



The Banner

First Presbyterian Church
Oak Ridge, Tennessee

April 2024

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Did you hear the one about...?

What does the first Sunday after Easter, Jolly Rogers, and frivolity have in common? Holy Humor Sunday! We are gathering in the fellowship hall for our 10:30 a.m. worship on Sunday, Apr. 7, to celebrate the supreme joke God

played on the devil by raising Jesus from the dead. It's a tradition that dates back to 15th-century Bavaria when priests deliberately included funny stories and jokes in worship to enhance the merriment of the faithful and celebrate God's gifts of

laughter and joy. Bring your favorite, suitable-for-church story or joke to share. If you don a funny hat or other accessory, even better!

FPCOR continues as Earth Care Congregation

For over ten years in a row, First Presbyterian Church has been recertified as an Earth Care Congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). FPCOR is one of several hundred congregations across the denomination that demonstrates its commitment to earth care through projects and activities in the four areas of worship, education, facilities,

and outreach. The annual recertification is achieved by submitting a report of our activities over the previous year in those four areas. Thanks go to Dan Terpstra and others for completing the necessary documentation.

Part of becoming an Earth Care Congregation involves taking the Earth Care Pledge, which states, in part: "The earth and all creation are God's. God calls us to be

careful, humble stewards of this earth, and to protect and restore it for its own sake, and for the future use and enjoyment of the human family."

You'll find our newest certificate just inside the main door to the Sanctuary building.



The flowering of the cross during the Easter service

Environmental disasters & religious responses topic of Science & Faith Lecture April 28

"Environmental Disasters and Religious Responses: Case Studies from Appalachia and the U.S. Gulf Coast" is the title of the next talk in the Science and Faith Lecture Series cosponsored by First Presbyterian Church and First United Methodist Church (FUMC), both of Oak Ridge.

Joseph Witt, associate professor of religious studies in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Tennessee (Knoxville), will address this topic on Sunday, April 28, 1:30 p.m., at FUMC, 1350 Oak Ridge Turnpike.

Witt is the author of the 2016 book, *Religion and Resistance in Appalachia: Faith and the Fight against*

Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining. The book concerns his investigation of how religious worldviews shaped attitudes toward mountaintop removal coal mining in Appalachia in multiple ways, and conversely, how debates about mountaintop removal also shaped new religious responses.

(Continued on pg. 5)



The Banner

From your pastor



Sharon Youngs, pastor

I absolutely love springtime! Yes, the lazy days of summer are enjoyable; and, yes, the colors of autumn are beautiful; and, yes, the stillness of winter is nice. But there’s just something about spring—its bright green leaves, its dazzling colors, bird songs galore, and more—that surpasses the other three seasons.

One of, if not, the most cherished gifts of spring for me is the yellow trillium wildflower in the side yard garden at my house. My mom had initially rescued it from a very precarious place right along the edge of the single-lane road that led to her house. It thrived in its new location and, over time and with the miracle that nature is, created a cluster of plants.

Several years ago, I transplanted that yellow trillium and one of its buddies from her yard to mine. Unfortunately, the buddy didn’t survive. So, each year about this time, I watch with bated breath for a single shoot to pop through the dirt, defying winter’s harsh weather (and my embarrassingly minimal approach to help protect it) for another year. I am happy to report that I spotted the precious shoot right around Easter this year! It will soon stand out among the many Lenten roses, lilies of the valley, Solomon’s seal, hostas, shooting stars, painted ferns, and more, that join it in the side yard. Parenthetically, all of the plants in that garden are gifts from others, which make them incredibly special.

That single, little, yellow trillium reminds me of how resilient life is. It is a slow-growing plant. It’s like the little steam engine with its “I-think-I-can” attitude. And when it’s blooming, I imagine that I can almost hear it humming the song “Ain’t nothing gonna steal my joy.” It brings a smile to my heart on so many levels and does much to launch me into a new day.

I want it (it needs a name) to create another cluster, and it may, but it will do so in its own time and in its own way. And it will be glorious!



Yellow Trillium

With a grateful heart,
Sharon



Young Adult Breakfast Club



All-church workday



FPCOR’s Welcome Table

Thursday, Apr. 11, 5:00 to 6:00 p.m.

