

WINTER 2024

# First

magazine





# First magazine

## FIRST MAGAZINE

is published by First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor and distributed to members and friends.

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CLIFF HANGER





# New Year, New Start

**We've taken a new approach to our newsletter to share the stories of our journey together in this thriving community.**

First Presbyterian Church is proud to present this new publication, First Magazine.

With photography and illustrations, along with approachable storytelling, First Magazine showcases the best of First Presbyterian Church.

This edition takes a look back at the ministry of Rev. Jay Sanderford, who after 40 years of ministry is retiring this January.

In addition, readers will get a glimpse into the transformative experience of 11:15 a.m. worship and learn more about how our Faith Formation ministry is creating welcoming and inclusive spaces for all ages.

We are excited about our future at First Pres, and we are looking forward to seeing where God will lead us, together.







# Astonishing Adventure

Jay Sanderford is on a quest.  
And it may not be what you think.

BY DAVID YNTEMA

## WHEN JAY APPLIED TO YALE

**DIVINITY SCHOOL**, he expected to become either an Old Testament scholar or a teacher of American Religious History. These fit two of his interests. He is fascinated by Hebrew language and the stories of the Old Testament. He also has an abiding curiosity about intersections of American religious and cultural history. Yale seemed like a reasonable place to pursue these interests.

By the time Jay earned his degree from Yale Divinity School, he was venturing onto a different path.

A few years later, M. Div. in hand, Jay Sanderford first met Mary Baine Rudolph. A legendary Christian educator who had published her first book on

Christian Education two decades earlier, Mary Baine Rudolph was the quintessential southern church lady. Serving as the Director of Christian Education at the Palms Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville Beach, Florida, the willowy southern gentlewoman was known to keep a bottle of vodka in her desk drawer.

Perhaps it was for times when she had to meet the new staff.

On their first meeting, the tall Southerner took one look at the new Associate Pastor and simply muttered, “Oh, Gawd.”

You can imagine the tension building within his soul as Jay tried to anticipate what would come next.

Fortunately, Mary Baine Rudolph put her hands on her hips and just said, “I guess I’ll show you how to do this stuff.”

Filled with Southern charm and a lightening quick wit, Mary Baine Rudolph was, as Jay will tell you, a better preacher, a better theologian, and a better administrator than almost any pastor you’ll ever meet. She also proved to be a remarkable mentor in teaching Jay the nuts and bolts of ministry over the course of his five years at Palms Presbyterian.

She taught Jay the whole gamut: Everything from the importance of officer training and development to ways to create a systematic youth ministry—the latter being particularly useful since Jay was charged with leading the youth at Palms Presbyterian. At the church set only a few blocks west of the beaches along the Atlantic



Ocean, Ms. Rudolph proved to be a generous mentor, Jay an eager learner.

Only a few years earlier Jay was hosting a small group at the apartment in New Haven where Jay and his wife, Beth, lived. On this particular evening, Beth was in bed with a respiratory illness. One of Jay's mentors, Henri Nouwen, an internationally renowned Dutch Catholic priest, scholar, and writer, was there as part of the group. When he heard that Beth was ill, Nouwen visited with Beth, fetched a cup of water for her, and then prayed with her. This simple attentive and caring act of friendship and kindness provided Jay with a memorable and powerful example of pastoral presence.

Jay, a master of the nuts and bolts of the Presbyterian way who is keenly attuned to the importance of relationships, is a friendly man with a stylishly close haircut and a quick wit. He reads widely and demonstrates curiosity about all things knowable. If you've been in the pew at First Pres on a Sunday, you know Jay knows how to pray. If you've been in the pew on a Sunday when Jay



preaches, you know that he has a love of literature, an ear for poetry, a keen sense of fairness, a heart for mission and justice, and an insatiable urge to square the way things are with the way things ought to be.

These characteristics did not arrive on the day that Jay was born at the racially segregated Duke University Hospital in Durham, North Carolina.

#### **GROWING UP**

Jay grew up in a suburb of Atlanta at a time when the entrance signs for public accommodations still declared "white" and "colored." His family moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, when Jay was entering junior high school. He had just started riding horses, he ran track, and played football. Attending a school with forced integration, Jay learned to

“

Jay is a fun-loving, playful, and serious colleague. He's a people builder, a relationship builder and a great colleague.

