

Congregational Communicator

Volume 5, Issue 4

April 2025



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“NOTES FROM THE PASTOR”

We are well into the Lenten season, and Easter will be upon us before we know it. In conversation with several folks about Jesus's death and resurrection, in particular the stations of the cross, I realized that not everyone is familiar with them, and what better opportunity to share them than during the Season of Lent? I will take you through the stations of the cross, using some resources from the booklet of James Adama, “*Cross Examinations: Stations of the Cross.*” Read them, and after each one is a personal reflection. Take your time as you read through them and reflect on the event that took place.

The 1st Station: Jesus is condemned to death.

The crowd condemns an innocent man to death, and Pilate, who could have reprieved Jesus, washed His hands of the affair and gave the people what they wanted. When the innocent are mistreated, what is our reaction? Do we join in out of pride or ignorance? Do we stand silently without defending the innocent? Or do we see Christ in the condemned and reach out to those in need?

“Lord, give me the strength and clarity to defend the innocent.”

The 2nd Station: Jesus is made to carry His cross.

When Jesus saw the Cross—the wood beams upon which he would suffer and then die—He did not hesitate. He took it upon his shoulders and began to walk, willingly embracing these excruciating hardships out of love for you and me. Out of love for God and each other, we, too, have the opportunity to sacrifice and give of ourselves. Christ's words to His disciples are just as true for us as they were for them: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”

“Lord, give me the grace and the strength to love you more than any earthly thing or person.”

The 3rd Station: Jesus falls for the first time

Picture Jesus straining, falling under the weight of a cross that He did not deserve to bear. How incredible it is that he chose to take on the burden of that cross and how much He wants us to join Him one day in heaven. When faced with choosing to either sin or strive for virtue, we can remember how Christ is weighed down every time we reject Him in favor of our own will and desires.

“Lord, help me to reject selfishness and imitate your loving generosity in everything I do.”

The 4th Station: Jesus meets His sorrowful mother.

Every parent can imagine the incredible pain Mary must have felt when she encountered her beloved Son and all that He was suffering. Despite her anguish, she did not try to stop her Son from making the ultimate sacrifice. For this reason, she is such an advocate for those who suffer, both physically and emotionally.

“O Lord, help me to advocate for those who suffer in any way.”

The 5th Station: Simon of Syree helps Jesus carry the cross.

The soldiers were impatient with how long Jesus took to carry the heavy cross alone. They pulled Simon of Cyrene out of the crowd and made him help Jesus with his burden. Have you ever been compelled to help in a difficult situation? What was your reaction? Like Simon, we can reach out to our loved ones, neighbors, or a stranger in need.

“Lord, grant us the desire to help those who need our assistance, whether friend or stranger.”

The 6th Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus.

Without hesitation, Veronica lovingly uses her veil to wipe Christ's bloodied face. In return, He imprints an image of His Holy Face. This is

just one of many instances where God outdoes us in generosity. What we give to Him; He returns one hundredfold.

“Lord, help me love you more and more.”

The 7th Station: Jesus falls the second time.

Jesus, the Son of God, falls again under the weight of our sins. He is not allowed to rest but instead is hit and pushed, compelled to continue. In this moment, we can recognize His great love for us.

“Lord, free me from vice in my daily life.”

The 8th Station: The women of Jerusalem weep over Jesus

They wept when these pious women moved out of love for their Lord and met Jesus on His path to Calvary. However, Jesus told them not to cry for Him but for themselves and their children. In other words, Jesus prompts us to express contrition for our sins, for the times we have hurt our relationship with Him.

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

The 9th Station: Jesus falls the third time

After a painful journey, Christ finally arrives at the foot of Mount Calvary, only to fall again. Even though He is crushed for a third time by the weight of the Cross, His love for us remains. How immense is the mercy of our God!

“Lamb of God, who takes away the world's sins, have mercy on me.”

The 10th Station: Jesus is stripped of His garments

When Christ arrived at Calvary, all of His garments were torn away. Wounded, torn, and naked, Christ was left with no earthly possessions. As the prophet Isaiah foretold, “Though harshly treated, he submitted and did not open His mouth; like a lamb led to slaughter...” He hum-

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bled Himself out of love for us!

“Lord, grant me grace and humility of heart in the face of difficulties.”

The 11th Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross

Jesus was not only put to death, but He was also executed in one of the most violent and painful ways possible: crucifixion. He suffered in silence as huge nails were pounded into His hands and feet. Later, Thomas the Apostle would doubt that Christ had indeed Risen and Christ showed Thomas His wounds. How willing are we to sacrifice for those that we love?

