



THE RED DOOR

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BIG FLATS, NY

Founded 1827 ----- "Pride In Our Past – Faith In Our Future"

[/www.bigflatsfirstpres.org/](http://www.bigflatsfirstpres.org/)

Dear Friends,

At the Christmas Eve service, during the time for announcements, Pat Fitzgerald asked the congregation to consider donating to the fund for repaving the parking lot. Reminding us of the long history of the church and its significance as the oldest continually operating church in Chemung County, Pat personified this lovely old church, referring to it as she, a grand old woman in need of a little care. I was reminded of the book, *The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein, the story of a tree and of a boy. In it the tree has also been personified and the book is simply conversations between the tree and boy, conversations which have spanned decades. This time upon reading this tale I found parallels between the church, and the tree, and the boy and us.



As the story begins, the tree gives the little boy her apples to pick and her branches to climb. The boy and the tree love each other and are happy in their life together. As the boy grows older, however, his interest in the tree becomes less. The tree is very lonely until one day the boy returns as a young man. The tree offers her apples and branches, but the boy claims that he is too old to climb and play. He is more interested in money. 'Can't you give me some money?' he asks the tree. The tree has no money, but she does have apples. The tree asks, why doesn't the boy pick the apples and sell them, then he will be happy. The boy does this and the tree is happy. But then the boy stays away an even longer time and the tree is sad.

Years later the boy returns. The tree is overwhelmed with joy as she invites the boy to swing from her branches. But the boy is too busy to play. What he really wants is his own family and a house to keep him warm. Can the tree give him a house? No, but the boy can cut her branches and build a house with them, suggests the tree; then he will be happy. The boy does this and the tree is happy.

Many years pass before the boy, now middle-aged returns. The tree, overjoyed, invites the boy to play. But now the boy is too old to play. All he wants is a boat which will take him far away. 'Can you give me a boat?' The tree invites the boy to cut down her trunk and make a boat so he can be happy. The boy does this, and the tree is happy--but not really, for now only a bare stump remains.

When, years later, the boy returns, he is hunched-over, an old man. The tree apologizes for having nothing to offer any longer, no more apples to eat or branches to climb, only an old stump. But the old man says his teeth are too weak for apples, and he is too old to climb. All he needs is "a quiet place to sit and rest" for he is very tired. "Well, said the tree, straightening herself up as much as she could, 'an old stump is good for sitting and resting. Come, boy sit down, sit down and rest.' "And the boy did. And the tree was happy."

It is a poignant story. The tree was truly a giving tree. It gave and gave and even when it only had a stump left, it still gave a place of rest and quiet.

Perhaps you may find parallels with your own stories and life experience, maybe even with yours or a family member's relationship with this church.

We come to the church and ask her to bless our children in baptism, to witness to our marriages, to give comfort when overwhelmed with life's challenges, and to provide solace and assurance at the end of life's journey. We come seeking the assurance and blessing of a loving God. And maybe we can see the tree as the one upon which Jesus gave us the greatest gift of all.

Regardless of how we may interpret this story, we do trust and expect the church, this church, to be here for us. But the reality is that that is not necessarily going to be the case. This church, as is true with most churches, gives and gives, and keeps the lights on for us, but the reality is that support is dwindling, as is membership. And each year more and more churches close their doors and become simply a memory.

Here, at First Presbyterian Church, we do have hope. The Mission Study has been completed and accepted by the Presbytery. The Pastor Nominating Committee has been elected, and are moving forward, but we need you to give your blessing, your energy, your support and your participation to ensure the success of the churches endeavors.

As Epiphany leads us to Lent and on into the celebration of Easter, let us consider what this church means to us and what it needs from us for its light to continue to burn brightly on into the future.

Peace and blessings,
Pastor Beth



SESSION ELDERS AND PASTORAL NOMINATING COMMITTEE ELECTED

Sunday, December 17 our congregation met and elected members to our Church Session and to a newly-formed Pastoral Nominating Committee. This was a very important meeting, as it ensured that our church will continue to have strong, effective leadership in the upcoming year.

Named to our session were elders **Sarah Cory, Sheila French, and Ann Slowik**. Our Pastoral Nominating Committee will be composed of **Jenny Dean, Patrick Fitzgerald, Sheila French, Ann Hayes, Rocky Peters, Patricia Seem, and Mark Slowik**. Congratulations and thank you for your willingness to serve! Thank you, also, to elders **Scott French, Luke Gromer, and Jill Knight** who will be leaving session following their terms of faithful service!

