dealing with the loss of schedules, school, church, special events and freedom, tackling the indefinite aspect of the pandemic’s timeline as well as dealing with fear for the future. Answers focused not only on physical health, family life and coping strategies, but also spiritual answers.

“We had some preset questions but let the conversation go where it wanted to go,” Brian said.

Pastor Hannah said the podcast lets people see other sides to their fellow members and celebrate their gifts.

“We don’t often get to see those gifts. It was nice to see Pete and Amy in their professional lives. They are good at what they do,” she said.

The conversation was done on Zoom with each person taking part in another location, Brian said.

“You can set it up so that when you are recording you are recording each person individually,” he said.

The individual recordings are then edited together and Brian used Garage Band software to edit out mistakes and distractions.

“It was one step above recording myself on cassette tapes in my bedroom,” he said with a laugh.

The podcast was then put on the website. A link to the program can be found on the Faith Formation page at wgpc.org. Both Brian and Pastor Hannah were happy with the results.

“I thought it was great,” Brian said. “I was super happy with how it turned out especially in our first go-round with it.”

“It went really well and it was fun to do,” Pastor Hannah said.

And now, there is a second one.

“In the second one, we talked with Kristen Cole, a high school teacher, Jennifer Blumenkemper, an elementary teacher, and Summer Kohring, a preschool teacher.

All the women also have children of their own.

“We wanted to know how they are doing playing their dual roles,” Brian said. “As teachers what do they hope their students and their own children get out of this time. They represented a wide range of perspective, and I was excited to see how it went.”

That podcast, entitled “Teaching, Learning and Parenting during COVID-19” is also on the website.

See Podcast cont. on next page.
Did you know?

Did you know that Betsy and Dennis Wacker hosted their “Dinner with Friends” on Zoom?

There were, however, a few changes to the thrice a year party that gets members together to get to know each other better. One is they couldn’t be together. Two is that dinner became dessert.

“We took everyone dessert, and dropped it off at their house. We took cake and ice cream,” Betsy said.

The group consisted of Carol Ault and Brian Tobin, Emmy and Allan McClelland and Jordan and Jessica Gatewood and their children Alex and Clara (who made a cameo appearance). They all met on Zoom and shared conversation and a game called Two Truths and a Lie.

“The way it works is that you tell two things that are true and one that is a lie,” Betsy said. “For example, I told that I proposed to Dennis, that we met when my snowmobile turned over and we played in a tennis tournament the day we got married.

“I like to play games, especially on Zoom, otherwise you might just sit there and look at each other,” Betsy said. “I told them all ahead of time to come up with something. Even Alex had two truths and a lie.”

All in all the virtual get together went well, she said.

“It wasn’t as good as being together in person, but we had a fine time and spent about an hour and 40 minutes together,” she said.

She said she passed on the idea to others who are scheduled to host a “dinner” this spring.

(By the way, the lie has to do with the proposal. Shhhhh.)

Podcast cont. from page 6

Online services, Zoom meetings e-newsletters and podcasts prove that technology has helped keep the church touching lives during the COVID-19 pandemic, Brian said.

“I think it will be interesting to see what people will demand from technologically going forward,” Brian said. “Will podcasts be something that people embrace from the church? Webster Groves had lagged behind but has made big steps to catch up.

“Still, we desire to be together,” he said. “It’s an interesting combination. We really need to be together. We want to be together, but technology really works well. Let’s continue to use that.”

Family Worship cont. from page 5

“This is still an experiment and I guess we will take it week by week,” Pastor Hannah said. “It’s very fluid as everything is right now.”

Although the pandemic has caused isolation and suffering for so many people, through it, the church is learning to stay connected in new ways, keeping our focus through technology, she said.

She said she is pleased everyone jumped in to be the church

“Church is something people miss when they can’t be together. It’s something people long for when they can’t have it,” Pastor Hannah said. “They are all having such fun with it. That’s what makes me smile the most.”
Banners and butterflies a congregation’s labor of love

A congregational art project gave wings to this year’s Easter worship service, even if it was from a distance.

Impressions of the crucifixion and heavenly orbs in gold, violet and crimson were the backdrop for services in the sanctuary as we made our way through Lent and remembered Christ’s sacrifice this year. Then, on Easter Sunday, fluttering butterflies appeared to celebrate His joyful resurrection.