“Lord, give me the grace to love others as myself.”

The 12th Station: Jesus is raised on the cross and dies.

“Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”; and when He had said this, He breathed His last” (Luke 23: 46). How great the Lord’s love is for us that He gave up His life to save us. May we be given the grace to overcome sin in our lives to join him in heaven.

“Lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil.”

The 13th Station: Jesus is taken down from the cross and placed in Mary’s arms.

Jesus’ earthly life ended as it began, in the arms of His saintly Mother. Her life is a testament to each one of us who would pursue the Christian life. Stay close to the Lord in life, in suffering and in death, recognizing that His sacrifice has set us free.

“Pray for me, a sinner, now and at the hour of our death.”

The 14th Station: Jesus is laid in the Sepulcher

Scriptures tell us that Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Council who had not consented to Jesus’ condemnation, went and asked for the body of Jesus. He took such care as he wrapped the body of Jesus in linens and placed it in a rock-hewn tomb that had not yet been used. His reverence for the Body of Christ can inspire us to similar faithfulness each time we receive the elements symbolizing Christ’s body and blood in Holy Communion.

As followers of Christ left the tomb and went home to observe the Sabbath, they mourned but waited in hope. We, too, wait with hopeful expectations for Christ’s Resurrection and the many gifts He bestows upon our lives.

“Lord, increase my hope.”

Wishing you a blessed EASTER!
Pastor Shazzy

CHURCH NEWS

HOSPITALIZATIONS/SURGERIES, TESTING...

- Myra Coover was in the hospital early March and is now home and doing much better.
- Beth Berends broke her arm and had surgery; she is getting along well.
- Pastor Shazzy had extensive ankle surgery and is getting around quite well.
- Linda Edwardson had two surgeries and is recovering.
- Jack & Mary Schomaker with various health issues.

CONDOLENCES...

- To the family of Dixie Barber who died on January 20th.
- To Josh & Alison Munter on the death of Josh’s dad, Thomas Munter on March 21.
- To the family and friends of Lou Reed who passed away on March 24th.

THANK YOU...

- Dear Church Family,
Thanks everyone for your kindness since I broke my arm and the surgery that followed. Your prayers, cards, and the meal are appreciated very much.
- Beth Berends
- I would like to thank my church family for the prayers, cards, phone calls, food and visits before, and after my two surgeries.
- Linda Edwardson
- Thank you for the floral arrangement in memory of our mother Mary Kay Zinn.
- Bill & John Zinn
- Pastor Shazzy & First Congo,
Thank you so much for your incredible generosity during our time of need. Our church and and Preschool/Daycare are so grateful for all the sacrifices you made to house our Preschool & Daycare in your building. You and your people will always hold a precious place in our hearts. God Bless You and Your Ministry:
- Pastor Renae & Trinity Lutheran Church & Daycare
- On behalf of our family, we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the First Congregational Church for graciously allowing us to use Fellowship Hall for the celebration of life event for Jody Rinken. Your kindness and generosity provided a warm, welcoming space for us to gather


with friends and family to honor and remember Jody. The support from the church community during this difficult time has meant so much to us, and we are truly grateful for your hospitality and care. Thank you for being a part of this meaningful occasion.
- Rinken Family

- On behalf of Hope Haven I want to thank you for your recent donation of \$1,210 for use of our flooded homes in Spencer. Your generosity enables us to live out our mission. Please accept my sincere thanks for your generous donation. Your partnership is appreciated.
- Hope Haven
- Thank you to everyone who has called, texted, visited, sent cards and food, and offered prayers as I recover from surgery. Your prayers have uplifted my spirit during this time of healing. I am on the mend but still not allowed to put weight on my foot, which is frustrating as it is hard to be still. Yes, my patience is being tested! Love y’all.
- Blessings, Pastor Shazzy

ADOPT-A-FAMILY THANK YOU’S:

- Thank you so much for helping us out this year, it means so much to us and literally makes us happy that you are doing this for us. You make the world a better place, so thank you so much.
- Thanks so much for your help!
- Thank you so much for your gifts. Without your generosity, kind hearted, and compassion, we would not have had such a wonderful Christmas. My sister died at 29 years old. She had a seizure in the bath and drowned. I got custody of the kids at that time who were 2 and 3 years old. It’s been rough but it is my job to give them the best life possible and with your help we are getting there.
- Thank you for everything! We really appreciated it. Have a Merry Christmas.
- Thank you for helping us celebrate Christmas! After the flood I was quite worried about how I was going to celebrate with my kids! You guys are making it possible!
- Thank you!
- Thank you so very very much. We lost all of our possessions in the Flood. God Bless You!!
- Thank you so much to the wonderful people whom adopted us. It means the world to us to have kind people in the world.

