

THE MESSENGER

A Pastor's Ponderings

Generally speaking I am a Lectionary preacher. The Lectionary is a three year cycle that suggests at least four readings per Sunday: an Old Testament Reading, a Psalm, a Gospel Reading and a New Testament reading. Each year corresponds to one of the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke with the Gospel of John sprinkled into each year. 2026 begins this three year cycle anew with Year A,

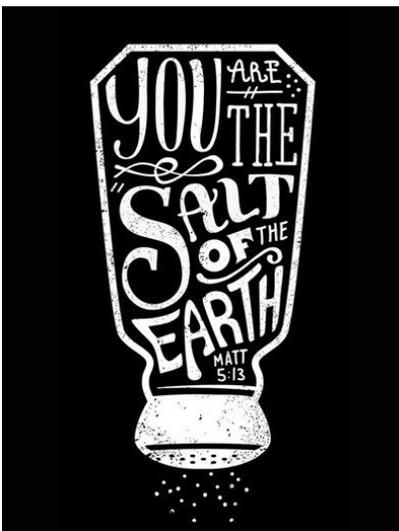
which corresponds to the Gospel of Matthew. This means we will be reading Matthew 5:13-20 on **February 8th** this year. This reading very famously begins with Jesus stating "You are the salt of the earth."

In the following verse Jesus states "You are the light of the world" which admittedly for me always made more sense than being called salt.

Salt in the ancient world had two main purposes: as a preservative and as a flavor enhancer. Thus by calling us salt, Jesus is calling on us to preserve the good news of the gospel in our hearts. Jesus is also calling on us to enhance the 'flavor' of the world by sharing God's goodness and love. As we all know salt impacts everything it touches. It seems clear by the remainder of verse 13 that Jesus is calling on us to make sure our witness remains impactful. Just like we are not to hide our light, we are not to lose our 'saltiness.'

Jesus may also call us salt because salt was very valuable in the ancient world. Salt was so valuable in fact that the modern word *Salary* comes from the word for salt.

In the Eastern Orthodox and in some Roman Catholic rites, whenever it is time to read Matthew 5:13 in worship, they invite their congregations to bring salt from their homes into the sanctuary to be blessed by the priest. The idea is that every time they cook with the salt at home their meals will also be blessed and they will be reminded that they are to be salt of the earth.



While I am not a priest, at least not in the Orthodox or the Catholic sense (we are a priesthood of all believers), I thought it would be fun to also have a blessing of the salt in our worship on **February 8th**. You are encouraged to bring a container of salt from your home with you to worship (please make sure to mark it so it does not get confused with other people's salt). At the beginning of worship we will collect the salt on the communion table and we all will say a special prayer over what has been gathered. I

plan to place little stickers on each container so you will remember this blessing each time you pull your salt out of the cupboard to cook. I will also have extra containers of salt available for anyone who might forget their own.

While I believe this blessing is just words and holds no mystical or metaphysical power, I hope this is a fun and helpful way for us to remember Jesus' call to be the Salt of the Earth. And to remember our faith when we are cooking and eating.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

Rev. Christopher J. McCloskey

Snow Closing Policy

What happens when there is heavy snow? Our policy is to hold worship whenever possible. However, if the Scotia or Glenville Police Departments declare a Snow Emergency and ask citizens to keep off the streets, we will comply and cancel our events. If we do cancel our Sunday morning schedule, we will make every effort to announce our closing through the school closings network. Check the TV and radio stations to find out if worship is canceled if you are unsure.



Winter Warm-Up Sale

The Winter Warm-Up Sale will be held on Friday, February 6th from 9:00am-1:00pm & Saturday, February 7th from 9:00am-12:00pm in Brink Hall. Donations will start being accepted on Sunday, February 1st and will be collected throughout the week. Items we are looking for: housewares, linens, books, jewelry, baked goods, clothing (warm/seasonal) & toys. Jewelry donations will be accepted February 2nd-6th from 9:00am - 1:00pm at the Church Office. We are also in need of volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering please contact Laura Bull.



Valentine Luncheon

Sunday, February 8th
11:30-1:00

Come join us for soup, conversation, fun & games

Open to everyone!



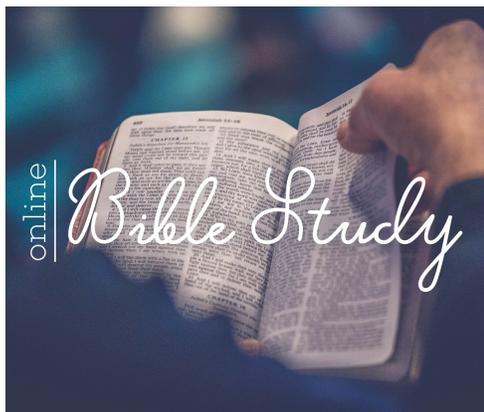
Mardi Gras

Mardi Gras, French for "Fat Tuesday," is coming to Coffee Hour February 15! Typically, Mardi Gras is a festival marking the final day of the Carnival season before the Christian observance of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. We're going to have a bit of celebration early with some special treats, music, and activities. Everyone is invited to join us!