The congregational art project was led by Music Director Shawn Portell. The idea was conceived nearly a year ago, at a conference on art, music and worship at the Montreat Conference Center in Montreat, North Carolina.

“I took an art class and there was a textile artist there doing this,” Shawn said. “I thought it would be a good congregational project where people could come in and do it whenever they wanted.”

Fortunately, the fun began before COVID-19 shut down the city and closed the doors of the sanctuary. Members stopped by on Fridays in February and early March to help with the project. In all, at least 20 people participated – creating butterflies and putting their creative touches on the banners. Seniors came in to make butterflies in the afternoon. Children from the Early Childhood Center came one morning to spend time painting the banners.

Shawn provided instruction and assisted.

WGPC’s total project consisted of a banner for the wall, a communion table covering, a banner for the pulpit and butterflies. All were made from white medium grade silk. Shawn began the project himself with a banner that represented the cross.

“This was my way of experimenting, learning how to teach people,” he said.

When it was complete, the result was impressionistic and gave viewers the opportunity to interpret the banner in their own ways.

“It is definitely a cross, and the cross appears to be broken into many pieces,” Shawn said. “Some people see Jesus on the cross; some don’t.”

The banners with their colorful spheres were simply an idea Shawn had while drawing and “playing with” circles.

“Some people see crowns. Some see sunbursts. Some relate the purple with sin and the bright golden sections with the forgiveness of sins,” he said.

The designs for the spinning worlds/stars/crowns/orbs on the banners were painted on the fabric with a polymer relief color. Then those designs were filled in with silk dyes by members of the congregation to create a fluid, free and colorful tribute to Christ.

Butterflies were traced onto the silk in fabric hoops, outlined with a polymer relief color and then painted with silk dyes in the colors of the artists’ choosing.

Special effects on dye patterns were created by adding salt and water.

Shawn said the process is simple enough that anyone can do it and have positive results.

“They can play with the colors. There is no right or wrong,” he said. “You can’t mess it up. Whatever you do, it will be beautiful.”

Getting the butterflies to have enough body to fly properly around the cross in the sanctuary, however, provided a challenge and some experimentation before the project got underway. At first, Shawn found a fabric stiffener that gave the wings some body and yet they were still moldable. A bit of copper wire was added to give them support. Eventually though, a plastic film was added which allowed the

Judy Wohltman and Kristy Anderson
butterflies to keep their shape and flutter on the monofilament line strung from the cross.

The result was a fluttering flurry of colorful butterflies, which traditionally symbolize the resurrection, Shawn said.

Members seemed to enjoy the project.

“I love art,” said Kristy Anderson who spent an afternoon painting butterflies.

She said art has properties beyond the aesthetic and art projects such as this were a blessing to her mother when she was in a nursing home.

“It became an outlet to connect her with her memories,” she said. “They used watercolors and could paint anything they wanted. It was a way to express themselves and remember.”

Kristy said she decided to help with the project, just for the joy of it.

“I like to do fun things, and it sounded like a fun thing and I love butterflies,” she said.

Although the congregation helped to make the butterflies and banners, they were only able to see the banners they helped create in two services before the church had to close, and they had to settle with seeing the finished project including the Easter butterflies remotely.

Shawn said he dealt with the disappointment by moving forward.

“People were asking, ‘What about the butterflies?’ We were determined to make Easter happen,” Shawn said. “We used all the elements that were planned to make the best of a bad situation. It was important to experience Easter in the best way possible.”

And so, the banners created the backdrop in the videos of Lenten services, and a banner with the risen Christ created by Shawn along with the congregation’s butterflies went up for the Easter morning service.

It was truly an art project that belonged to everyone, Shawn said.

“Any time you have a congregational project it’s neat to see individual people each come together in a small way to make a larger project,” he said. “It really is symbolic of the church. Every person is important. They do their part to make the whole.”
On Feb. 7, the Rev. Deanna Hollas, Coordinator of Gun Violence Prevention Ministries for the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, made her way from her home in Texas to St. Louis at the request of members of WGPC’s Advocacy Team. What followed were three full days of programs to bring awareness, encourage conversation, and reach out to local legislators to support measures that would help prevent gun violence.

Advocacy Team Co-Chair Sue Scott said the committee was eager to have Hollas give a presentation here in St. Louis after they read about her ordination last summer, but she was not scheduled to come to Missouri.

“Our state was not a targeted state,” Sue said.

Gun violence prevention, however, was a high priority for the Advocacy Team, she said.