Our new elders will be installed during morning worship on Sunday, January 14, 2018. They will assume their new duties when our session meets on January 17. Our Pastoral Nominating Committee will soon begin the process of finding our new pastor.

ANNUAL MEETING SET FOR JANUARY 28

Our annual Congregational Meeting will take place following the worship service on January 28. The **Annual Report** will be presented, and we will act on a number of items of important church business.

NOTE: Committee Chairs should submit end-of-year reports to Bill Howells as soon as possible.

JOYS AND CONCERNS

Many people worked very hard to make Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas a truly joyous time for our community of faith. We are very thankful to have such dedicated and caring friends in our congregation. Highlights of the last two months include:

- Thanks to the volunteers who service our used clothing shed! We recently received a letter from the St. Pauley organization commending us for the quality of our work.
- The annual **Scouting for Food** drive, held on November 11, was very successful. Nearly **3,000 food items** were donated! Thanks go to our local scout troops and adult volunteers from the Big Flats Lions Club and Food Pantry staff!
- We had a special color guard ceremony on Sunday, November 13, as Veterans **Sam Dean (US Navy), Jack Horn (US Marine Corps), Stewart Potter (US Air Force), Neal Gummo (US Army), Galer Perreault (US Navy), and Ezra Wolcott (US Army)** helped us to remember those who have served our nation in the past, as well as those who are currently serving.
- On Sunday, November 12, we celebrated the joyous Sacrament of Baptism, as we welcomed **Carter Bruce Scott Courtwright** into our community of faith. Congratulations to mom **Megan Raeder** and to Carter's entire family!
- Thanks to **Mark Slowik**, the kitchen crew, and all who pitched in to make our Thanksgiving breakfast so special! Special thanks go to **Paul Holland** for sharing his wonderful music with us!
- Thanks go to the middle grade students from the **Chemung Valley Montessori School** who helped our Food Pantry staff prepare for Thanksgiving and Christmas food distributions!
- Thanks go to all who worked to make our December 3 Silent Auction and luncheon so successful.
- Thank you to the '**Gromer Trio**' (mom **Samara** and sons **Luke** and **Ty**) who blessed us with a number of uplifting brass selections during our worship service on December 10!
- On Sunday, December 10, our church hosted a "Blue Christmas" service of hope and healing for those who find the holiday season a time of sadness and emotional pain. Thank you, **Pastor Beth and Music Director Nancy Compton**, for making this such a very special and moving time!
- On Christmas Eve, many volunteers from our congregation rang the bell at Miniers Supermarket to raise funds for the Big Flats Community Food Pantry. Thanks to all!
- And thank you to **Pastor Beth, Nancy Compton, Mary Ellen Rudnick**, our vocal and bell choirs, and all who made the Christmas Eve Service so joyous and so meaningful. Special thanks to **Joyce Dean** for the stunning display of poinsettias!

Among our concerns this month, we ask for prayers for: **Cindy & Ed Leisening, Phil Hubbard, Brandon Davis** (nephew of Sheila French and Lisa McGill), **Denise Wiskowski** (sister of Debbie French), **Alan Giglio** (Pat Fitzgerald's nephew), **Heinz Weissenbuehler, Reva Soutar, Nick Rudnick, Emma Gardner, Irene Hoey, Ginnie Schweizer, Dudley & Marie Shea, Dorothy Bartlett**, and others who are dealing with ill health, surgery, loss, or life changes. Please remember our shut-ins, and please continue to pray for our servicemen and women and their families and for peace in our troubled world. Please remember our shut-ins, and please continue to pray for our servicemen and women and their families and for peace in our troubled world.

Do you have a special joy or concern that you would like to share with our faith community? See Pastor Beth or Bill Howells, and we will include your news in our Joys/Concerns column.

Circle of Love



SOUP SALE STARTS IN JANUARY



Mm-Mm-Good! Delicious and nutritious homemade soup will be available after church each Sunday, **January through March**. Just **\$5.00 per quart!** Volunteers are needed to provide soup, and a sign-up sheet will be posted in the Church House. **Questions? – See Barb Horn.**

PANCAKE BREAKFASTS CONTINUE -- NEXT SLATED FOR JANUARY 20

Well into our seventh season, our fund-raising Pancake Breakfasts have proven to be a big hit! Enthusiastic patrons have flocked to our Church House for gourmet breakfasts of pancakes, eggs, sausage, fruit cup, and beverages. We thank all who have helped to make these meals so successful.