The next dinner of the Welcome Table, our monthly community meal ministry, will be served in the fellowship hall on Thursday, Apr. 11, beginning at 5:00 p.m. To-go dinners will be available between 5:45 and 6:00 p.m., when the meal concludes. All are invited to come, eat, and enjoy the fellowship. Groceries will also be available through FPCOR’s food pantry.

If you would like to help, tasks include setting up, cooking, serving meals, and cleaning up. Please let Sharon know if you’re interested: fpcpastor@live.com or (865) 771-7178.

FPCOR Spotlight: Anna Vlot

You may have noticed a young woman who has recently been singing in the FPCOR choir. She is Anna Vlot, a native of the Netherlands. She has a Ph.D. from the University of Berlin. She is fluent in three languages—Dutch, English, and German. She recently moved to the Oak Ridge area after taking a position as a postdoctoral researcher at Oak Ridge National Laboratory. There she works on chemical risk assessment.

In March, Anna gave a presentation to FPCOR’s “Let’s Talk about It” (LTAI) class on environmental injustices to low-income, non-white communities exposed to air and water pollution as well as hazardous waste. The sources of the contamination believed to cause respiratory diseases, cancer, and other disorders in people in disadvantaged communities are often nearby emissions of toxic industrial chemicals whose production enhances white communities’ wealth.

Anna delivered a PowerPoint presentation to the class and introduced the attendees to an informative video and easy-to-read journal publication on chemical exposures, health, and environmental justice in marginalized communities. Many are located adjacent to industrial and agricultural operations, or oil and gas extraction “fracking” operations in which cancer-causing chemical additives are injected with fluids into the ground.

Class attendees learned that hog, poultry, and dairy operations for producing foods cause respiratory diseases in workers and neighboring communities. LTAI class members mentioned that Oak Ridge area residents are aware of toxins such as methylmercury in a local creek and coal ash next to a former fossil fuel power plant.

Referring to quotes from various sources, Anna said that pollution has annually caused one in six deaths worldwide and that the economic cost of health damages totaled \$6 trillion in 2019. One major problem, she remarked, is that new synthetic chemicals are constantly being developed with an annual average of 1500 new substances being produced in the United States. “We have no efficient way of testing all these new chemicals for human and environmental safety,” she said, adding that chemical risk assessment researchers at ORNL and elsewhere are addressing the problem.

A new approach avoids testing mice and other animals to determine if a new chemical might be toxic to humans. Anna told the class about the international PrecisionTox project that uses genetic and other methodologies, including artificial intelligence, for chemical safety testing. Molecular toxicity pathways are being uncovered through tests of human cell lines, as well as fruit flies, water fleas, roundworms, and frog and zebrafish embryos.

Anna gave this definition: “Environmental justice means that everyone regardless of race, color, national origin, or income has the right to the same environmental protections and benefits, as well as to meaningful involvement in the policies that shape their communities.”

LTAI class members agreed that community members should be involved in identifying environmental health concerns that require investigation and in translating research findings into action, including advocacy for policy change.—Carolyn Krause



Anna Vlot sings in the FPCOR choir and has made a presentation on environmental justice to the church’s “Let’s Talk about It” class.

“Majority white and wealthy communities are where investments in infrastructure are more likely to be made, where environmental laws are more likely to be properly enforced, and where polluters are more likely to be held accountable or kept away entirely.”
<https://www.nrdc.org/stories/environmental-justice-movement>

Children & Youth



Our children's activity time continues to grow with new attendees. Kirsten is teaching from the Lenten study and engaging the children around the vocabulary of church life. Who is God? Where is the sanctuary located?



Time with Children during the Easter Sunday service



The Easter egg hunt was a success!



The congregation kicked in to help stuff Easter eggs in preparation for the annual Easter Sunday big egg hunt. There were 200 eggs for the taking!



SUNDAY EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES THIS MONTH

Let's Talk About It

For adults and older youth, 8:45 a.m., in person (room 102, Activities building) and via Zoom

Apr. 7: Off for eclipse travel

Apr. 14: Discussion of Tim DeChristopher, also known as Bidder 70.