DAVE VANDERMEER,  
MINISTER OF MUSIC & FINE ARTS

”



navigate some of the social and racial complexities of the newest “New South.” Jay’s family soon moved to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where Jay attended R. J. Reynolds High School. A starter on the football team for four years, Jay played offensive guard and also served as the long snapper for punts and extra points. Besides playing on a championship football team, Jay ran the 400-meter dash and the 1600-meter relay on the track team. Jay also was part of the theater crew, putting on plays, musicals, and concerts. His favorite part of high school, though, may have been the English and literature courses in which he began to learn how to analyze poetry and think abstractly. It was there that Jay Sanderford, class of 1973, was introduced to the poetry of Langston Hughes during his junior year. (More than fifty years later, he would effortlessly integrate Langston Hughes’ poem “Mother to Son” in a remarkably memorable sermon.)

Growing up in the South in an age

of great reforms and resistance, the grandson of a North Carolina textile mill owner, Jay developed friendships across class and racial lines. His friends taught him much, but Jay also learned from history and literature and observation. Jay’s sense of outrage at social injustice was still largely inchoate.

There was, of course, more to Jay’s life than high school classes and sports and clubs. He also became connected with a healthy Young Life program at a local church. Although baptized a Methodist, and having attended Methodist churches in Atlanta and Charlotte, in Winston-Salem Jay attended First Presbyterian. Like most teenage Presbyterians, he preferred the balcony. His birds-eye perch offered a great view of the Reverend Dr. David Burr, a noted stemwinder of a preacher. Through Young Life and the First Presbyterian, Winston-Salem, Jay encountered leaders who promoted service and involvement

in the church, and who fostered small groups.

Working his way through the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Jay studied American history. The honors thesis he wrote under the direction of George Tindall, a distinguished historian of the American South, examined the socialization of women in small towns as they confronted the implications of Brown v. Board of Education. Interviewing great aunts from Roxboro, North Carolina, helped Jay learn how their faith gave them a community ethos to be able to accept the changing racial climate of the American South. It also helped him understand some of the social and cultural dynamics of where he was from. His studies did not, at that point, transform Jay’s social consciousness; he did some advocacy, appeared at marches, but it was still somewhat inchoate, a stance still felt antithetical to family and experience.

## GOD AND JAY AT YALE

Having worked as a carpenter during summers and winter breaks in college, it was not a huge leap for Jay to work as a carpenter for a while after graduation as he discerned his calling in life. Increasingly he was drawn toward a bias in his heart—exploring a new intellectual and cultural climate. Eventually, Jay chose to attend Yale Divinity School. It took him far away from the world of Southern Presbyterianism, and Jay loved it. Jay and Beth had wonderful places to live and work. Beth had a terrific job as a research associate with the Yale School of Nursing. They were able to go skiing, visit Acadia







## JAY'S BOOK LIST

### JAY'S LIST OF FAVORITE READS:

- "A Good Man is Hard to Find" (in the Complete Stories) by Flannery O'Connor
- "My Bright Abyss" by Christian Winan
- "Gilead" by Marylynn Robinson
- "Dakota" by Kathleen Norris
- "Jaybeer Crow & What Are People For?" by Wendell Berry
- "Some Horses" by Thomas McGuane
- "Horse" by Geraldine Brooks
- "The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe" by CS Lewis
- "The Cross and the Lynching Tree" by James Cone
- "Compassion" by Henri Nouwen
- "Church Dogmatics" by Karl Barth
- "Life Together" by D. Bonhoeffer
- "Cost of Discipleship" by D. Bonhoeffer
- "Flourishing & Exclusion and Embrace" by Miroslav Volf
- "Jesus and the Disinherited" by Howard Thurman
- "A Theology of Liberation" by Gustavo Gutierrez
- "Feminist Interpretation of the Bible" by Letty M. Russell
- "Personal Commitments" by Margaret Farley
- "Holding Faith" by Cynthia Rigby

National Park, and see friends in Boston. Plus, New Haven proved as intellectually stimulating as advertised.

