



illumination

Summer 2023

Forman Christian College Fosters Connection

By the Reverend Matthew Schramm, Senior Pastor and Head of Staff

In March 2023, I embarked on a remarkable journey to Lahore, Pakistan, with Friends of Forman Christian College and the Presbyterian Foundation. This expedition provided me with a unique opportunity to immerse myself in the vibrant Pakistani culture, connect with students from diverse backgrounds, and witness firsthand the transformative power of education. It was particularly inspiring to hear dramatic stories of Forman Christian College's commitment to providing educational opportunities for marginalized Christian students, empowering women, and changing hearts and minds in a country very different than our own through their inclusive approach.

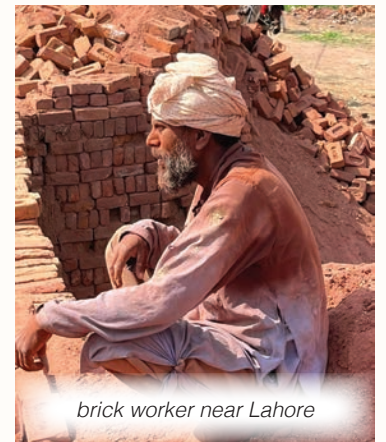


welcoming villagers gather to greet us

Forman is open to students of all faiths and backgrounds. Since its founding by Presbyterian mission workers in 1864, Forman has earned a reputation for excellent academics, educating presidents, prime ministers, and prominent leaders across the nation. At the same time, the Christian commitment of supporters creates opportunities for Christian students to receive a university education that would be otherwise completely inaccessible. The promotion of compassion, tolerance, and empathy among students fosters an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding that is markedly unique in a society not typically welcoming of Christians or those from the lower rungs of society. Forman also fosters connection and community among Christians across Lahore, and I was able to preach – translated into Urdu – for a full house at a Sunday worship service on campus!

Situated in a city ranked just outside the top 20 in the world by population and nearly double the size of New York City, Forman has a mission to be a beacon of hope and to “by love, serve one another.” In a huge metropolis like Lahore, a commitment to service stands as a remarkable witness to a nation often hostile to Christian people. The predominantly Muslim culture ostracizes Christian people and limits their options to the most menial labor, like working in brick kilns, fields, or handling the cleaning of dust and sewage from the streets. Despite prejudice, though, education has been proven a legitimate path to a brighter

future for “the lowly,” but the cycle of poverty and marginalization is cruel, and the poor (and Christians in particular) do not have the resources to even begin such a path. Forman has been able to stand in this gap by providing scholarships and housing through assistance programs for all sorts of students as well as those aimed particularly for Christians.



brick worker near Lahore

The college has also been at the forefront of championing women's education and empowerment. We had opportunity to meet many young women who, apart from the education and scholarships at Forman, would never have been allowed to attend school. We spoke (and even appeared on the university video podcast) with female professors who – even after the completion of PhD and post-doctoral fellowships at world-famous institutions – found the only school in their home country willing to employ them was Forman! Asked what they would be doing if it weren't for Forman, both students and professors described being married off against their will, and even being forcibly converted to Islam. Instead these women are working to overcome societal barriers, pursue their dreams, and empower the next generation of leaders.



student Haroon Chand

To gain a deeper understanding of the transformative impact of Forman Christian College, watch the captivating video “Haroon's Story” on YouTube (search ‘Forman Christian Haroon’) or at www.friendsofforman.org. It encapsulates the journey of Christian student and scholarship recipient Haroon Chand and bears witness to the impact of education and the support of initiatives that promote equality, education, and understanding.

There is much more to the heritage and ministry of Forman Christian College and the legacy of Presbyterian mission in Pakistan. As part of our upcoming Cultural Conversations mission series, I invite you to join me and the Rev. Dr. Roger Dermody, Executive Director of Friends of Forman, on September 29 at 7:00 p.m. in Mayton Hall for a presentation on how Forman is working to change the world for the better!

ILLUMINATION

Thank you for picking up *Illumination*, a publication of Memorial Presbyterian Church in Midland, Michigan.

A WELCOMING COMMUNITY OF FAITH FOR OVER 150 YEARS

MPC is a Christ-centered community of believers that is part of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. We are a welcoming community of faith for all people: sharing, growing in, and living the Good News of Jesus Christ! And we live it out through worship, study, fellowship, and service. In everything, we want to point to Christ.

There's a place for you at MPC! We are in the heart of Midland, Michigan, connecting people with their faith and one another. You'll find that we want all people to feel welcome to find a place where they can grow in faith and where their gifts can be used in meaningful ways that impact this world. We invite you to join us as we share, grow in, and live the Good News!

WORSHIP WITH US

We invite you to join us each Sunday at 9:00 a.m. for our contemporary worship service or at 10:45 a.m. for our traditional worship service. We broadcast each service on our website www.mempres.org and the church Facebook page.

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Louis Roberge shines the light of Jesus even in the shadow of parachute play at Stellar VBS.

Photograph by Elinor Hnizda

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Illumination is published by MPC for all congregation members and distributed throughout our Midland community.

CREATIVE 360 MOVING TO FORMER CHAPEL LANE PRESBYTERIAN BUILDING

By Dan Chalk, Midland Daily News, Reprinted with Permission

Creative 360 will be moving to the former Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church at 5501 Jefferson Avenue this summer. The arts non-profit said the move from its current 1517 Bayliss Street building reflects its commitment to serving the community by offering opportunities for creativity, wellness, and community.

