

First Presbyterian Church the LANTERN

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Session Votes to Keep Masks While Awaiting Omicron Guidance

In its December meeting, Session voted to continue to require use of masks inside the church building, both on Sundays and during the week. Session also discussed the importance of after-service Fellowship Time to many in the congregation. Because of that importance, Session also reaffirmed the continuation of Fellowship Time (with coffee) as the single exception to this policy. Of course, it's good to wear masks during Fellowship Time as well, but it is understood that most masks do not allow the free flow of coffee.

Readers may remember that Session voted last month to loosen restrictions, but with the caveat that the issue would be reconsidered in December, should conditions change. The steep rise of delta cases in Kirksville over the last month and the impending impact of the omicron variant throughout the country mean that, unfortunately, conditions have indeed changed.

Discussions this time focused mainly on two factors: (1) protecting those who are most vulnerable means not only protecting those within our walls, but also doing what we can to protect hospital workers during a spike in cases, along with those who would be harmed by lack of access to hospital care when they needed it. (2) When the omicron variant reaches Kirksville, we will be pushed back toward a situation where even vaccinated people can spread the virus and become infected—a situation where masks become more important.

There's much we don't know yet about how new COVID variants will change the status quo, but it seems clear to Session that new guidance on mask use will become necessary as our knowledge grows. Therefore, Session will once again reconsider the issue once that guidance is available.

Finally, we'd like to share our reasoning in treating Fellowship Time differently than other activities in the church. At heart, we know Fellowship Time is an important aspect of making the church feel welcoming to members and friends alike, and we want to encourage that fellowship. With the exception of the White Gift Sunday, Fellowship Hall has not been overrun with people on Sunday morning, and we feel that distancing while sipping coffee can be maintained. Furthermore, Fellowship Time is also an element of our Sunday morning routine that can be bypassed by those who are trying to be more careful around large groups. So, it's perhaps a good small step toward becoming more open, even while continuing to require masks in the service itself.

As always, we are happy to talk more fully with anyone who has questions about these policy changes or thoughts more generally about how we could make the church more welcoming.

Scott Thatcher
Clerk of Session



Prairie Song Academy would like to extend a warm and hearty thank-you to the church for allowing our school to use the Travers Room and Fellowship Hall on Tuesdays and Thursdays! Prairie Song is a K12 Montessori-inspired, project-based school. We focus on child-led learning, individualizing instruction for each student. We teach math, science, geography, literature and history, centering marginalized voices as we explore our world.

Each of our 35 students pays tuition on a sliding scale, which is supported by community fundraising. It is important to us that our school is affordable and equitable, creating a space where families of all backgrounds can join together to form a safe learning community. The school has filled a great need in our area; we

are completely full at the elementary level with a waitlist, and filled our secondary class as well. We're excited that we'll be able to open up four more spots in our secondary class for this spring!

We love seeing Becky's friendly face in the morning to greet us, and several First Presbyterian members are involved in running the school: Sami Shirk is an assistant guide, Ginger Nolker is a lead guide and head of school, and Kate Sandefur is the lower elementary lead guide. Many of our parents have said that they have never seen their children happier, and they are so thankful to the school and our church for making it possible! The church feels so alive during the week with Take Root and Prairie Song's sounds echoing through the halls. We can't thank you all enough for the kindness our church has extended to us.

If you would like to come in and read a book, help with an art project, knitting, or crocheting, or just let a student show you the work they've been doing, we'd love to have you! Get in touch with Ginger at ginger.nolker@gmail.com. We love fostering connections between our students and the community! You can follow our Facebook page to see what our students have been learning recently; we're really impressed by this group of students, and love working with them each day.



Our thoughts and prayers go out to the family of Jan Martinson: Rebecca, Russell, Beth and Sami Shirk and Sam Martinson. A memorial service for Jan was held Monday, December 20.