Renew Bible Study

The Renew Bible Study group continues to study Adam Hamilton's "Christianity and World Religions – Wrestling with Questions People Ask". The author touches on the high points and characteristics of each faith in order to assist us in comparing and contrasting each faith with our Christian faith. The group led by Sunny Baldwin, continues to meet at 12 noon on Tuesdays via Zoom. Anyone interested either for one or all three weeks is welcome! For the schedule and Zoom link, contact Sunny at 518-320-4562 or by email at csunnyb@nycap.rr.com.



Lenten Bible Studies

Tell Me Something Good

- Renew Bible study: Tuesdays at noon on zoom
Contact Sunny Baldwin for more information
- Bible study: Tuesdays at 6:30pm - 7:30pm starting Feb. 11th
Contact Miss Diana for more information



Ash Wednesday

Lent begins this year on Wednesday, February 18th. We will have a brief Ash Wednesday service that evening at 7:00pm in our sanctuary.

Faith Formation

- February 1st *Topic: Micah 6:8*
Confirmation Group Session after worship
- February 8th *Topic: The Ripple effect*
KIDS are SINGING in worship
Valentine Luncheon after worship
- February 15th Communion - **No Class**
Mardi Gras after worship
- February 22nd 1st Sunday in Lent
Topic: Let God's goodness surprise you



Missionary Visit

On Sunday, February 22nd, we will be visited by Yohannes Bekele. Yohannes is the Director of the Christian-Muslim Relations Center at Mekane Yesus Seminary in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia—the flagship theological institution of an 11-million-member rapidly growing denomination. This new Center will be pivotal in equipping pastors, evangelists, and other church leaders with the skills they need to provide a sensitive Christ-centered witness among their non-Christian neighbors. Yohannes will give a presentation in Brink Hall following 10am worship.



Come Join Choir!

As we approach Lenten season it is a great time to join our church choir! Come join us as we sing to spread God's glory and have a great time doing it. The ability to laugh and enjoy singing are the only requirements. Thursdays at 7:00pm. Contact Miss Diana for more information.

Fowler Spaghetti Dinner & Cake Auction

Save the date: Saturday, March 21st

4:00pm - 6:30pm

More info will be coming soon.



BE A HERO: Give Blood

Every two seconds someone in the U.S. needs blood. There is no substitute for blood. The Red Cross is the single largest provider of blood products in the U.S. At the heart of the Red Cross mission to ensure a safe and reliable blood supply is the voluntary blood donation.

Learn more about what blood is used to treat and blood donating at redcrossblood.org. Come join us on February 23rd, 1pm-5pm in Brink Hall as we donate to save a life. Appointments can be scheduled on line at redcrossblood.org/give or by calling 1-800- 733-2707.



Mission of the Month

February's Mission Of The Month is the Community Meal program. This program was founded by Mark Holley with the clear vision to feed the people of our community facing challenging times. Over the last seven and a half years, this program has served over 8,000 meals. It consists of a sit down meal on the last Saturday of each month along with a bagged Grab-and-Go lunch on the second Wednesday of each month. There is a dedicated group of volunteers who assist Mark with the preparation, and serving of these meals. This invaluable mission offers meals at no cost to anyone who wants or needs them. The Community Meal Program offers comforting meals, support and encouragement to our neighbors. The program relies on the proceeds of fundraising along with the generous donations from people like you in order to function. Please consider supporting the Community Meal Program this month. Thank you!

Community Meal Update by Mark Holley

In December, we had a glorious celebration for Norma Hamm in order to recognize her for all that she does for our church and community. Her family joined us along with many from our church and community to honor her steadfast service. We are blessed to have such an angel among us.



Also in December, we surpassed 8,000 meals served since the program's inception seven and a half years ago. After the January Grab-and-Go, we have served 8,065 meals.

At the December meal our guests were served the ziti dinner and were given a Christmas Box of food, which included: chicken thighs, stuffing mix, rice mix, corn, and dessert. They all seemed to enjoy their gifts.

February Genealogy Group Meeting

The genealogy group will be meeting again on February 4th from 7-9pm. If you did not attend in January, no worries...you are always welcome at any time. This time we will be in the Library as Brink Hall is preparing for the winter sale. Remember to bring your thumb drive to download documents shared during the evening. If you have questions, please contact me, Bob Baldwin, via text at 518-320-456 or via email at robert.baldwin.acctrng@gmail.com. The more the merrier!

Staying Connected

If you aren't on our Constant Contact email list, this is a great time to add yourself, so that we can all stay connected! Please go to the church website: firstreformedscotia.org, and click on the "NEWSLETTER" tab. If you scroll all the way to the bottom, you will need to click on "JOIN OUR EMAIL LIST." From there, you just fill out your information, and click "SIGN UP." We look forward to hearing from you.