“Creative 360 is an organization that loves to say ‘yes,’” said Executive Director Laura Vosejpk. “Our goal is to offer our community as many ways as we can to experience the value of the creative process. Lately, space constraints have been limiting our ability to say yes as often as we would like. The new location will allow us to better serve our community in the ways we always have through classes, performances and exhibits, but also in brand new ways that we are really excited to explore.”

Founded in the summer of 1994 by Linda Z. Smith and Cynthia Keefe through a residency at the Alden B. Dow Creativity Center, the Creative Spirit Center, as it was originally known, started in a small space on Townsend Street above what is now Crepes Et Amis. The nonprofit quickly outgrew the space and in 2004 purchased the current venue, the former Salvation Army Church designed by Alden B. Dow in 1962, with support from a number of community foundations.

The 5000-square-foot building on Bayliss has hosted Express Yourself Artshop, Yes We Can!, Artfest 55, Midland Artists Guild, Old Time Radio Shows, Broadway Flights, and many other programs. The arts center recently opened up two gallery spaces on the corner of Ashman and Larkin streets. East Ashman Galleries serve as fine arts exhibit space, classroom space, and arts retail space. Vosejpk said Creative 360 intends to remain downtown, adding that the increased visibility has been positive for the organization and the additional space for exhibitions, art sales, and classes has allowed an expansion of offerings, including serving as a home for Midland Chess Club, Alignment 8 Yoga, and Creative Minds visual arts series.

“After successfully navigating the challenges of the pandemic in 2020, the Board of Directors realized that space issues were keeping Creative 360 from acting on many new ideas for the community,” remarked Board President Bre Sklar. “Our first core organizational value is Inclusion, and one important aspect of the new space is how much more physically accessible it is. For example, we are going from one accessible restroom in the lower level of the current building to a single level building with multiple accessible restrooms. And there is so much more opportunity – with multiple spaces for coming together, we have the chance to create environments where all people can explore creativity in a safe and supported atmosphere.”



After the congregation and its leaders made the difficult decision to close CLPC in 2021, many members were welcomed into Memorial Presbyterian Church. As MPC had been instrumental in founding CLPC over 60 years ago, MPC assumed stewardship of the Chapel Lane property. When they became aware of Creative 360’s search for a larger, more accessible space, they offered the Jefferson Avenue building for consideration.

“The congregation, including former members of CLPC, has enthusiastically supported this new direction for a beloved building,” said MPC Senior Pastor Matthew Schramm. “The work that Creative 360 has done in the community these last 25+ years is work that fits well with the legacy of the CLPC congregation, as the arts have always been an important part of their ministry. We are confident that Creative 360 will use this special space in a way that creates a positive impact.”

Creative 360 will be moving over the summer months, with plans to offer a special series of events in September to celebrate the opening of the new space. The board hopes to find a buyer who will continue to use the Bayliss Street property for the benefit of the community. Founders Keefe and Smith, who are both still highly engaged with Creative 360, are very supportive of the move to the new building and the continued commitment to their holistic artistic vision. “It is rewarding to know that throughout these 29 years, our original mission has always been at the forefront of all decisions,” said Smith. “This next step and move is perfect. [My husband] Dave and I are extremely proud!”

“The Bayliss Street Stage and Gallery has been a warm, welcoming part of Midland for nearly 20 years,” remarked Vosejpk. “We don’t ever want to lose that feeling. We know that we have more than enough energy, love, and ideas to fill that big new space, and the Board and I cannot thank our supporters, donors, staff, and guests enough for all they have done to support our mission, vision, and values. We look forward to at least another 29 years of serving Midland.”



STELLAR
SHINE JESUS' LIGHT

VBS 2023



NIGER STUDENT CENTER & TWO-COINS-A-MEAL

By the Reverend Michael Ludwig, Associate Pastor

What's going on now in Niger? I'm delighted when I get this question because I used to serve as a mission co-worker with the church in Niger. When I came to MPC last year, part of the vision for my role as an associate pastor here was to continue deepening the ways we can be partners with our Nigerian siblings. Here is an update on those connections.



In an effort to help our church partners in their vision for helping students attend middle schools that are usually very far from their villages, MPC helped to buy property for a much needed hosting center in Western Niger, about an hour from the edge of the capital city of Niamey. The 12 Christian students already staying with the pastor in this town of Torodi surprised Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger (EERN) leaders this spring by moving into the new hostel rooms almost immediately upon their construction, without waiting for them to get painted. These leaders of our partner church are so thankful to God and to the churches in our Presbytery, like MPC, who gave support to buy the land, drill the bore hole, connect to electricity, build a wall around the property, and build the rooms for boys, girls, and pastor's family. The boys already occupying the new space gathered to express their gratitude for what they called a very big support to them (pictured above). They sent us a video tour of the compound, highlighting the bore-hole water system with tank in action on the street side. The availability and number of latrines has also been a big hit for the students! School will finish at the end of June and then they expect a full group of about 30 students in October for the new school year.

Two-Coins-a-Meal is an offering that we've been collecting for a few decades, and we are renewing our focus with a current update. All the money we collect in the buckets or bowls at the end of every month is counted and then 25 percent stays local to assist our HELP Food Pantry at MPC, 25 percent goes to

the Presbyterian Hunger Program for national and international hunger work, and 50 percent is sent to an international hunger project that is a partner of our presbytery. Since 2019, that international part has gone to our partner church, the EERN in Niger, as they establish grain banks in villages (pictured below).

The grain banks give families a 100-kilogram bag of millet at planting time when their food stuffs are usually depleted, due to lower yields from the previous year or growing families. At that time, families are at the mercy of loan sharks. Our Two-Coins-a-Meal offering every month is almost enough to buy one 100-kilogram bag. So one year of our offerings could open one grain bank in a village and produce a strong witness to the love of Christ that empowers people to help each other. Our challenge is to collect double what we did last year so that the 50 percent we send to Niger will combine with the work of our partner's church in management and farming to help at least 12 families.