WHAT'S HAPPENING



Winter
BIBLE STUDY


TUESDAY MORNING
10:00 a.m.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT
7:00 p.m.



WOMEN'S
Fellowship

MAYFLOWER CIRCLE
will meet in the
Fireside Room @ 1 p.m.
Thurs., April 17th
ALL WOMEN OF THE CHURCH
ARE INVITED.



CONGO NIGHT OUT

TUESDAY, APRIL 1ST
POT LUCK IN FELLOWSHIP HALL
5:30 - 7 p.m.

Joe Conover will be discussing his Egypt trip and sharing more stories and pictures. This should be a fascinating event and we can't wait to see you all!

Spencer Historic Preservation Commission Presentation:

First Congregational Church along with Sacred Heart Catholic Church and Grace United Methodist Church have been asked to speak about the history of our church's since we are three of the oldest churches in Spencer.

We invite anyone that would like to join us for First Congregational Church's Historical presentation in person on

THURSDAY, APRIL 10TH
5:30 – 6:30
in the City Council Chambers

The presentation will also be available live online on the City of Spencer's Facebook page and played again on SMU at a later date. Shelly Robinson, Sheryl Patten, and Sandi Nielsen will be giving the presentation, thank you ladies for working so diligently on the history of our church.

What an honor to have been asked to share our rich Congo history with others. Please join us for our presentation on April 10 beginning at 5:30!

May Breakfast
UPDATE

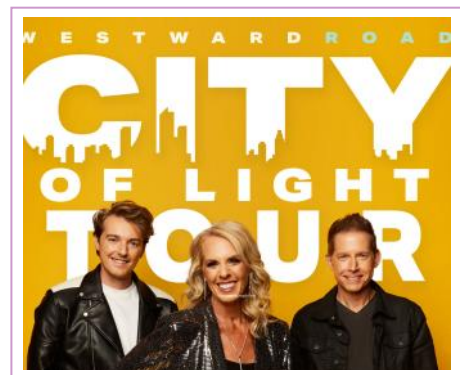
After careful consideration and dwindling numbers in Mayflower Circle we have decided to take a break from the May Breakfast.

There will NOT be a May Breakfast in 2025. We will carefully consider other fundraising opportunities and keep everyone posted on these events and dates.

We so appreciate your past and continued support of Mayflower Circle and look forward to our next adventure.

We would like to ask any women of the church to prayerfully consider joining Mayflower Circle.

We meet once monthly usually the third Thursday. Times and locations may vary to try to accommodate as many as possible.

WESTWARD ROAD
CITY OF LIGHT TOUR

ALL ARE INVITED TO AN EVENING OF WORSHIP WITH WESTWARD ROAD!
SUNDAY, MAY 4TH • 6 P.M.
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Providing a unique blend of gospel and modern worship music is where Westward Road excels. Westward Road is an exciting and dynamic family trio, led by Scott Roberts, a 20 year veteran worship leader and nation charting songwriter, and his wife, the talented and award winning vocalist, Kelli Roberts. Their son, Garrett Roberts completes the superbly gifted musical family with his smooth vocal tones. Their "out of the box" take on worship and gospel music paired with their God given ability to communicate the Good News takes audiences into the presence of God in a very powerful way. They have performed for audiences in large theaters and for intimate settings in rural churches, festivals and fairs. A Westward Road concert leaves you uplifted by their message of hope and encouraged to live a life of trust in God. Their inspiring style of music along with their smooth family harmonies and ability to lead God's people into His presence through worship will have audiences of all ages falling in love with this fun and energetic trio.



You're invited to join us for Lenten Lunch and Worship every Wednesday during the season of Lent!

Lunch will be served at 11:30 with a worship to follow.

April 2nd: First Baptist Church

April 9th: Faith Pentecostal Church

April 16th: Hope Church



Join us for services during the Lenten Season!

APRIL 13TH: Palm Sunday & Cantata
with meal to follow

APRIL 17TH: Maundy Thursday
5:30 p.m.

APRIL 18TH: Good Friday Tenebrae Service
5:30 p.m.