Apr. 21: TBA

Apr. 28: TBA

Early Birds

For adults and older youth, 9:00 a.m., in person (parlor) and via Zoom

Studying the letter of James.

Leaders: Anne Backus, Gene and Rosalyn McKeown-Ice

Rise 'n' Shine

For adults, 9:00 a.m., in room 6 (with the comfy chairs just inside the main church entrance)

Studying I Corinthians. Refreshments provided.

Leaders: Sue Byrne, Cheryl Barr, Hannah Tippett

**Environmental disasters & religious responses
topic of Science & Faith Lecture April 28**

(Continued from pg. 1)

Before joining the UT faculty in 2023, Witt served from 2011 to 2022 as assistant and later associate professor of religion at Mississippi State University. He has a B.A. degree in philosophy and religion from Hendrix College and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in religious studies from the University of Florida.

Witt’s research, teaching, and public engagement have centered on religious studies and analyses of community encounters with environmental issues, such as resource extraction, pollution, climate change, and food insecurity.

He provided the following summary of his upcoming talk.

“Natural disasters are a regular challenge for communities around the world. But when those disasters are associated with industrial activities such as coal mining or oil exploration, they can lead to unique and long-term challenges for impacted communities above and beyond the need to address immediate health and safety threats.

“I will describe recent social-scientific research on industry-associated disasters on the U.S. Gulf Coast and in Appalachia, highlighting the ways that religious institutions helped negotiate community responses. This research shows that, while religious institutions proved integral in helping recovery

efforts, they were also limited in their abilities to address certain challenges due to the complexities of the social relations in which they were entangled.”

A reception with drinks and dessert snacks will follow the lecture.

—Carolyn Krause



Joseph Witt

FPCOR to receive Living Waters for the World offering on Apr. 21

It’s hard to imagine our daily life without access to abundant clean water coming out of our faucets. But that’s a reality for far too many of our siblings in the underdeveloped world. Over two billion people worldwide do not have access to safe, clean water.

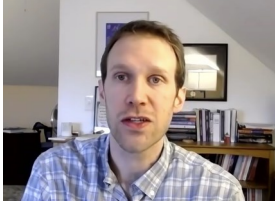
We can help. One way is to donate to our special offering on Apr. 21 to support the ongoing efforts of Living Waters of the World, a faith-based nonprofit that trains and supports volunteer mission teams to form partnerships with communities and install sustainable water purification systems in the U.S. and abroad. These water systems purify contaminated water to provide safe, affordable water for the communities. The first prototype of the purification system was developed here at FPCOR.

To give, simply put LWW on the memo line of your check or donate online using the QR code on the last page of this issue of *The Banner*. All God’s children deserve clean water!

—Roger Ryburn and Peggy Bertrand Terpstra, co-chairs, Social Concerns Committee



PART ONE: Community organizing, the church, and power were topics of FPCOR class



Aaron Stauffer speaks via Zoom about his book and community organizing to FPCOR's "Let's Talk about It" class.

In March, FPCOR's "Let's Talk about It" class participated in-person in three online sessions with Aaron Stauffer, associate director of the Online Learning and Wendland-Cook Program in Religion and Justice at Vanderbilt Divinity School. He is the author of the recent book *Listening to the Spirit: The Radical Social Gospel, Sacred Value, and Broad-based Community Organizing* published by Oxford University Press.

Aaron defined community organizing as "a political and religious practice" that results from people who have one-on-one relational meetings in which they listen to one another's stories and pain and feel listened to. These folks then commit as a large group to protecting and fighting for what they agree they hold most dear—what he calls "a sacred value." He said he has led listening campaigns in churches in which congregants through one-on-one mutual listening sessions come to a consensus on "their core values and most pressing community issues." Values, he suggested, can include the right to vote, abortion rights, and the importance of inexpensive childcare.

In the book's preface, he states: "The act of narrating one's own story, while feeling listened to and empathetically cared for, creates space for critical theological and political reflection that can agitate and energize Christians toward political action."

When asked about the need for all Americans to have medical care and health insurance, Aaron said that broad-based community organizing can bring multiple sectors together to act on this common value and issue. He argued that if 2,000 people representing churches, the medical community, schools, labor unions, and other groups gather together and threaten to vote out politicians opposed to Medicaid expansion, such a powerful action could be effective.