In addition to supporting the EERN's efforts in these areas, we're also being strategic about what we can do to strengthen our mutual sharing and partnership with our siblings in Niger. We are part of our presbytery's efforts to start a pioneering group of churches that is gearing up for a video fellowship group with Nigerian Christians. Our youth ministry leader Eli Schweikert is our representative in this group that exchanges videos about church life and everyday life in each culture. The purpose is learning more and encouraging our own efforts to live out the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Thank you for contributing your change over the years! And be encouraged that, as we look to renew our focus on our Two-Coins-a-Meal offering, we are making big steps to walk alongside our partners in God's mission of love to the world.



UKRAINIAN EXCHANGE STUDENT SHARES HIS STORY

By the Prayer Committee and Reaching Out for Justice and Peace Committee

Picture yourself as a 17-year-old Ukrainian who just embarked on the adventure of a lifetime. You've been given an incredible opportunity to study in the USA through a Future Leaders Exchange scholarship. You arrive in Bay City in September 2021, taking in a new culture replete with novel foods, customs, sights, and systems. You then transfer to Midland in December, further immersing yourself into the local scene, exploring your expanding horizons, and discovering new interests. Suddenly the unthinkable happens – Russia invades Ukraine. Your thoughts immediately turn to family and friends back home over 5000 miles away. Within a few days, your hometown is bombed and devastating pictures are posted that don't resemble anything of the downtown you recall or the places where you often walked. Soon your family has been scattered across different countries, and you face uncertainty not knowing where you will go once the exchange program finishes at the end of the school year. Can you imagine facing this scenario?

These are indeed the circumstances that Vlad encountered in February of 2022, when MPC's prayer team became aware of his plight. As prayers for Vlad were steadfastly uplifted, the team learned of his desire to spread awareness and understanding about what was happening in Ukraine. Subsequent coordination with Reaching Out for Justice and Peace resulted in us extending invitations to Vlad to share his story, and he graciously accepted.

Poised with a maturity beyond his years, Vlad spoke at MPC in October 2022 and April 2023 to tell of his experiences since coming to the USA. Upon entering Mayton Hall, he was touched to see tiny glimpses of God's kingdom warmly beckoning him in – brightly adorned welcome signs and posters of all sizes, various Ukrainian-themed decorations, bracelets, and cookies, along with friendly smiles all around.

Surrounded by God's love, he began his presentation with an introduction of Ukraine's national symbols and folk patterns. With deft communication skills, Vlad immediately connected with the audience by sharing historical highlights and interesting facts. He then discussed various factors impacting the war in Ukraine and their significance, revealing that 8 million people have been displaced to date (18 million people left Ukraine due to the war and 10 million returned). Vlad displayed vibrant pre-wartime pictures of his hometown along with impressive subsequent holiday images during wartime. He also described traditional Ukrainian foods and even offered recipes for stewed cabbage and borscht. By this time, Vlad's keen ability to discuss important topics without serious heaviness left no doubt of his joy, humor, and perceptiveness.

He revealed that most Ukrainians are Christians and that Catholicism and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine are prevalent in the west and east, respectively. Vlad presented stunning

pictures of the exterior and interior of several beautiful Ukrainian churches. Easter celebrations typically include consecration of Easter breakfast items such as Easter bread (*kulych*) where people line up in front of churches to receive a blessing with holy water that pastors drip with a brush. Brightly painted eggs known as *psyanky* (patterned) and *krashanky* (solid-colored) are also decorative Easter celebration traditions.

After deciding to stay in the USA to attend college, Vlad took the Scholastic Assessment Test with only one week of preparation. He talked about God's guidance in his choice of what to study and which college to attend. Through this process, Vlad also shared that he found his purpose for being placed in Midland – to serve as an ambassador of sorts by giving numerous presentations about Ukraine to the Midland community.

Vlad shared an observation, "that despite cultural and geographic differences, all people are essentially the same. We all laugh, we all cry, we all have dreams." When asked how we could best support him aside from prayer, he replied that he would not answer for himself but rather on behalf of Ukrainian and Russian people. He advocated for the promotion of awareness and understanding about what is happening in Ukraine and to not blame the Russian people for the war. Most Russians, many of whom are related to Ukrainians, don't approve of the conflict, have no voice, and should not be held responsible as a population. Although stark circumstances currently provide the backdrop for Vlad's story, he is not allowing undesirable circumstances to hinder him from speaking hope into the world but is instead promoting peace and understanding.

Vlad was gifted with honorariums, a MPC logo blanket, and travel mug, further experiencing God's compassion and love for him. MPC's prayer team continues to pray for Vlad, his family, the vulnerable, Ukraine, Russia, surrounding countries, NATO, all nations, for God's provisional care and protection, and for an awakening of hearts towards the goodness of His way and that He guide and bless the efforts of government, church, and school leaders. As Matthew 5:9 says, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God."



FAMILY TIES & LABOR MIGRATION

By Sheryl Billmeier Hnizda, Communications Director

In February, I went to the Philippines and Hong Kong for a travel study on labor migration. The team of ten was co-led by the Rev. Cathy Chang, our former associate pastor, who is a mission co-worker with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) serving with her husband Juan Lopez and daughter Aurelie. She said, “My desire was for participants to experience fully how faith communities and migrant-serving organizations embodied ministry that is with and on behalf of migrant workers and their families.” I was grateful to reunite with her as a friend and witness firsthand her valuable mission work with those who are marginalized. What impacted me most was the rift created when parents are forced to leave their children for employment in another country.