APRIL 20TH:
Easter Sunrise Service & Communion at
Gary's on the River • 7:00 a.m.

Easter Breakfast • 8:00 - 10:00 a.m.

Easter Egg Hunt • 9:45 a.m.

Easter Worship & Communion at FCC
10:30 a.m.



7:00 a.m. ~ Sunrise Service
@ Gary's on the River

8 a.m. - 10 a.m. ~ Easter Breakfast
in Fellowship Hall

9:45 a.m. ~ Easter Egg Hunt
In the church court yard.
If inclement weather, it'll be held inside.

10:30 a.m. ~ Easter Worship



Core Ministry of Mission has chosen our Easter Offering to go to
**Upper Des Moines Opportunity
& The Outreach** (formerly GACO)

Please use the enclosed envelope to donate to this cause. Thank you in advance for your gift.

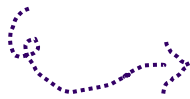
CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRY

CONGO YOUTH IN THE NEWS...

- LARGE GROUP SPEECH TEAM: Mallory Adams, Jozefin Kierscht, Evalyn Simpson, Robbie Gerlock, Haedden Slawson, and Maggie Moser.
- ONE ACT PLAY: Jozefin Kierscht
- REATER'S THEATRE: Evalyn Simpson and Robbie Gerlock
- MUSICAL THEATRE: Robbie Gerlock and Haedden Slawson
- ENSEMBLE ACTING: Mallory Adams



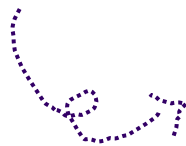
NORA CONOVER WITH HER DANCE TEAM!



SKI TRIP TO MT. KATO



CONFIRMATION RETREAT WITH PASTOR SHAZZY!



PILGRIM FELLOWSHIP SCHEDULE:

WEDNESDAY EVENINGS

6:00 - 6:30 - Middle School devotion time

6:30 - 7:30 - High School/Middle School dinner, mentorship moment and game/activity time

7:30 - 8:00 - High School devotion time





MISSIONS

UPCOMING MISSION TRIP WITH NEXT STEP MILWAUKEE, WI – JULY 27- AUGUST 1

WHAT IS THIS MISSION EXPERIENCE ABOUT?

During your time in Milwaukee, you may have the opportunity to work on block beautification and home repair projects, or serve at local gardens and food pantries. But at the end of the week, you can know that your understanding of the city, as well as growth in and understanding of prayer will have taken place. Relationships will have formed. Projects will have been completed. And the love of Christ will be made known.

COST PER PERSON: \$449

INCLUDES MEALS AND ACCOMMODATION.

First Congo has secured funding and credited it towards a mission trip, and depending on the number of participants, we will have a fundraiser to raise the additional funds needed. Sign up asap! A deposit of \$50 will be required to secure your spot.

Currently we have 10 signed up for the mission trip. We are still able to add **FIVE ADDITIONAL** folks up until **APRIL 15**. A \$50 deposit is needed to secure your spot. Please call the church office and let us know if you're interested!

SAVE THE DATES!

NAPF/HOPE ~ JUNE 21 - 24 ~ *St. Louis, MO*

NAPF

NAPF is for youth who are entering 9th through 12th grade. NAPF allows teens to meet and bond with other Christians from throughout the country and to share their faith in a fun-filled atmosphere. Small groups are led by dedicated adult counselors, many of whom volunteer and use vacation time to attend. In conjunction with tremendous worship music, worship times may be led by members of the Commission on Youth Ministries or other adult leaders. Local church youth groups are also asked to prepare and lead morning and evening devotionals. Opportunities to express faith through acts of service are always a highlight of the conference. Any time a group of young people is gathered, there is always plenty of fun!

HOPE

HOPE offers young adults post high school through age 26 a great opportunity to further grow in faith with peers in an environment similar to NAPF. While still including worship, speakers, small group time, and mission work, HOPE promotes closer connection with peers and deeper discussion about faith through peer-led small groups. The experiences and perspectives that each person brings to their small group are valued and can enrich discussions about faith in remarkable ways. In addition, HOPE provides more opportunities for leadership involvement through prayer team, small group leader, or CYM (Commission on Youth Ministries) representative positions. HOPE creates a genuine, meaningful, and fun atmosphere to grow in faith while creating new friendships!

