

THE MESSENGER

A Pastor's Ponderings

While I continue to actively discern each and every day that, without a doubt, I have been called to serve as the pastor of this particular church, I admit it has been a great undertaking. As far as I can tell from First's history, since 1954, during the pastorate of Rev. Brink, this congregation has had two full-time pastors or a full and a part time pastor (though there have been interim times that this has not been the case). Even with the congregation being smaller post-Covid, I have found my time and energy continually stretched. For a time I had the assistance of Dr. Lou, for which I continue to be incredibly grateful, who was able to support me in my pastoral work, but she has now been gone for almost two years.

I have at times admittedly struggled to find a sustainable work-life balance. My wife Susan, has often joked that the church is my 'other wife' given how much of me she has had to share since I began serving this church. Ironically, one of the reasons I left my first church was because I felt like I was being underutilized and had often found myself praying for God to give me more to do. And boy, God did not disappoint! My hands here are very full and truly I am grateful for the abundance of life-giving work and service my time here has given me. Though I have often found myself wishing that I could be in more than one place at a time. I continue to work to better utilize the staff that I have, but without another pastor on staff there is often work only I can do. Then lo and behold, God answered my prayers and found me the help I needed even before I knew what, or in this case who, I was looking for.

By God's goodness, there have been many new faces worshipping with our congregation week after week. Since I began, we have even welcomed a total of

10 new members (I anticipate there will be a good number more next year!). One of these new faces has been Viki Brooks – known more formally as Rev. Dr. Viki Brooks, who has been worshipping with us regularly at 10am service for almost 2 years. She is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) just like me and has served in this area for over 30 years.

For 20 years she served as a protestant chaplain at Union College from which she retired in 2018.

She has become an incredibly important source of support and encouragement for me. She has also become a huge supporter of this church in particular. She has felt called to give back and the two of us have been in conversation over the past year about what this might look like.



Viki Brooks and her husband, John

With the Consistory's blessing, Viki will be taking on a 'Dr. Lou-like' role in the new year. She however will be doing so as a volunteer having turned down our offer to compensate her. She will be helping the church stay in touch with folks that we are not able to see as frequently as we would like especially, those struggling with health problems. She will make phone calls and be available to meet in person with those that would appreciate it. I of course will still make hospital visits and provide pastoral care especially in emergency situations. Viki is coming on to support, not replace me. I ask that you please warmly welcome her into this new role. She will be formally commissioned to this service in the early part of next year.

Truly God has and continues to bless me abundantly. I look forward to you all getting to know and love Viki as much as I do!

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

Rev. Christopher J. McCloskey

FRCS Welcomes New Members!

On Sunday, December 14th the congregation received four new members: Joe and Diane Bennett, Erikka Gravell & Kevin McCann. This means that a total of 10 new members have joined since Rev. McCloskey began his pastorate with us! We look forward to receiving many new members in the near future.



FRCS Elects New Elders and Deacons!

Following worship on Sunday, December 14th, the congregation elected Kathe Sheehan & Kevin McCann to be new Elders and Allie Beauchamin & Erikka Gravell as new Deacons. You will notice that two of these folks are new members and that is because they officially joined in order to be on the Consistory, which is frankly amazing and unheard of! Kevin grew up in this congregation and Erikka has been worshipping here for many years. All four will be ordained and installed on Sunday January 4th. Thanks be to God!



Women's Retreat 2026: Last Call

There is still room! We'll be joining together in the comfort of Chi Rho Lodge at Camp Fowler January 9th-11th. The cost for 2025 is \$200 per person and includes meals, room & board. We'll provide a program including faith focused discussions, games, crafts, fun and more!

Want to join in? Contact Miss Diana ASAP at education@firstreformedscotia.org.

Faith Formation Topics

January 4th - Epiphany

Fear doesn't stop us from doing what's right

January 11th - **No Class due to Women's Retreat**

January 18th - What happens after Christmas?

We are called to help those who live in fear

January 25th - Baptism

Camp Fowler Summer Registration Now Open!

Register online at campfowler.org.

We ask that you only pay the deposit so that FRCS scholarship can be applied. The scholarship code is SCOTIA2026.

Hope to see you all at camp this summer!