I flew out on the coldest winter morning in Midland and arrived on the muggiest night in Manila. Pastor Cathy and other members of the team joyously greeted me with a bottle of cold water and a bag of dried mangoes and milk tea candy. We stayed at the UCCP Shalom Hotel, and a few times I walked to a prosperous, sprawling mall that seemed in direct contrast to the poverty of the surrounding area. Juan met me for lunch and shared that most of the local workers, like those in the mall, must “take turns” and work for a few months at a time, rotating through because of job scarcity.

A high poverty level, lack of local jobs, a government that encourages residents to work abroad, and many other factors combine to make many Filipinos decide that migrant work is their only option. Families are split. In some cases, both spouses go abroad and their children are placed in care of relatives. Workers send home remittances and pray that the years pass quickly until they are reunited. A few months after returning home, many feel the pull to once again to seek migrant work. This has been the norm for decades.

A Little Background on Filipino Migrant Workers

In 1974, then-President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in the Philippines and established what was meant to be a short-term labor program to gain foreign exchange. In 1995, Marcos’ successor Corazon Aquino used the term Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and the “temporary” program’s reach continued to grow. To this day, as workers are paid low wages and send home their remittances, agencies and the government are poised to take out their fees. Remittances contribute heavily to the gross domestic product (nearly ten percent last year), and the government seems dependent on using their people as a commodity. In 2021, there were 1.83 million OFWs, with 60 percent of them being women, most of whom were in “elementary occupations” that involve routine tasks and physical effort, like cleaning and medical care. A scary development looms on the horizon as other poverty-stricken countries begin to copy the Philippines’ labor migration program.

On my first Sunday in the Philippines, I attended church at UCCP-Cubao in Quezon City. The Rev. Homar Distajo preached about how we are called to serve others and invited us to take communion. The whole atmosphere reminded me of MPC, except for a cat that breezed in through the open doors. Then everyone enjoyed a feast of traditional foods like the national dish *adobo*, chicken *pastil* wrapped in its own banana leaf plate, sticky and sweet rice cake *suman*, rice dessert *puto*, nutty shortbread *polvoron*, and coffee.

Arranged ahead of our visit, several former migrant workers from the church met with us in small groups. They shared their stories of having to leave their homes for opportunities abroad. One husband and wife traveled to Saudi Arabia together, leaving their four children in the care of a sister. They are retired now, with two children living abroad and two living nearby. Another woman came to Manila for college and remained for work, sending money back home to her sister and mother, while her brother works in Texas. An older gentleman shared his past as an internal migrant worker, meaning that he could not find work in his hometown and traveled far to Manila in hopes of better prospects. He has



had a number of occupations, meanwhile raising a family and always seeking the nearest UCCP congregation wherever they have lived.

Five hours north by bus, we visited UCCP-Loacan with Pastor Joseph Agno. After lunch, snacks, dinner, and more snacks, we joined around a large bonfire with talking, dancing, and making music. One lady spoke to us of her regret and distress in leaving her family in the 1990's. Money is an issue but she prefers her family to be whole. This tight-knit community is also facing exploitation and pollution left by a foreign mining company.

At UCCP-Ucab with Pastor Cristopher Bala, the church ladies cooked a bountiful lunch, like our own Presbyterian Women who readily welcome guests. Several former migrant workers spoke, many of whom have never openly examined their feelings this way. One woman told of her employer's abuse in Saudi Arabia; meanwhile, her children were being abused at home. Another lady worked in Taiwan, depressed that her children were growing up without her and livid to find that her husband had a girlfriend. Another woman worked in China for six years and returned home to a family that resented her for leaving. She still struggles with the consequences of her choices.

The Rev. Frank Hernando taught us the history of the UCCP along with its mission to "preach, teach, and heal." He identified major causes of labor trafficking in the Philippines and implores, "When will Filipinos no longer be forced to leave their homes and country for work? When will a 'reversal of fortune' occur?" Your call as a Christian moves beyond *attending* church on Sunday toward *attending to* others who need help. As an American, wife, and mother of three daughters, I will likely never have to face such difficult decisions as those of the many souls I encountered, but I want to lift up the voices of those who do.

In the Philippines, many organizations offer aid and advocacy, like the UCCP, Churches Witnessing With Migrants, IBON Foundation, Filipino Nurses United, and Migrante International. And of course, just like we do here at MPC, local congregations step in to offer care and support to families affected by labor migration. I saw that everyone who shared their stories of work, family, and community have deeply rooted faith.

Since Hong Kong is a two-hour airplane ride from Manila and has a prosperous economy, many Filipinas migrate there as temporary domestic workers. In the next part of my journey, I flew to Hong Kong to meet with some of these women and staff members of agencies that advocate for the workers' safety, health, and rights.

In a family dealing with labor migration, whether they are ones leaving for work or the ones impacted at home, the consequences of the separation affect everyone. I have so much more I wish to share with you that I need a Part 2! In the next *Illumination*, I will tell you about my experience during the Hong Kong portion of my travel study. Please join me on October 20 at 7:00 p.m. in Mayton Hall when I speak about my whole journey as part of our upcoming Cultural Conversations mission series.