NAPF and HOPE Scholarships

Scholarships have been made available through various funds to assist in reducing the cost of registration to the annual youth conference. Scholarships will be awarded according to available funds and can be used to cover part or all of the registration fee to attend the meeting. Various scholarships include the Lynn Merkel & Joanne Simpson NAPF/HOPE Scholarship. This scholarship was created in 2018 and named to honor the tireless work and the many years of leadership these two individuals gave to the youth ministry of the NACCC. Scholarships assist anyone wishing to attend a NAPF/HOPE conference and event, who has financial need and has shown outstanding development in any or all of the following areas: Christian character, Participation in local church youth programs, Community service. Scholarship applications are available to all who are affiliated with a church that maintains membership in the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches.



MEALS ON WHEELS:

First Congo is delivering Meals on Wheels each Thursday & Friday during April.



**UDMO Donations Challenge
APRIL: Pasta & Pasta Sauce**

Any food or hygiene donations can be delivered here to the church in our blue barrel by the office, or taken directly to Upper Des Moines.

ONLINE GIVING WITH TITHE.LY



Do You Give With Cash or Check?

We strongly encourage you to switch to digital giving! Online giving with Tithe.ly makes it fast and simple to donate, and also reduces

the amount of administrative labor we need to process gifts in cash or with a check.



Scan this QR code with your smart phone camera, click the yellow link that will pop up, it will take you to our online giving webpage.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to email or call the office, we'd be happy to assist you further.

REMEMBERING OUR MILITARY

Evan Ball
4120 Van Buren Avenue
Sutherland, IA 51058
(grandson of Jackie Ball)

Major Kathryn Polking
949 MDVSS
APO, AE 09366
(sister-in-law of Alison Munter)

Brandon Black
1804 Division Rd., Apt #110
Great Falls, MT 59404
Bradon.black85@yahoo.com
(son of Jon & Lori Black)

Lt. COM Patrick Sullivan
5850 Kyiv Place, Box #176
Dulles, VA 20189-5850
(grandson of the late LaVonne Peterson)

LTC Mark Ivey
21326 Thimbleweed Ct.
Ashburn, VA 20147
(husband of Cara Wilkerson-Ivey)

SGT Daniel Wilkerson
616 Willow St W, Unit 2
Harrisburg, SD 57032
(son of Rick & Barb Wilkerson)

Nathan Jones
29 E. Campus Drive
Campus Center 116
Bluffton, SC 29909
(son of Deb Jepson)



SEND A CARD, NOTE OR CARE PACKAGE TO OUR DEDICATED SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN.





WHEN?
Sundays!

WHAT TIME?
9:15 a.m. - 10:15 a.m.

WHO?
Children in 5th grade
and under!

Adult Education classes
are at 9:00 a.m.



BIRTHDAYS

- Apr 1 Kevin Brown
Alison Munter
Joel Oldenkamp
- Apr 4 Evalyn Simpson
- Apr 7 Jacque Heinrichs
- Apr 9 Brea Schmidt
- Apr 10 Sheryl Patten
- Apr 13 Bob Whittenburg
- Apr 15 Tom Van Tassell
- Apr 16 Kingston Baltes
- Apr 18 Jon Black
- Apr 19 Michael Moret
- Apr 26 John Prather
- Apr 27 Judy Van Dyke
- Apr 29 Rhonda Baish

ANNIVERSARIES

- Apr 9 Tom R. & Katie Howe
- Apr 10 Jim & Nancy Seih
- Apr 14 Tom & Nyla
Throckmorton
- Apr 15 Dave & Jane Nelson
- Apr 20 Curt & Anita Miller



PASTOR SHAZZY
Mon - Thurs

SECRETARY
Mon - Fri

OFFICE HOURS
9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

MISSION STATEMENT


The First Congregational Church of Spencer joyfully worships and praises God. Bound by our covenant, we strive to be the Body of Christ throughout the world by loving, helping and supporting our church family and others through fellowship, missions, and outreach. Our philosophy encourages all people to experience God's grace by freely thinking and building personal relationships with Christ to the glory of God.



First Congregational Church is a member of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches.



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
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712-262-4392 ~ www.congospencer.org

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Pastor: Pastor Sharon "Shazzy" Britz
pastor@congospencer.org
emergency contact 864-407-9022
Church Secretary: Michelle Tullberg
office@congospencer.org

Assistant Secretary: Amber Stoutenborough
amber@congospencer.org

Christian Education Coordinator: Katie Baltes
congospencer.ed@gmail.com

Organist/Accompanist/Bell Choir/Choir Director: Elina Ozolins-Leander
Building Manager: Lori Haburn