In his preface, he conceded that because the United States is so deeply mired in cultural wars, some people assert that absolute religious attitudes or commitments should be excluded from political life because they do not "allow for compromise or negotiation—strategies necessary for a healthy democratic culture." He rejects this argument, saying

that "religion is at the heart of politics."

In the final session with Aaron, he asked the members of the class to pair off and engage in a 15-minute, one-on-one relational meeting in which each person would speak for 7 minutes and listen to the other for the same amount of time. Aaron asked the participants to tell stories answering two questions: "What first brought you to FPCOR and what has kept you at the church?"

When the listening sessions had ended, one class member said that he and the person he talked with and listened to came to agreement on the same values even though their pathways there were so different. Another class member said that the friends she made at our church have kept her here.

Aaron concluded that "the work of the church is the task of building relationships of liberation and love and that work itself accurately expresses what true Christian identity is."
—Carolyn Krause



The new labyrinth is complete!

PART 2: How a community organizing workshop led to FPCOR's Welcome Table

In February 2017, shortly after the inauguration of President Trump, a community organizing workshop was held for three days at the Alex Haley Farm in Anderson County. It was attended by at least 100 East Tennesseans, including many church members, as well as community organizers from Nashville.

I was the only member of our church who attended the workshop; I volunteered to go as a representative of Session's Social Concerns Committee. One of the exercises the workshop attendees were encouraged to engage in several times was the "one-on-one meeting" in which two persons in an intentional face-to-face dialogue explore common values and interests and ways to come together.

I had a one-on-one meeting with Abbie Moore, a member of the Oak Ridge Unitarian Universalist Church. I knew that ORUUC offered a free meal to the community the last Friday of the month and that Pastor Sharon had suggested to our Social Concerns Committee that our church consider moving in that direction. At the time, we were hosting Wednesday Night Dinners for six weeks at a time in spring and in fall, primarily for congregation members and their friends.

So, during our 30-minute conversation, I asked Abbie how their community meal ministry got started and how ORUUC made it work. We

talked about the importance of church missions to provide nourishment for the food-insecure in our community. I later reported what I learned from her to the Social Concerns Committee and to Anna Robinson, one of the leaders of the Wednesday Night Dinners' "Chop and Chat" crew. It took a year of discussion that included concerns that the Wednesday Night Dinners (WND) cooks were not inclined to take on an additional food project.

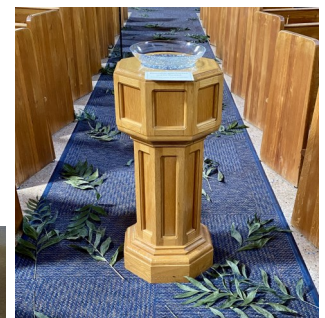
Even so, the Social Concerns Committee made the community meal ministry a priority. I later talked to another WND leader, Susan Sharp, who agreed to lead the new ministry and announced at the 2018 annual meeting that she felt inspired by Matthew 25 verses to organize this new effort. The WND program was abandoned partly because one of its most enthusiastic leaders, Sandy Rohwer, had passed away. Anna and other congregational cooks embraced the new mission.

So, that's how a one-on-one meeting at a community organizing workshop planted a seed that grew into the Welcome Table, FPCOR's community meal ministry over the past five years. Many volunteers and donors of money and food from our congregation have stepped up to make this ministry a success.

A few Presbyterians and I attended additional meetings of Strong and United of East Tennessee, which started in 2017 in response to the lessons learned at the community organizing workshop. It was called "a non-partisan alliance of diverse organizations and individuals using its collective power to bring positive change to our community, to hold our public institutions accountable, and to create and sustain just and healthy systems."

The website for Strong and United indicates that it became inactive almost 16 months ago after achieving one notable goal. Strong and United had a mobility justice working group headed by Marian Wildgruber, who is vision impaired and has a service dog. In 2022 she spoke to Oak Ridge City Council about the need to improve accessibility for disabled residents of Oak Ridge. At the end of the year, she gave an update to the League of Women Voters of Oak Ridge. By that time City Council had established a Disability Advisory Board, and Marian Wildgruber was named the board chair.

—Carolyn Krause



Good Friday prayer stations

Last but not least...

