

A Note from Rev. Phil | Holy Week 2026

Dear Beloved of First United Presbyterian Church of Tarentum,

It is Holy Week. Yesterday, Palm Sunday began our week as we traveled from the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, to Christ's last meal with his disciples on what we call Maundy Thursday. Maundy comes from the Latin "Maundatum" which means command or we in English we have the word Mandate. I give you a new commandment, says Jesus. We will worship at 7pm on Maundy Thursday. Good Friday there will be a community service at Trinity United Methodist Church in Brackenridge (big red doors on Freeport Road across from the cemetery) from 12-13pm. Easter Sunday our worship is at 11am. The service is usually full so come early to find a seat and to enjoy the prelude music from our organist, Denise Olson.

April also brings with us a full month of opportunities for gathering and service. On April 26th we will celebrate 25 years of ministry together. This is a moment to celebrate! The average stay of a Presbyterian pastor with a congregation is now under 5 years. I am one of the longest tenured pastors in Pittsburgh Presbytery. We will celebrate in worship with some favorite hymns, a liturgy celebrating our 25 years of ministry together, some great music by our choir, and more. Then we will do what I love - we will gather for a time for fellowship with a catered meal. A team of folks have some special things planned for that day. I am grateful for them.

I would be delighted if you can be in worship on April 26th and then stay following for the luncheon. Favor - please contact the church office or sign up on the sheet at the entrance to the church to let us know you are coming to the luncheon. We want to make sure we have enough food for everyone.

Other opportunities for service include some of the following:

- Spring Garden Clean Up and Plant Day on Saturday, April 25th from 10am-noon
- The Fourth Tuesday Community Dinner Tuesday, April 28th
- Mission Trip to West Virginia (our 45th trip): May 3-5
- Vacation Bible School - Summer Fun Days: June 14-17 from 6-8pm

If you would like to help, just let me know at pastor@fupct.org, tell me, sign up on the inserts or contact the church office.

Lastly - I went to this very interesting talk the other day at a gathering called "Faith Forward" which featured Ryan Burge. Ryan Burge loves numbers and statistics and trends. He shared many of those in the time together - most were, honestly, fairly depressing. When asked what do in the light of these statistics he shared two things - we persist, we persevere, we lean into

Jesus and sharing the love of Christ, of being decent and kind and caring. And he referenced a book titled "Bowling Alone" that even in the late 90's folks were already becoming more isolated and weren't joining things. He suggested the church just offer more social opportunities for the community (Like the Fourth Tuesday Community Dinner).



It got my brain moving - what if we offered ice cream and the bounce house to the kids after school in our front yard area? What if we did a once a month noonday gathering with perhaps soup and a sandwich for our seniors in the community? What if we opened our space on perhaps a Friday evening for those who love to play board games and Dungeons and Dragons and those such games for folks to play (perhaps we would put out some snacks and drinks for them)? What if we had a Lego build night where kids could come together once a month and play Legos with one another? What if we offered an open time in our Nursery (folks love it) where kids could just come and play and parents could meet?

You might be thinking - "Rev. Phil, are you asking us to do more things? Don't we do enough?" Yes and no. I am hoping that maybe one of the above strikes you and you would like to lead it up. I am hoping that we understand that the more we open our doors and offer a safe space for folks, without asking for money, creates an atmosphere of love and acceptance. Many days I ask myself, if First United disappeared tomorrow, would it matter to our community? In fact, I think every church should be asking that question. Not to be self-centered, but just to say, are we focused inward or outward. Is it about just us or are we reaching out into our community and beyond?

Phew - that's a lot to think about. Thanks for reading all the way through.

Peace be with you.

Rev. Phil