Yale, it turned out, was full of mentors willing to show students pathways to learning. Jay's terrific teachers included Brevard Childs, one of the most influential biblical scholars of the last century (and a Michigan grad). Professor Childs was writing a series of books on the New Testament and the Old Testament as canon. A wonderful and very kind theologian and scholar, Professor Childs stimulated Jay's interest in the Old Testament as story. Robert Johnson taught theology and gave Jay an essential grounding in Reformed Theology. Professor George Lindbeck, a distinguished medievalist and Lutheran theologian who became a founder of "post-liberal" theology, provided Jay with crucial encouragement on his scholarly work. E. William Muehl, an attorney who had graduated from University of Michigan

Law School, taught homiletics. An Episcopal lay person, Professor Muehl was both exacting and encouraging. Professor Letty Russell, a pioneer in feminist theology, introduced Jay to Liberation Theology.

Henri Nouwen proved to be a great pastoral and spiritual influence. He helped Jay understand how to hold contradictory principles in tension. It was the Benedictine idea of having opposites in mind as a way of probing reality. It involves having the ability to at the same time know God and yet understand that God is an unknowable mystery. Of Nouwen's many books, *The Wounded Healer* is especially helpful in cracking open the paradoxical notion of holding the opposites in tension. This is a tension that continues to play out in Jay's understanding of ministry. Nouwen's non-reactionary style of ministry was very much considered, thoughtful, and prayerful and appealed to Jay.

Sydney Ahlstrom, who wrote *A Religious History of the American*







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Jay is kind and passionate; his greatest strength is he is a visionary, an ideas guy.

REV. MARK MARES

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*People*, had drawn Jay to Yale in the first place and Jay took courses from him until rapid onset of dementia took Professor Ahlstrom out of the classroom. Jay remained interested, however, in how cultural history shapes individuals. While he read a great deal of American religious history under Professor Ahlstrom, Jay was also attracted to broader cultural history. He was especially fascinated by the interplay of religion and personality and family type and how that is transmitted over time.

The intellectual stimulation at Yale was breathtaking. The rich interaction with giants of the faith and their gentle firm guidance made it easy to love living in community at Yale.

Most of all, perhaps, Yale helped Jay articulate the social conscience he had been developing through his experiences and education in Georgia and North Carolina.

By the end of his third year at Yale, Jay was turning away from what drew him there initially.

For different reasons, he had decided not to pursue more work in Old Testament or in studying American Religious history, despite continued attraction. Instead, Jay had decided to be as good of a pastor as possible.

Two years of field placement at the First Presbyterian Church of New Haven may have helped Jay realize gifts in that area, too. The Rev. Dr. Blair Moffett and Mary Marple Theis proved to be terrific mentors. They gave Jay the chance to lead worship and be involved in a wonderful community. The challenging and nurturing and reflective environment at Our Lady of the Telephone Poles, as the church was affectionately known, demonstrated to Jay that he had the capacity and love for a congregation as an institution. The experience there inserted Jay into the life of the church and proved confirming of his path into the parish.

#### **EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN THE VINEYARD OF YOUTH MINISTRY**

After a short stint as pastor at the Butner Presbyterian Church in Butner, North Carolina, Jay accepted a position as Associate Pastor at the Palms Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville Beach, Florida. Under the guidance of Mary Baine Rudolph and the Rev. Dr. Jack Swann, Jay focused on youth ministry. The church had a large youth group with 80 to 100 high school students and 50 to 60 middle schoolers. The size of the group alone forced Jay to understand the value of working with other people. He needed to gather groups of people and then delegate. As a result, they had twenty to thirty adults engaged in





helping the youth. He also came to realize that youth pastors are, in essence, mentors.

It was there that Jay deepened his interest in experiential learning. Being along the ocean, they were able to use sailing, kayaking, surfing, and just being along the ocean as a playground and as a teaching tool. Jay developed the skill to teach young people to reflect on their experiences. But it was more than fun in the sun. The area attracts all kinds of people, including those who become homeless or destitute or live meal to meal. The church was able to teach the youth how to come alongside people gently and enter into ministry with people experiencing homelessness at a deeply compassionate level. This, too, was an opportunity to teach young people to reflect on their experiences.