Save the Date!

Valentine Luncheon

Sunday, February 8th

11:30-1:00

Come join us for soup, conversation, fun & games

All Ages Welcome!

Renew Bible Study

The group will welcome the New Year with a new book starting on January 13th! We would also like to welcome any new people who would like to join in the study a book by Adam Hamilton titled: "Christianity and World Religions – Questions we ask about other faiths"

In examining major world religions and beliefs of their followers, the author urges us as Christians to build bridges with others so that we might grow in faith, seek peace in our world, love our neighbors, and find positive ways to share the gospel.

The group led by Sunny Baldwin, continues to meet at 12 noon on Tuesdays via Zoom. Anyone interested in participating is welcome! For the reading schedule and Zoom link, please contact Sunny at 518-320-4562 or by email at csunnyb@nycap.rr.com.



Community Cupboard Update

The ongoing generosity of our church is a blessing to our community. We are able to continue to stock the Community Cupboard with the donations that are brought in each week. With these cold winter days, quick canned or packaged meals, chicken & tuna, and peanut butter all go very quickly. There is also a need for toilet paper. Think protein as you shop for items to donate. Thank you all for the ongoing support of this service.

Backpack Program Update by Linda Lewis

December has certainly been a very busy month for the Backpack program! Because Thanksgiving was so late this year, we went almost immediately from that distribution of extra food into the planning for the December distribution. All of the money raised from the annual Cookie Walk (this year over \$3,000.00!), goes towards these vacation distributions. School staff, and even the superintendent, have commented on how grateful the families are to receive this extra food. Our volunteers unpacked, sorted, and packed about 3,000 pounds of extra food, in addition to the regular weekly bags! We are fortunate to have community support for these efforts: Keith Buhmaster, owner of Buhmaster Farms, donated a pickup truck full of beautiful apples; the Scotia volunteer firefighters donated \$1,000; the Glenville Rotary donated \$2500 (to be shared with Trinity Presbyterian).

The Community Cupboard also received donations from the community: 900 cans of food from the Middle School student council food drive; one of the sewing groups that rent space donated a shopping cart full of food; Vicki Hayner's family collected food at their reunion and also packed snack bags for Over the Bridge distribution. In addition to all of this, the Fresh Table pop-up pantry held a distribution for families in the Backpack program on December 22 at our Church!

As the saying goes, "It takes a village to raise a child.", it takes a village like Scotia to feed hungry children and their families.

Community Lunch Update by Mark Holley

The Grab and Go Lunch in November distributed 65 meals. Since we have gone back to soup in the fall and winter the number of lunches has gone up.

The Thanksgiving Meal went very smoothly this year. The new ovens worked great. Thanks to all who had a part in getting the ovens up and running. We were all done with prep on Tuesday by 10 am. On Wednesday, the setup went well and we had the meals all out by early afternoon. 142 meals were distributed that day and additional meals were frozen and given out at a later time. A total of 160 meals were distributed. Truly amazing!

A special thanks to all my volunteers, Laura Bull, The Scotia Methodist Church especially Judy Swain, and the Thomas Corners Fire department especially Wayne Penn for doing all of the deliveries.

We are at a total of 7,881 meals. Happy Holidays to you all!



Health & Wellness Note:

At the beginning of December, a study about the effect of smart phones on children was released in Pediatric magazine. This is a health issue that researchers at Children's Hospital Philadelphia, the University of California at Berkeley, and Columbia University have been studying since 2018. They have been analyzing data from more than 10,000 adolescents around the United States who participated in the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development Study (ABCD) between 2018 and 2020. That study, funded by the National Institutes of Health, describes itself as "the largest long-term study of brain development and child health" in the country.

According to the new most recent results, children who had a smartphone before age twelve, compared to those that did not, had increased risks of mental health issues and obesity. Mental health issues included higher incidences of depression and insufficient sleep.

In recent years, a growing number of experts have sounded the alarm about increased screen time and the effect it has on kids and teens. In a 2023 advisory on social media use and mental health, former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy recommended creating "tech-free zones" and encouraging kids to "foster in-person friendships." Meanwhile, several states have taken steps to ban cellphones in schools. Since statistics show that most teens will eventually have cell phones, it is advisable to monitor what our children do on their phones, ensuring they're not exposed to inappropriate content and that smartphones don't disrupt sleep.