Cathy, Juan, Sheryl

FEBRUARY 2023 TRAVEL STUDY SEMINAR TEAM

Co-Leader, The Rev. Cathy Chang
Presbyterian World Mission

Co-Leader, The Rev. Carl Horton
Presbyterian Peacemaking Program

Christi Boyd
Mission Co-Worker based in the DRC

Pastor Roceni Bakian
UCCP

The Rev. Joram Calimutan
UCCP
Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants in HK

Sheryl Hnizda
Presbyterian, MPC Staff Member

The Rev. Dr. Lee Choo Phang
from Malaysia

The Rev. Helivao Poget
from Madagascar

Doug Tilton
Mission Co-Worker based in South Africa

John Wallace
Presbyterian and Activist from California



team's "praying in color" morning devotion

A Little Background on UCCP

In 1901, Presbyterian missionaries in the Philippines sought one united Christian presence. The green leaves on the logo represent the US denominations that united in 1948 to form UCCP: United Brethren, Church of Christ (Disciples), Congregational, Presbyterian, and Philippine Methodist. Because of this tie, a Presbyterian mission co-worker like Pastor Cathy can serve with the UCCP.



HERBERT & TOMMY LOOK TO THE STARS

By Tommy, Herbert (the Talking Presbyterian Church Mouse), and Mike Hoy (Herbert's story editor)

"Hey, Herbert," called out Tommy as he walked into the Sanctuary. He then ran up the steps to the organ looking for Herbert and found him on top reading a Vacation Bible School poster. "This year VBS should be a 'stellar' blast, but I will not be able to go because I'm too old," exclaimed a disappointed Tommy.

"Wait just a minute," said Herbert. "You may be done participating as you did before, but you can still have fun."

"What do you mean?" asked Tommy, looking dejected.

Then Herbert jumped up and said, "By volunteering and helping the teachers with the younger kids and the activities. They will even give you a cool T-shirt to wear!"

"Do you think I would be able to help out?" asked Tommy looking really excited. "Now that school is out, I have the time."

Doing a little dance, Herbert said, "Tommy, you can really help out because you have been there. You can talk with the kids, especially those who are having

problems making friends right at first."

Then Tommy sat back on the organ bench and said, "If I'm going to get involved, I would have to catch up with some reading about this year's VBS theme – Stellar."

"You're just the person to help out," said Herbert.

"Stellar is a great theme for VBS as it can help the kids 'reach for the stars' and share the light of the world with everyone. *Stellar* means 'of the stars' and Jesus is our guiding star because He is the light of the world. The light of Jesus shines through the children," said Herbert.

"That reminds me of the Star of Bethlehem which announced Jesus' birth and lead the magi to Him," said Tommy, thinking of Christmas. "I'm excited about being part of VBS this summer," said a happy Tommy.

"I too am happy, because I will also be a part of VBS this summer," said Herbert with a shine on this face, "as I will play the role of the 'star' in the program along

with the sun, moon, comet, and planetary rings."

Tommy and Herbert went their separate ways to prepare for Vacation Bible School.

Herbert indeed was a shining star!



Family Chats

This summer as you enjoy a meal, car trip, or time around a campfire together, take turns answering these fun family questions:

- What was the best part of your day and why?
- Would you rather live in a giant bubble under the sea or in a space station above the earth?
- What are some ways our family shows each other love?
 - If you were in charge of Christmas, what's one thing you'd change about it?
 - If you could be an animal, what animal would you want to be, and why?
- What's your favorite thing to do with our family?
 - Would you rather eat carrots or apples every day?
 - If you could ask God for one miracle, what would it be?
 - Which is worse, telling a little lie or hurting someone's feelings?
 - Would you rather live without TV or music?
 - What is your favorite thing about the person sitting near you?
 - What do you like most about God?
 - What's your least favorite family rule?
 - What do you think God's least favorite part about the world is?
 - If you could change your name, what would you change it to?

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KID'S
CORNER



CELEBRATING OUR NEIGHBORS

By the Reverend Dr. Wally H. Mayton III, Parish Associate

The practice of neighbor-ing has three ingredients: learning names; sharing common interests and goals; and enjoying compassionate relationships. While building one-to-one relationships is often focused on, local and global neighbor-ing is equally applicable to thriving, caring communities.

Memorial Presbyterian Church has a place in its community. Its history begins at a downtown location, one among the historical congregations active in the growing lumber and chemical industries. From the benevolence of Dr. Charles J. Strosacker and the vision of an engaged congregation, its present location garnered a new neighbor within the community. MPC's neighbor was a school site operated by Midland Public Schools located on Rodd Street. Originally Midland's high school, this neighbor had also carried the names of Central Intermediate School and Central Middle School. After extensive reconstruction, its new identity is Central Park Elementary School (CPE). In the school's transitions, MPC continued to acknowledge its neighbor. The church affirmed the mission of education within the community, an enterprise upon which our reformed faith is grounded.

MPC prepared to renew its neighbor-ing practice through the celebration of the opening of CPE. With a beginning enrollment of over 800 students in its inaugural year of 2017-2018, the school offered significant neighbor-ing potential. Combining the student populations of Eastlawn and Carpenter elementary schools, CPE offered in its building design and curriculum "Project Lead the Way" as a first for Midland. Its educational delivery model would be STEM (Science Technology Engineering Math). As a congregation, church leaders sought a way to share in this new adventure and endeavor. Benefiting children and households, the school offered potential for the church's practice of neighbor-ing.

Prior to CPE's opening, the church began discussions directed especially to its new neighbor. The dialogue concluded with a decision to establish, through the Advance Concepts Fund of the Session, a Special Projects Fund within Midland Public Schools designated for the students of CPE. In partnership, the shared vision of the fund was for educational experiences. A gift from the church of \$75,000 became the MPC Special Projects Fund of MPS. Neighbor-ing implies a life journey together. The journey began in the first academic year.