“She had one weekend open and we grabbed it,” Sue said. “What was important about getting Rev. Hollas was that she brought a faith perspective, a partnership of advocacy and faith and the Presbyterian Church. It was critical to connect with her.”

Rev. Hollas’ visit included a lecture on “unmasking the powers” behind the gun violence issue in Graham Chapel at Washington University for students and members of the public on Feb. 7; a luncheon meeting with legislators and other public officials to discuss legislation, as well as a workshop on how to have civil and productive conversations about guns and gun violence in WGPC’s Fellowship Hall on Feb. 8; and sermons at both worship services on Sunday, Feb. 9.

About 40 people attended the lecture at the university where questions were taken by text after the presentation.

The luncheon meeting with public officials the following day was well attended, said Emmy McClelland, Team Co-Chair and former state representative for the 91st district which formerly encompassed all of Webster Groves and Glendale. Guests at the event included elected officials at all levels of government including Missouri Congressman Lacy Clay (D) 1st District and State Senator Scott Sifton, (D) District 1, as well as three state representatives, two mayors, two Webster Groves city councilpersons and a member of the Webster Groves School District’s Board of Education.

“I was extremely pleased on Saturday at the luncheon when state legislators that represented all or some part of our community were there along with Congressman Lacy Clay,” Emmy said. “The Congressman has filed federal legislation that, if approved, would bring local control to this issue by enabling the city of St. Louis and cities in 43 states across the country to enact tougher gun laws without the approval of state legislatures.”

Emmy said it was important to include legislators as part of Rev. Hollas’ visit.

“They are the ones making the laws that can help make our community safer,” she said. “It is important for them to know the significant number of people who feel strongly about the issue of keeping our community safe.”

Continued on next page
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Emmy said, however, that although the church needs to work with legislators, the issue is one of faith not politics.

“We don’t think reduction of gun violence is a political issue,” she added. “We want to make sure that people know this is a church acting on its religious convictions to reduce gun violence. It’s not about taking guns away from people either. It’s about making our community safer for everyone especially our children.”

Emmy pointed out that taking on social issues with views that are biblically based is a Presbyterian tradition that stretches back to the American Revolution.

“We feel that we are doing what the Bible tells us to do, loving our neighbors, trying to get along and stopping those acts of violence that are killing our young people,” she said.

The workshop on “How to Have Courageous Conversation about Gun Violence” was well attended with about 75 people including WGPC members and people from the community turning out for the event.

During the workshop Rev. Hollas shared how she became involved with the issue of gun violence when in 2016 Texas passed a law that would allow people to carry concealed weapons on college campuses. Her own daughter was attending college at the time.

“I felt it was an invitation to be armed, and I was afraid she wouldn’t be safe,” she said.

She joined Moms Demand Action for Guns Sense and began her efforts to change laws, build awareness and prevent gun violence. Along the way she found that “debates were not productive” in the effort, but dialogues where people listened and had conversations were more fruitful. That concept was at the heart of the workshop.

“We that love peace need to organize and train the same way those that are going to war do,” she said.

Exercises during the workshop focused on conversations where people listened and were heard. Those speaking were asked to “speak authentically and to the point.” Times were set for people to listen to each other.

“Be curious; listen for understanding,” she said. “Write down your comments to hold them.”

Participants began with easy topics, talking about themselves, what sense of purpose guides their lives, what they hope for their community and then about the roles guns have played in their lives and pivotal questions about whether there were any laws concerning guns they would change.

Rev. Hollas said being open, honest and loving is key to understanding one another.

“We need to keep our hearts and minds open to those who think like us and those who don’t,” she said.

In all, members of the Advocacy Team thought the weekend was a great success, Sue said.

“It exceeded our expectations. It was well attended and well received,” Sue said. “We also had lots of press coverage. It just goes to show how important this issue is to so many people.”

The weekend event with Rev. Hollas was Advocacy’s third gun violence prevention program in the past year. Two successful programs were held earlier -- Guns in My Backyard and the Be Smart program. And Hollas’ visit was soon followed with a bus trip to Jefferson City on Feb. 18, where WGPC members and members of the local chapter of Moms Demand Action joined more than 100 other advocates who showed legislators their support for common sense gun laws.

Sue said the Team is not done yet because there is work to do.

“The point I take away from this is that it is important for churches to get involved in this issue. They have an important role to play that is biblically based,” she said.
Imagining new spaces

New ideas and new uses for WGPC’s buildings are coming in the future.