For more information, just google children and cell phone hazards. You'll find many practical ideas to limit the negative effects of smart phones.

Mission of the Month: Kids Hope

January is National Mentoring Month, and FRCS is celebrating the life-changing relationships with students at Sacandaga elementary school through Kids Hope USA. This month recognizes the faithful commitment of volunteer mentors who show up week after week to show students they are loved and cared for. In Kids Hope USA programs, that one hour can make a big difference. Students can experience an improvement in academic skills and reading, feel a sense of greater confidence, and better social/emotional behaviors. Kids Hope USA is a national mentoring organization that connects community-focused churches with their neighborhood elementary schools. These school-based mentoring programs equip and mobilize volunteer mentors to go into the schools to enrich the lives of students through one-on-one relationships. Standing alongside parents, teachers, principals and counselors, Kids Hope USA mentors show kids they are valued and loved. Together they play games, read, do schoolwork, talk and much more. This intentional time helps provide the student support, motivation and confidence to learn and achieve.



Through the power of relationships, kids build resilience and a brighter future.

Let's thank the following Mentors:

Diana Ackner, Barb Aldi, Jeff Austin, Carol Ahl, Diury Alvarado, Marty Gilgore, Vicki Hayner, Peg Kniskern, Carol Leitze, Linda Lewis, Laurel-Le Lipski, Sheryl Pelkey, Donna Richards, Bill Shave, Diane Skibinski & Jeff Taft.

And our Substitute Mentors: Sunny Baldwin, Richard Doyle, Sandy Lunstedt & Linda Willoughby.

Genealogy Class Now Offered

The class, which is for those who wish to learn skills to successfully seek answers about their ancestors, will begin in January. Knowledge about deciphering DNA data, seeking legitimate cyber records, and seeking primary source documentation all will be discussed. Should you be planning participation in these classes, please contact Bob Baldwin at robert.baldwin.acctrng@gmail.com or call 518-320-4561. Also, make sure to provide a clean flash drive (thumb drive) or SD Card to receive items covered in each class. I am hoping to provide these sessions every two weeks. The first session will be January 21st, 7pm to 9pm, in Brink Hall.

Many Hands Make Light Work!

This church has 7 councils that coordinate the various ministries of the church. Consistory members help to lead the councils, but *congregational members are needed as well*. Please review the following councils and see where you might be able to lend a hand.

Admin Council - This council is responsible for overseeing financial and personnel matters for the church, which include Stewardship, Communication, and Fundraising.

Building & Grounds Council - This council is responsible for the maintenance of our facility.

Christian Education Council - This council is responsible for preparing educational programs for children and adults.

Congregational Care Council - This council is responsible for the care of our congregation including funeral receptions, home communion visits as well as the Health & Wellness team.

Fellowship Council - This council is responsible for planning and preparing various activities for the congregation to enjoy fellowship together.

Mission Council - This council is responsible for coordinating and planning our many and all mission activities.

Worship Council - This council is responsible for planning worship services, communion, etc.

Thank You!

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank my church family for all their wonderful 'get well' wishes since my knee replacement. They were very much appreciated. Wishing you all many blessings for the Christmas season." - Carol Arnold

January Anniversaries:

**Joe and Cathy Deamer 1
Wayne and Susan Penn 15
Bub and Janet Bekkering 21
Mike and Susan Torelli 22
Kirk and Linda Willoughby 30**

January Birthdays:

**Kevin Beauchemin 2
Jessica Crisci 6
Chris Grumbling 9
Connor Kilgallen 16
Sue Pitts 18
Lucy Trbovich 22
Cindy Taft 25
Tom Bodden 28**

**June Coryer 5
MaryLynne Davidson 6
Barret Germain 12
Sunny Baldwin 17
David Gonyea 20
Brad Coryer 23
Claudia Garrison 26**

**Jacob Crisci 6
Naomi Faulkner 6
Brittney Schaefer 12
Tom Lansing 18
Bob Grumbling 21
Sally Knutson 24
Duane VanPatten, Jr 26
Rebecca Penn 28**

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