With clear intention and goals, the first impacts of the Special Projects Fund were collaborations resulting in enhancing technology usage by students with the purchase of Chromebook headphones; in advancing the expansion of FIRST Lego League Robotics Clubs within the school from one team to four teams; in partnering with T-Mobile to develop "hot spots" within students' homes; in assuring summer learning through peer summer camp experiences through scholarships to STEM-related Greater Midland Community Center camps, Alden B. Dow Architecture

Camp, and Camp Neyati; in promoting structured play at the school through collaboration with Central Michigan Recreational Therapy Department; and in sponsoring team-building services and activities through assemblies, consultations, and field day events. Subsequent years expenditures follow this pattern of enhancing diversity, inclusivity, and character-building.

Their mission states that CPE "develops compassionate, inquisitive, and action-minded students in partnership with community and home. We embrace the cultural diversity and global perspectives within our school and society to cultivate a caring and inclusive environment. Students explore, self-reflect, and take action to create a more inclusive and peaceful world."

Inaugural principal of CPE Shannon Blasy reflects, "I appreciate all that MPC has done for our students. Even though I am not its principal any longer, I know that the support the church is offering is so appreciated." (Shannon Blasy currently serves MPS as principal of Jefferson Middle School.) Neighbor-ing displays generosity and hope with every fulfillment. In the mission of its welcoming faith, MPC sustains its partnership with CPE, a neighbor and now, a friend.

We thank current CPE administrators Kara Stark (principal) and Chelsea Sauve (assistant principal) for their ongoing communication of impact experiences from the five-year project. Kara shares, "CPE is honored to have such a wonderful partnership with our neighbor. The gracious donation has allowed us the opportunity to provide all students with life-long experiences. We look forward to the continued partnership to ensure that all students have access to equitable opportunities within the community." Opportunities have included a Loons baseball game; state capitol and museum tour; "Sonia de los Santos" at Midland Center for the Arts; Saginaw Children's Museum visit; Leaman's Green Applebarn tour; NCG Movie Complex visit; GMU cultural and natural history exhibit; and Lion Heart Assembly. On its five-year anniversary of this project partnership, we promise still to celebrate our neighbor.



NEW HORIZONS: COMMEMORATING REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENT

By Elijah Schweikert, Youth Ministry Director

On Sunday, May 21, we extended our heartfelt congratulations to the graduating class of 2023. We honored the nine exceptional individuals who have displayed deep commitment to their faith and achieved success in their education. Ale Brenes, Andrew Brenes, Anthony Brenes, Elleana Bucknell, Brendan Dastick, Elinor Hnizda, Lydia Schramm, Sydney Thompson, and Abby Wilson have been a part of the congregation for many years, with some being involved in the church since birth. Their presence and contributions have enriched our community in countless ways, and we are immensely proud of their achievements.

Contrasting the farewell that we bid our graduates, we also joyously welcomed six newly confirmed members into our church family. Danny Farison, Stephanie Haskett, Mirabel Hnizda, Adeline Ludwig, Kayla Lyons, and Evie Schramm were confirmed on Sunday, May 14 after their inspiring presentations to Session on May 7. We are thrilled to continue nurturing their faith and witnessing their growth as they use their unique gifts to serve the church and faithfully live among the people of God. It is truly inspiring to see their active involvement in various areas of congregational life, including the choir, music programs, children's ministry, the audio-visual team, and youth group. To celebrate

the completion of their confirmation classes with Pastor Michael Ludwig, they embarked on a day filled with both learning and fun at Zehnder's Splash Village. They will undoubtedly share stories about it for years to come!

As we bid farewell to our graduates and empower our newly confirmed members, we should remember that their journeys are only just beginning. We commit to support and guide them, fostering an environment where they can thrive and make a positive impact in the world around them wherever they might go. As the new graduates left the service, they were given devotional gifts with a passage inscribed from Proverbs 3, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

The mentors were a blessing to the confirmands by offering encouragement, knowledge, and guidance. We know these young adults will continue to their success as they enter adult life because of their incredible motivation, the resources they have been given, and the many people who wrap them in support. We pray they always remember they have a place here and that they truly feel God is the source of all good things.



Graduates (pictured left to right) Ale Brenes, Elleana Bucknell, Andrew Brenes, Anthony Brenes, Sydney Thompson, Abby Wilson, Brendan Dastick, Lydia Schramm, and Elinor Hnizda.



Confirmants and mentors (pictured left to right, back row) Aaron Orlowski, Danny Farison, Evie Schramm, Katy Leonard, Mirabel Hnizda, Mary Ann Gilbert, Katie Wenban, and Mara Stewart; (front row) Tracy Perry, Kayla Lyons, Adeline Ludwig, and Stephanie Haskett.

***Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.***

– Proverbs 3

Congratulations to the 2023 Scholarship Recipients

CHARLOTTE B. CURRIE MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Laura Brookens, Midland High School
Caleb Brown, Midland High School
Aiden Porritt, Midland High School
Myah Shelton, Midland High School
Jocelyn Stopka, Midland High School
Vladyslav Vasylyk, H. H. Dow High School

DALE THOMAS DEAN MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Ella Roberson, H. H. Dow High School

LAURIE ANN KARPIUK-DICKERSON MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Andy Yao, H. H. Dow High School

BETH ANN HODGES MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Ale Brenes, Midland High School

THE REV. DR. WALLACE HOWARD MAYTON III AND LINDSAY ABBOTT MAYTON SCHOLARSHIP

Elleena Bucknell, H. H. Dow High School
Paige Dolph, H. H. Dow High School
Lydia Schramm, H. H. Dow High School / Home School

GEORGE AND JEAN METCALF MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Sydney Thompson, H. H. Dow High School

OPERATION FUN ANNIVERSARY SCHOLARSHIP

Alexandra Little, H. H. Dow High School

THE MARK SHELDON AND MILDRED PLATE PUTNAM MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Andrew Brenes, Midland High School
Elinor Hnizda, H. H. Dow High School

CATHARINE ANN & CYNTHIA CHRISTINE RING MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Brendan Dastick, H. H. Dow High School

WINSTON TRUST MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Anthony Brenes, Midland High School

with gratitude to our Scholarship Committee

NEW SCOUT CHARTER

By Valerie Davis, Cub Scout Pack 3703 and Troop 765 Leader

MPC and Boy Scouts of America Cub Pack 3703 and Troop 765 hold a new charter together. Here is an update on our activities.