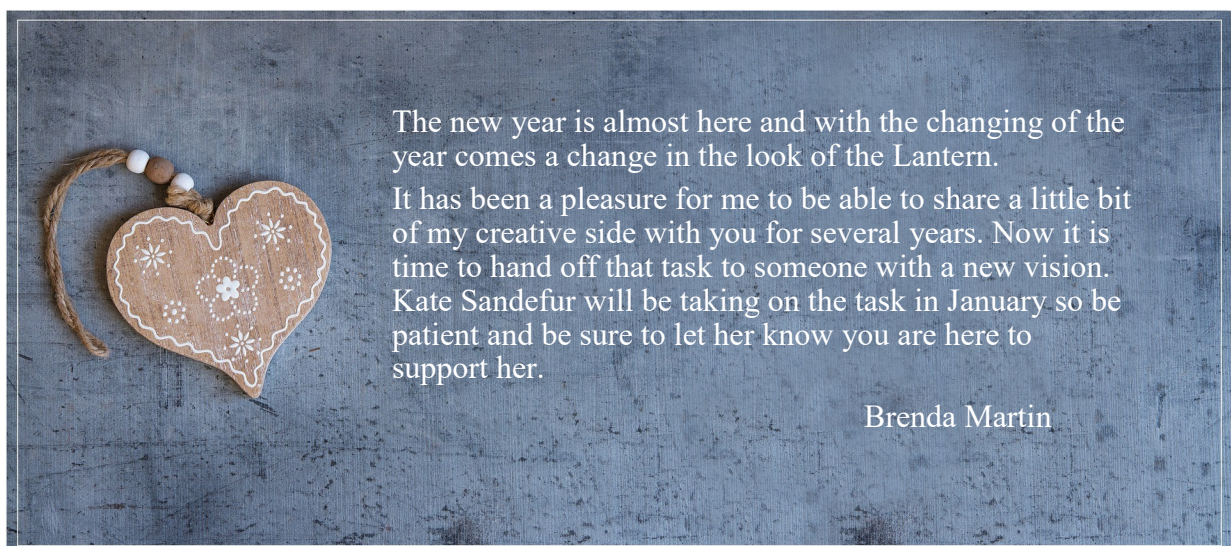
And also to the family of Burt Picht.: Janie and Nancy Picht. A memorial service for Burt

was held Thursday, December 23.

Please keep these families in your prayers.



To vote on nominations for incoming Deacons and Elders Sunday, January 9, following worship



December Birthdays

J Biehl—12/2
Courtney Hamilton—12/2
Laura Easley—12/5
Chad Mohler—12/7
Sandy Elliott—12/10
Ron Shepherd—12/11
Perry Easley—12/16
Sam Martinson—12/17
Daniel Marshall—12/18
Michele Yoder—12/21
Harvey Young—12/23
Victor Barrios—12/28
Jason Gran—12/31

December Anniversaries

Victor Barrios & Adriana Gonzalez—12/18
Garrett & Mary Elam—12/30

January Birthdays

Jaimee Miller—1/5
Alex Hall—1/7
Adriana Gonzalez—1/13
John Thomas—1/20
Esther Nolker—1/22
Kate Krebs—1/24
Elias Nolker—1/26
Grace Mohler—1/28
Dale Stone—1/28

Christmas Opportunities



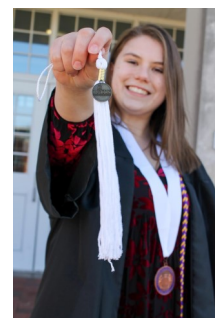
Annual Gingerbread House Making at the church and Caroling 2:00 pm

Christmas Eve Service—
Lessons and Carols 6:00 pm

Sunday, December 26, Wear your jammies and join us for worship in Fellowship Hall for coffee and a discussion led by Paul Yoder.

Congratulations Sami!

Sami Shirk is our newest college graduate. She graduated from Truman State with her bachelor's degree in Mathematics. She will be starting the Masters of Arts in Education program in January.



White Gift Service



the LANTERN

First Presbyterian Church

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Sunday Worship 9:30 am

Sunday School 11:00 am

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Clothes Closet Christmas Shoppe

A big shout out to everyone who helped make this year's Christmas Shoppe a success! We provided 25 families with hygiene products, household items, hats, socks and gloves. Brenda will be working with Deb at Community Mission to make and deliver 7 more boxes. Remaining gloves and hats will be used on the community coat rack. Remaining hygiene items will be used when the Closet re-opens once COVID cases decrease, hopefully in January or February.