WGPC’s Session took the recommendation of the “Building Dreamers” committee and approved an agreement with Partners for Sacred Places April 21.

Pastor Ed Zumwinkel said the partnership is an important step forward.

“During the discernment process for the Meyer gift, we discovered the congregation had a strong desire to reconsider the use and design of our building in order to better fit the needs of our church,” he said. “Additionally, there was a strong feeling we needed our facilities to look friendlier and be more inviting to the community. That is a long journey in a building as old as ours, so this is an important step. Having the session committee work with Partners for Sacred Places, who have a lot of experience at this work, is very exciting.”

Unofficially called the Building Dreamers, the committee consists of three Session members, Marilyn Kuhn, Debbie Miali and Diane McCullough as well as members of the congregation, Kathryn Duckworth, Todd Ringkamp, Dave Fleisher, Kris Roudebush and Allan Scott who were appointed by the session. They began meeting in the Fall of 2019.

The Building Dreamers will take a hard look at WGPC’s buildings and imagine how they can better serve the church, said Kathryn Duckworth, committee chair.

“The task is dreaming about our space and how to improve it, thinking about how the buildings support the church’s ministry, and thinking about what the building needs to be like to support the church’s mission for the next 50 to 100 years,” Kathryn said.

Kathryn said there is already a list of ideas that have come out of the committee’s brainstorming sessions.

“We hope that our discussions will begin to give answers to questions like how to make the church building feel more open and friendly along Lockwood, where the front office should be, how to make a proper front door—one that is functional and safe, and one that is easy to find, as well as the best ways to share our space with others,” she said.

Pastor Ed discovered Partners for Sacred Places as he researched resources and consulted with other pastors looking for answers to making the best use of space for the church.

“The name that came up time and again with other pastors, at conferences, meetings, and retreats was Partners for Sacred Places,” Pastor Ed said.

In February, the committee met with Joshua Castano from Partners. The nonprofit, nonsectarian organization will calculate the economic value of the church in Webster, engage the community through an advisory task force and asset mapping, consult with architects to lead a design charrette and help create new community partnerships as well as strengthen existing ones, Pastor Ed said.

“That is one of the solutions that Partners really sells,” Kathryn said. “Under their leadership, we hope to find groups that will be compatible, but, even better, groups with which the relationship will be mutually beneficial.”

Work on the project with the company is currently delayed because of the COVID 19 pandemic but will begin when it can be safely accomplished.

Thank you to our congregation, who in addition to their donations, has been sending notes offering prayers, encouragement and their gratitude to the staff. It is a privilege and a pleasure to work for such a caring congregation. May God bless you and keep you safe from harm in these troubled times, and we look forward to welcoming you back to the church.

The church is grateful to the late Shirley Clifton for her generous gift. Shirley was a member of the church for nearly 59 years. Thank you to Sue Williams and her brothers for ensuring the church received her gift.

“Over the years, our family has always felt WGPC to be our church home,” Sue wrote in an email. “Thank you for your part in helping to send mom home to be with her Maker. All the best to you, all the staff and the membership.”
Lift Your Prayers to God
“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” Psalm 46:1

Births

Junia Louise Zyla, daughter of Associate Pastor Hannah and Adam Zyla, was born Nov. 21, 2019.
Maggie Ann Smutz, daughter of Mark and Darcy Smutz, was born Dec. 4, 2019.
Alice Margaret Tebb, daughter of Zach and Emily Tebb, was born Dec. 5, 2019.
Grant Bennett Roudebush, son of Van and Kris Roudebush, was born Jan. 17, 2020.
Remy Grace Austermann, daughter of Greg and Jessie Austermann, was born March 5, 2020.

New Members

Matt and Katie Stocke joined the church by profession of faith on Nov. 24, 2019.

Graduates

To our graduating high school seniors, we are so proud of you for your hard work, for your accomplishments, for your patience and strength during this difficult time. We celebrate the class of 2020, a special class that will never be forgotten. Go your way, and take God and the lessons you have learned with you. Congratulations!
Dayan Barnard, Maggie Cleeland, Ethan Doll, Lizzy Egley, Sofia Elliott, Parker Hagemann, Madi McKeown, Ryan Strand, Ethan Weihi, Mary Claire Wolk, Andrew Zerega and Josh Zumwinkel

Baptisms

Lyla Stocke, daughter of Matt and Katie Stocke was baptized Nov. 24, 2019.
Maggie Ann Smutz was baptized Jan. 19, 2020.
Junia Louise Zyla was baptized Jan. 19, 2020.