CUB SCOUT PACK 3703

Nine scouts are in Pack 3703. At the recent Blue and Gold ceremony, three of the five Webelos crossed over to Troop 765. One went to another local troop and one chose to pursue sports. The remaining active scouts range from Tiger to Webelos. They had fun earning advancements, and their activities included building bird houses, tie-dying, pine wood derby racing, and visiting Midland Fire Station One. The leadership team is working on an advancement ceremony and fun summer activities.

BSA TROOP 765

The troop had a smooth transition from First United Methodist Church to MPC. Currently 13 scouts are registered and two are completing their Eagle rank. At our court of honor ceremony, several scouts were awarded merit badges and earned ranks. Recent activities include a Great Lakes Loons camp-out, aviation merit badge opportunity in Oscoda, and training in CPR and first aid. One of the assistant scout masters left for Navy boot camp, and another, along with a Life Scout, is working at scout summer camp. With adult leaders, ten scouts are attending BSA summer camp at Camp Rotary in Clare and are excited to earn more merit badges. Three scouts – the only ones from Midland – will represent the Michigan Crossroads Council at the National Jamboree in Summit, West Virginia, in late July. The scouts are planning a bike ride and more camping activities this summer.

You may have interacted with some of our scouts who were volunteering at the rummage sale ingathering or HELP Food Pantry collection (pictured). They are eager to help with the Midtown Mission Garden and other volunteer opportunities through MPC. We appreciate our dedicated activity space at MPC and look forward to a full program in the fall.



Welcome, New Members

MEET THE KILLEN FAMILY

The Killens moved to Midland in November 2017, just months after marrying and relocating from Nashville, Tennessee. Daughter Viola was born in July 2019, and son Wells was born in March 2021. Lindsay and Jeff enjoy hiking with their golden retriever, boating, and traveling. They hope to pass along an appreciation for new experiences to their children. Recently they purchased a second home in Jacksonville, Florida, where they plan to spend the school year. They're excited for the family's new adventure and are grateful to call Midland home for the summer.



MEET THE BATTERBEE FAMILY

The Batterbees live in Beaverton and started attending MPC just before Covid hit. Chris is a chiropractor in Gladwin, and Mackenzie home-schools their children Beau (10), Eden (8), Emmitt (6), and Maren (3). Chris and Mackenzie grew up in mid-Michigan and attended Hope College in Holland. The Batterbees spend their time playing and coaching sports, enjoying the outdoors, traveling, and trying to catch up on laundry.



MEET THE MCPEAK FAMILY

Dave and Vicki McPeak are teachers for Midland Public Schools. Vicki and Dave met at Central Michigan University and landed jobs in Midland right after graduation. Vicki grew up in Blissfield and Dave grew up in Bay City. Their daughters Cady (13), Charlee (12), and Cece (8) are very active in sports. On most weeknights or weekends, you will find them either at a practice or a game. They also enjoy traveling, golfing, playing beach volleyball, reading, and being with their beloved dog Ellie.



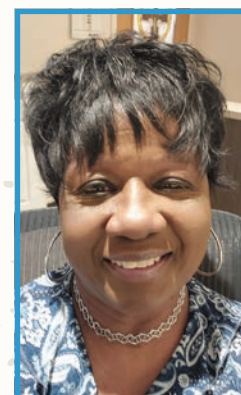
MEET ANN HALL

Ann is a "traveling grandma" who has followed her youngest daughter Kelly, son-in-law Lee, and granddaughters Brook and Mackenzie across Michigan. She also enjoys traveling across the USA. Ann is a former member of First Presbyterian Church of Holt (35 years), Mason First Presbyterian Church (5 years), North Park Presbyterian Church near Grand Rapids (2 years), and Lakeshore

Presbyterian Church near Port Huron (2 years). Through church, libraries, YMCA, and senior groups she's made friends everywhere she's lived. At MPC, she has attended *Horizons* Bible Study, Thursday morning women's Bible study, adult Sunday School, and events like the Crawfish Boil. Ann and her dog Annie love to meet new people for coffee and take walks.

MEET KAREN WILLIAMS

Karen was born and raised in Illinois and baptized in the Christian faith. She lived in Virginia for 14 years where she was active in church as a deaconess, chair of women's ministry, chair of prison ministry, and a choir member. After moving to Midland, Karen became involved with Community Bible Study and felt led to make MPC her new church home. She immediately started attending adult Sunday School classes and weekly women's Bible studies. Karen is also our newest volunteer receptionist. She says her experience at MPC has been a continuous road for her growth, and she looks forward to seeing what God has planned next.



FAMILY REUNION

By Randi Kawakita, Reaching Out for Justice & Peace Committee Member

Rieek Nyoach was born in war-racked South Sudan. He and his older brother spent their teen years and young adulthood in a Kenyan refugee camp. Despite beginning his education at age 14, Rieek earned a student visa to study abroad because of his academic prowess and due to support from his older brother. A social worker from the USA encouraged him to attend college, and Saginaw Valley State University was the place. Rieek recently graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Sociology.