Health and Wellness Note: This fall the congregation completed the annual Health and Wellness survey. The three top interests were: Aging Healthily 55+, Exercise, and Nutrition/Weight Loss. Using these results, the Health & Wellness Team is currently developing programs for this coming year. We are recruiting presenters and Messenger articles will frequently focus on these topics.

That being said, our topic this month is Age-Related Macular Degeneration, AMD. The American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) and Prevent Blindness have designated February as AMD and Low Vision Awareness Month. Their focus is to raise public awareness about AMD, a serious eye condition that can lead to irreversible vision loss.

Common symptoms are:

- **Wavy or Distorted Lines:** Straight lines, such as door frames or lines of text, may appear bent, crooked, or wavy.
- **Central Blurriness:** A fuzzy or blurred area may develop in the center of your sight, making it difficult to recognize faces or read small print.
- **Blind Spots:** You may notice dark, gray, or blank patches in your central field of vision that can grow larger over time.
- **Reduced Color Vibrancy:** Colors may seem dull, faded, or "washed out" because the macula is responsible for detailed color vision.
- **Light Adaptation Issues:** Difficulty seeing in low light or needing much brighter light for close-up tasks like reading.
- **Distorted Object Size:** Objects may appear smaller (micropsia) or farther away than they actually are.

Common ways to prevent AMD:

- 1. Quit smoking.** Smoking can double a person's risk of developing AMD. The sooner you can quit, the better!
- 2. Know your family history.** If you have a first-degree relative with AMD, you have a much greater risk of developing it too.
- 3. Eat leafy greens** like spinach, kale, and Swiss chard. Their anti-oxidants help protect against cellular damage from free radicals, which can contribute to eye disease.
- 4. Take supplements.** Ask your doctor if you should take a multi-vitamin or take a specialized blend of supplements known as AREDS, if you are at high risk for AMD.
- 5. Wear sunglasses,** which offer protection from UV and blue light that can cause retinal damage from repeat exposure.
- 6. Maintain a healthy blood pressure and weight.** This improves circulation to the retina.
- 7. Test yourself with an Amsler grid.** The tool, which helps doctors detect vision problems related to macular damage, can be used at home.
- 8. Help yourself.** Early detection is essential so AMD can be slowed or stabilized. If you have symptoms, make an appointment! AMD can be managed and risks reduced with regular eye exams and healthy lifestyle choices. Ultimately, the choice is yours.

Youth Mission Trip 2026

Who: Open to ALL High School students

When: June 28th - July 3rd

Where: Reformed Church of Highland Park, New Jersey

What: We will work at their store and cafe, supporting refugees and those in need

Want to know more?

Contact Miss Diana

education@firstreformedscotia.org

518-428-2914 (cell)

Men's Group

Deacon Bill Shave has felt calling to try and start a Men's Group here at FRCS. This group will gather for the first time on Wednesday, February 11th at 7:00pm. Come and help us discern what this group will look like going forward. Food will be provided!



Annual Assessment

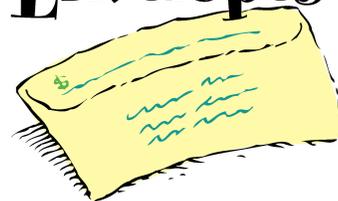
As you may, or may not know, our church pays assessments as a member of the Reformed Church in America. For 2026, we have been "assessed" an amount of **\$88** for each member of our church. If you are willing and able to help cover this cost, please submit a separate payment to cover your assessment (over and above your pledge). It would be greatly appreciated. Please mark clearly on your check and/or payment that this is for your assessment so that it is recorded correctly. Thank you for your consideration.



Offering Envelopes

Once again, this year we will NOT be providing "numbered" offering envelopes. We WILL, however, have offering envelopes available for your use. These envelopes are available in packages in the Narthex and the Brink Hall lobby. Envelopes are not necessary, you can put your check right into the offering plate as long as your name is on it. Cash should be put into an envelope if you wish to receive a statement credit. Thank you again for your generosity!

**Offering
Envelopes**



February Anniversaries

Linda and Richard Lewis 21

February Birthdays

**Tina Haldeman 1
Jason White 2
Mark Rahn 7
Sophia DeMasi 9
Wesley Kohout 12
Norma Hamm 20
Terri McKenzie 23**

**Mark Holley 2
Amanada Faulkner 4
Walther Pfuntner Jr 8
Lynn Makrin 10
Terry Paulson 12
Viktoriya Falcon 22
Sara Madison 26
Julia Penn 28**

**Simon Trbovich 2
Jason Bull, Jr. 5
Emma DeMasi 9
Ellen Schultz 11
Sue Torelli 16
Chris Bodden 23
Maggie Pfuntner 27**

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