Deaths

The following members recently passed from this life to be with the Lord. Please be in prayer for their families as they make their way in this world without them.

Bill James passed from this life Dec. 7, 2019.
Phyllis Mitchell passed from this life Dec. 17, 2019.
John Hagar passed from this life Jan. 9, 2020.
Carol Fleisher passed from this life Jan. 9, 2020.
Elizabeth “Betty” Smith passed from this life Jan. 20, 2020.
Shirley Clifton passed from this life Jan. 22, 2020.
Dr. Ann Johanson passed from this life Jan. 30, 2020.
Bernice Roemer passed from this life Feb. 13, 2020
Sandy Buschmann passed from this life March 11, 2020

The church also received notice that Erma Robinson passed June 12, 2019 at the age of 104 and that Samuel Sutton passed away sometime ago.

Money Matters

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:21

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act offers new incentives for charitable giving and a money saving deferment for those whose IRAs would begin disbursement this year, according to the Lilly Foundation.

There is a new universal charitable deduction for 2020 for donors who do not itemize their deductions. This is an “above-the-line” adjustment to income that reduces a donor’s Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) and taxable income. The adjustment is available for cash gifts up to $300 per taxpayer or $600 for a married couple.
The deduction does not apply to gifts to private foundations, donor advised funds (DAFs), supporting organizations (SOs) or for cash deductions carried forward from prior years or for non-cash gifts.

There is a new 100 percent AGI limit for 2020 for those who itemize, for cash gifts to public charities, but only in 2020. This limit does not apply to carry-over deductions from prior years. Gifts to DAFs, SOs and private foundations are not eligible.
The 100 percent limit is reduced dollar-for-dollar by other itemized charitable deductions. This means that in 2020, a donor who deducts 30 percent of AGI for gifts of long-term appreciated property and elects the 100 percent of AGI limit for qualified cash contributions will be able to also deduct up to 70 percent of her AGI for qualified cash gifts, a total deduction of up to 100 percent of AGI.

A donor who makes the 100 percent of AGI election can carry over unused deductions up to five additional years. The carry-over deduction will be subject to the regular 60 percent of AGI limit. It may not always be to a donor’s advantage to make the 100 percent of AGI election, however consult your financial advisor.

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WGPC and Rise Against Hunger partner again to feed the hungry

On Feb. 2, about 100 people – WGPC members, their families and Scouts from Troop 300 – gathered in Fellowship Hall to prepare 15,000 meals for hungry people.

The church partners with Rise Against Hunger for the project, an international hunger relief organization that distributes food and other types of aid to people who are in need around the world.

This is the sixth year for the meal making effort and in those six years, WGPC has prepared at least 90,000 meals, said Brian Kuhn, director of Youth and Family Ministries.

He said people enjoy the event because it brings families together in an activity that everyone can participate in. It also makes an impact on hunger they can see.

"It’s a great chance for everyone to be in the same room with the same goal, the same mission – feeding hungry people, most of them children," Brian said. “There is no age restriction (for the project). There’s a job for anyone, and everyone can do it and it doesn’t matter if they are four or 94. Every little thing they do is key to the process.”

The event began right after the informal worship service at about 9:30 a.m. Those who attended the service moved out chairs, set up tables and began to organize equipment into filling stations.

The goal was to fill bags with everything that was needed for a nutritious meal that could be made simply by adding water and cooking the ingredients. Ingredients included: rice, a soy bean product for protein, dried vegetables and a flavor packet. Each bag produces four meals, Brian said.

Rise Against Hunger sends meals all over the world from countries in Central and South America to African nations, to islands in Southeast Asia and countries in the Middle East.

Most of the meals are served at schools in places where families have a difficult time feeding their families, he said.

"It's a pretty straight forward mission –making meals and shipping them to other parts of the world, usually for school lunches, which not only makes the children better learners but their parents make sure they go to school to get a meal," Brian said.

The simple act of providing a meal also gets “a foot in the door” for Rise Against Hunger, he said.

The object is to help the community it serves develop food sources that are sustainable. It could be to help people decide what crops they should grow and how best to grow those crops, or perhaps to learn to use their water sources more efficiently, Brian said.

Rise Against Hunger’s goal is to mobilize the necessary resources to end hunger by 2030, according to the group’s website.