**PLEASE!!
NOTE**



Weekly gatherings

Sundays:

8:45 a.m. Let's Talk About It
9:00 a.m. Early Birds;
Rise 'n' Shine;
10:30 a.m. Worship
11:30 a.m. Refreshments

Mondays:

Noon Men's Zoom lunch

Wednesdays:

6:30 p.m. Choir rehearsal



Monthly gatherings

- **Piece for Peace Sisters**, first Tuesdays, 9:30 a.m., room 102, Activities building
- **Brewing Questions**, first Thursdays, 7:00 p.m., via Zoom
- **Conversation on Loss**, fourth Sundays, 11:50 a.m., parlor, Sanctuary building
- **Coffee Chat**, last Mondays, 9:30 a.m., room 6 and via Zoom
- **Young Adult Breakfast Club**, last Saturdays, 9:00 a.m., room 102 kitchen, Activities building

(See weekly emails or call the church office for Zoom links and details.)

Session news

At its stated meeting on Mar. 21, the Session:

—learned that the new outdoor labyrinth is very near completion and should be ready for Good Friday. Approval was given for just over \$3200, to be taken from the Memorial Garden fund, to install a compacted stone path to the labyrinth that begins at the magnolia trees between the Memorial Garden and labyrinth. A portion of that amount may be paid by a pledge from First Baptist Church because of their interest in the project.

—noted that income for 2024 is trending lower than this time last year.

April birthdays

4/3 Darlene Sanders
4/3 Meg Tonne
4/4 Jo Kendrick
4/4 David Mullins
4/4 Anna Randolph
4/5 Kelly Drane
4/5 Ed Tilley
4/10 Katie Terpstra
4/11 Mary Mullins
4/18 Sydney Murray III
4/20 Richard Ward
4/21 Selma Lavender
4/27 Sally Haywood

Happy birthday!

April Anniversaries

4/15 Elaine Wilson &
Darlene Sanders
4/20 Donna & Brian
Hoppestad

Congratulations!



Easter at FPCOR

April 2024

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 12:00 p.m. Men's Zoom lunch	2 9:30 a.m. Piece for Peace Sisters 1:00 p.m. Staff meeting	3 11:30 a.m. Al Anon 6:30 p.m. Choir rehearsal	4 7:00 p.m. Brewing Questions	5	6 9:00 a.m. CLP Meeting
7 Holy Humor Sunday 9:00 a.m. Sun. school 9:45 a.m. Choir 10:30 a.m. Worship 11:30 a.m. Fellowship 11:45 a.m. Church Life & Witness Team	8 12:00 p.m. Men's Zoom lunch	9 1:00 p.m. Staff meeting	10 11:30 a.m. Al Anon 6:30 p.m. Choir rehearsal	11 5:00 p.m. Welcome Table	12	13
14 9:00 a.m. Sun. school 9:45 a.m. Choir 10:30 a.m. Worship 11:30 a.m. Fellowship	15 12:00 p.m. Men's Zoom lunch	16 1:00 p.m. Staff meeting	17 11:30 a.m. Al Anon 6:30 p.m. Choir rehearsal	18 6:30 p.m. Session Meeting	19	20
21 9:00 a.m. Sun. school 9:45 a.m. Choir 10:30 a.m. Worships 11:30 a.m. Fellowship	22 12:00 p.m. Men's Zoom lunch	23 10:00 a.m. Anna's Book Group 1:00 p.m. Staff meeting	24 11:30 a.m. Al Anon 6:30 p.m. Choir rehearsal	25	26	27 9:00 a.m. Young Adult Breakfast Club
28 9:00 a.m. Sun. school 9:45 a.m. Choir 10:30 a.m. Worship 11:30 a.m. Fellowship 11:50 a.m. Conversation on loss	29 9:30 a.m. Coffee Chat	30 1:00 p.m. Staff meeting	31 11:30 a.m. Al Anon 6:30 p.m. Choir rehearsal			

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Oak Ridge, Tennessee

April 2024

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The Banner team: Carolyn Krause,
Madison Green & Sharon Youngs



**FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**
Oak Ridge, Tennessee

Embodying Christ's inclusive love through heart, mind, and service



give
today