Even with a full academic schedule, Rieek spoke at various fundraising events for the non-profit agencies Nonviolent Peace Force and Rotary Club, as well as volunteering at the Mustard Seed organization that serves homeless women and children. In December 2022, he created a non-profit organization called Grassroots Initiative Network in order to establish a school in his home village of 300 residents. He knows education is the key to help those who have been left behind, the way to change the minds of people.

Two years ago, Rieek took on a meaningful, monumental project. With the support of Midlander Laura Ault, he began the process of moving his wife and three children from Kenyan refugee camps to mid-Michigan. Every day he juggled his school and work schedule, while dealing with Homeland Security, Immigration, Social Security, airlines, and other government departments.

His three children, Keach, Nyakuoth, and Fidel arrived in Michigan on January 22. They moved into their house on Ashman Street a few days later. In the Kenyan refugee camps, the children attended English schools which helped in transitioning them to their neighborhood school, Plymouth Elementary. According to their dad, they have started to like pizza. Fidel enjoyed “sliding” in the winter, also known as sledding.



The Nyoach Family (left to right): Fidel, Nyabuay, Nyakuoth, Rieek, and Keach.

On March 17, Rieek’s wife Nyabuay was reunited with the family. She received her travel documents three business days after her consulate interview, thanks to Representative Kildee’s office. Nyabuay enjoys English as a Second Language classes, not only for the lessons, but also for the friendship with fellow internationals. Rieek started his new, full-time position at Hemlock Semiconductor Corporation, making his job commute much shorter. In the fall, Keach will be a sixth-grader at Northeast Middle School, Nyakuoth will be a fourth-grader at Plymouth, and Fidel will be a first-grader at Plymouth.

In March the MPC Board of Deacons unanimously approved a financial request to help the family with resettlement. Thanks to the support of many, the Nyoach family is thriving. They are grateful to everyone who helped them on their journey, especially Laura Ault and family and Midland Area Interfaith Friends.



The Bertha E.R. Strosacker

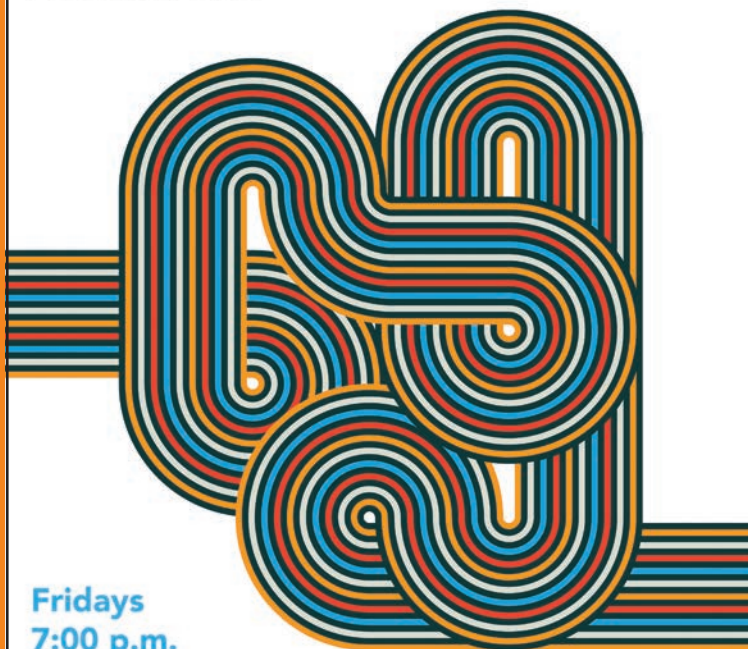
Memorial Presbyterian Church

A House of Prayer for All People

1310 Ashman Street
Midland, Michigan 48640-5493

Cultural Conversations

MPC Mission Series



Fridays
7:00 p.m.

- August 11 | *Crossings* Film about Korean Peace | Snacks | Reaching Out for Justice & Peace
- August 25 | *English Camp in the Czech Republic* | 6:00 p.m. Dinner | Dave & Liz Neithamer
- September 8 | *ACT Uganda's 20th Anniversary* | Fundraiser Dinner by ACT Uganda
- September 29 | *Forman Christian College in Pakistan* | Dessert | Pastor Matthew Schramm
- October 20 | *Migrant Workers of the Philippines* | Treats & Tea | Sheryl Hnizda
- November 3 | *Niger Partnership Update* | Dessert | Pastor Michael Ludwig

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The Greenhoe Library Board presents

Adult Summer Reading Program

Lunchtime Book Chat

Tuesday, July 25 • 11:30 a.m.

Bring your lunch and meet in the Colonial Room to discuss *Stories That Bind Us* by Susie Finkbeiner.

Lunchtime Book Chat

Tuesday, August 22 • 11:30 a.m.

Bring your lunch and meet in the Colonial Room to discuss *The All-American* by Susie Finkbeiner.

Meet the Author!

Friday, October 13 • 7:00 p.m.



Susie Finkbeiner is the author of *Stories That Bind Us*, *The Nature of Small Birds*, and *All Manner of Things* which was selected as a 2020 Michigan Notable Book. *The All-American* is her ninth novel. Susie and her husband make their home in West Michigan and have three amazing teenagers.



VBS REUNION!

Wednesday, August 9
6:30–8:00 p.m.

Everyone from VBS 2023 is invited to reunite at MPC for a fun family game night!