Members at WGPC obviously want to help them do that, but they also are having a good time with the project, Brian said.

“They have fun while they are doing it,” he said. “Some have been doing it awhile. They have their job and enjoy teaching how it all works.”

He said the event went well and some volunteers even said it was over too soon. The group finished packing up their 15,000 meals by about 1:15 p.m., Brian said.

"If someone hasn’t participated before, I would encourage them to participate next year. It’s so much fun," he said. “And it makes a difference”.

One hundred people come out to prepare 15,000 meals for hungry people.
Earth-minded gather at WGPC

On Feb. 12, Webster Groves Presbyterian Church became a hub in an ecumenical circle of people who care for the earth.

The Environmental Stewardship Sharing Event was a meeting to bring together members of area churches to listen to each other and share ideas and projects that benefit the environment, said Dennis Wacker, Environmental Stewardship committee chair.

“Representatives of between 8 and 10 churches came out,” he said. Members of Missouri Interfaith Power and Light, (a group that works with Missouri faith communities to be stewards of God’s creation) also were there.”

About 25 people in all attended the meeting.

Deb Grossmann said the event was a good fit for people of faith.

“Environment issues are so important to all of God’s Children,” she said. “There is so much that needs to be done, it seems like the efforts of one person or one church can’t make a difference, but if you get more people, more churches doing those small things, you get a bigger and better project,” Deb said.

Two examples of local projects illustrate how churches’ efforts, if shared, can bring the community together. Holy Redeemer’s pumpkin composting project at Halloween, and WGPC’s holiday lights recycling program at Christmas both serve the community at large. When churches know what other churches are doing they can support and participate in those programs, she said.

The group that met in February wasted no time. They shared their ideas, their projects and their upcoming programs with each other and brainstormed new ideas. All items were listed in four categories – worship, education, facilities, and outreach/ advocacy. When the bulleted lists were finished they included about 50 ideas, projects and tips, Dennis said.

Under worship, suggestions included bulletin free services, regular sermons and prayers on the environment and communion by intinction, instead of using plastic cups. Education included speakers, book studies, church gardens, and green tips in newsletters. Ideas for facilities, the longest list, included an energy audit, using real dishes and silverware instead of paper, installing solar panels and energy efficient lighting and removing invasive species from church grounds among others. Outreach and Advocacy included letter-writing campaigns, Mission weekends and even an Earth Day Concert.

Unfortunately, speakers scheduled for 2020, by WGPC including Susan Trautman, CEO of Great Rivers Greenway and David Gunn, arborist for the Missouri Botanical Garden were canceled because of the pandemic.

Deb said they may be rescheduled.

“We hope to reschedule them and other speakers in the 2020-2021 year, she said.

Overall, Dennis said the sharing event was a success.

“I think it went very well. There was a lot of give and take and a lot of interest in it. Everyone had more things they could take back to your church. And there were things done at other churches that maybe we could do,” Dennis said. Everybody took away something they thought was important whether for them or for their church. It was a good interchange and people got to know each other and that was pretty much what it was all about.”

Both Deb and Dennis said there will likely be another gathering of environmentally friendly people in the future.

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The new law also suspends required minimum distributions (RMD) for 2020 from IRAs, 401(k)s, 403(b)s and most other defined contribution plans maintained by an employer for individuals. Minimum distributions that have already started are still required from defined benefit pension plans and some 457 plans. However, required minimum distributions that would have had to start in 2020 do not have to start until 2021, including distributions from defined benefit pension plans and 457 plans.

This change will decrease the tax incentive for a donor to make a qualified charitable distribution (QCD)—an IRA charitable rollover—from an IRA in 2020. However, the change will help retirees who would have had to withdraw a greater percentage of their retirement accounts than expected or face a penalty, given that their RMD calculation for 2020 is based on the retirement account balance as of Dec. 31, 2019 andaccount values decline with the market.

Before making any financial decisions involving the new law consult with your financial advisor.
Spend some time in God’s Creation

- Feeling tired? Spending just 20 minutes outside can give your brain an energy boost.
- Spending time in nature, conservation areas, woods, backyards and urban parks may ease stress levels.
- Taking a nature walk may increase attention spans and creative problem solving skills as much as 50%.
- Exposure to nature contributes to physical well-being, reducing blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and the production of stress hormones.

*Thank you to the Missouri Department of Conservation.*