Our next breakfast is slated for **Saturday, January 20, from 8:00 - 10:00 AM**. Subsequent breakfast dates are **February 17, March 17, and April 21**. The cost for each meal has been set at \$6.00. There is no charge for those under six years old.

This series of meals is an ambitious project for our little church, and it takes a lot of help to ensure success. Sign-up sheets will be posted for each meal. Please do your part by pitching in to help and also with your patronage. Questions?? Talk to **Sarah Cory**.



“SOUPER” BOWL SUNDAY – FEBRUARY 4

Go AFC! Go NFC! It doesn't matter which team you are supporting. Here's a way that everyone can be a champion! Each year our church participates in **“Souper” Bowl of Caring Sunday**. Wear your favorite team apparel and bring cans of soup (other canned goods and cash are also gratefully accepted) for the benefit of those who are served by our Food Pantry. We will be passing around the soup kettle on **Sunday, February 4**, and we hope that you will join us in helping those in need.



BLANKET SUNDAY SET FOR FEBRUARY 11

For some fifty years, the Church World Service Blanket Program has helped in making life more bearable for those who have been affected by a disaster, such as flooding or fire. We will be taking a special collection on **Sunday, February 11**. Every \$10.00 that we give can provide a good wool or cotton blend blanket (quantity purchase keeps costs down). Please support our church's participation by donating to this very worthy cause during morning worship on February 11.



POTLUCK DINNER TO BEGIN OUR OBSERVANCE OF LENT – FEBRUARY 14

On Ash Wednesday, **February 14, at 6:00 PM**, our church will mark the beginning of the season of Lent in a special way. We will have an informal gathering and potluck supper. Please bring a dish to pass -- place settings will be provided. There will be time for those attending to share, telling why Lent has special meaning in their lives. Don't have time to prepare a dish? Decide to come at the last minute? No problem! All are welcome!



IT'S PER CAPITA TIME!

Each year the church must pay a fee to our Presbytery for each member. This year that individual member fee is **\$50.00**. These monies are used to fund outreach programs, disaster relief, the resource center for the churches, and Camp Whitman programs. In your offering envelopes box, you will find a "Per Capita" envelope. It would be great if we could all pay our individual per capita assessment and, if possible, a little more.



ADVENT MISSION DRIVES VERY SUCCESSFUL

Our congregation responded with great generosity to our 2017 Advent mission drives. Our **"Shower for Mary"** is an important effort which helps victims of domestic abuse at the **Elmira Salvation Army's Safehouse**, and our **"Gifts for Joseph"** program helps men (and families) served by the **Catholic Charities Samaritan Center**. Both of these drives were extremely successful, overflowing a station wagon with donated items on delivery day! We also had a number of monetary donations.



Thank you to all who participated in this vital outreach. **Special thanks to our Mission Committee for a generous cash donation to both these programs.**

PHOTO GALLERY



January



WEEKLY EVENTS

SUNDAY	9:30 AM	Choir Rehearsal
	10:30 AM	Morning Worship
TUESDAY	12:00 – 2:00	Food Pantry is open
	6:30	Boy Scout Troop #87

SPECIAL EVENTS

January 7	Epiphany Sunday – Holy Communion
January 7	We will put away Christmas decorations and enjoy a Soup & Sandwich Luncheon
January 14	Installation of Elders
January 14	Worship Committee will meet
January 17 (Wed.)	Property Committee & Session will each meet
January 20 (Sat.)	Pancake Breakfast – 8:00 – 10:00 AM
January 28	Pennies from Heaven
January 28	Annual Congregational Meeting following morning worship service
February 4	Holy Communion
February 4	“Souper” Bowl Sunday – collection for Food Pantry
February 4	Boy Scout Sunday – scouts may be involved in our worship service
February 11	Blanket Sunday collection for Church World Services
February 14 (Wed.)	Ash Wednesday Potluck supper and informal devotional service
February 17 (Sat.)	Pancake Breakfast – 8:00 – 10:00 AM
February 18	Worship Committee will meet
February 21 (Wed.)	Property Committee & Session will each meet
February 25	Pennies from Heaven
February 25	Deadline for articles for March/April <u>RED DOOR</u>

COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Worship Committee	Meets following church service on January 14 & February 18
Property Committee	Wednesdays, January 17 & February 21 – 6:00 PM
Session	Wednesdays, January 17 & February 21 – 7:00 PM

EDITOR'S NOTE: This edition of **THE RED DOOR** covers two months – January & February. Our next issue will be published in late February. Updates will be sent via e-mail.