After five years, Jay and Beth moved to Charlottesville where Jay accepted a position as Associate Pastor at the First Presbyterian Church. It was another large church, another large youth program. Over 15 years, Jay would confirm several hundred young people. But Charlottesville was different.

At a time when Adventure Education was in its heyday, Jay received formal training from the National Outdoor Leadership School and Project Adventure. The training helped advance the youth program at First Presbyterian, Charlottesville. Jay says, "Charlottesville was an experiential ministry of being together, worshipping, serving the community, and being in community together but also using natural resources." They didn't have the ocean, but they had the Blue Ridge mountains, the James

River, and, not too far away, the Chesapeake Bay. And so the youth went canoeing, rock climbing, backpacking, and hiking. It was evangelism through adventure. Under Jay's guidance, the church used the adventures to probe people's minds and hearts. Jay was again leading youth to learn how to reflect on their experiences. For Jay, the point was how those experiences can transmit faith to youth and families.

Jay says, "Part of what was most fascinating about ministry to young people is the ability to influence people in positive ways, giving them positive connections to the church, good experiences in worship, in community, mission, service, and challenging adventures." He continues, "Creating generative opportunities for young people and adults around them to be able to grow into their own best sense of self is great."



Jay's interest in experiential education as a tool for ministry had a spillover effect, improving his skills as a facilitator and drawing attention from a local outdoor group and corporate groups interested in taking advantage of Jay's skills.

As in Jacksonville, it wasn't all fun and games. There was drama—a huge drama program where Jay would produce 12-minute skit that would hold the attention of adults in worship. This was part of an effort to create a culture of families, one where they developed a ministry with families without calling it that. Jay became a certified parenting teacher and taught classes a couple of times each year around parenting. This helped create an atmosphere of family well-being. The message was that parents knew they were welcome at church, and the parents and kids knew that the children were welcome on the trips. It was a whole community effort to care for, nurture and launch young

people in the faith. For example, Jay didn't teach confirmation class; it was led by a psychotherapist, a judge, and an attorney (using curricula Jay helped organize).

Jay served the church in Charlottesville for 15 years, finally leaving when his friend and colleague, the Rev. Dr. Tom Kennedy, retired as Senior Minister. The Reverend John Lewis (Jay) Sanderford, Jr., resigned from First Presbyterian Charlottesville in March 2000 to accept a call to the Woods Memorial Presbyterian Church at Severna Park, Maryland.

When he got to the outskirts of Annapolis he found a bigger youth group and easier access to the Chesapeake Bay. The church's youth program included a summer mission trip that involved 120 youth. The church had a scheme and a process in place, and they hoped Jay could add in recreation and sailing on the bay. It was not, however, a good fit for Jay. In many ways, it turned out to be a

mismatch of skills and interests, and Jay left, perhaps a little early, to become the executive director for a fledgling nonprofit in Charlottesville.

## BUILDING NEW INSTITUTIONS

The Building Goodness Foundation got its start from mission trips to Haiti. On those trips, working with mission partners, members of First Presbyterian Charlottesville worked with an agricultural mission project in southern Haiti. They would walk through the mountains, work in villages, plant trees, help with erosion control, and with small-scale community development. Eventually, some of the people who went on these mission trips decided to help build a mission compound that became the headquarters for this mission. From this project, three men, with different faith traditions and commitments, came together to harness the skills of tradesmen to build homes, schools, clinics, and other spaces for people in lower-



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Jay is a good conversation partner; he is reflective, thoughtful, and collaborative.

DAVID PRENTICE-HYERS,  
LEAD PASTOR

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income communities. Today the Building Goodness Foundation has a budget of 4.5 million dollars and attracts volunteer services from architects, general contractors, plumbers, electricians, and other skilled trades. They work in Haiti and other countries in the Western Hemisphere to erect buildings for people who need them.

This is the group Jay helped get started and organized. He led the organization through its 501(c)(3) process, its first funding, its first annual fund drive, and its first real grant-making. After a few years, Jay felt he had completed his mission and it was time for the group to hire a professional nonprofit administrator to help the organization take its next steps. Also, Jay was itching to get back to the church.

Not far from where he lived, the PC(USA) had a fledgling development of its own. A new church plant in the northern part of Albemarle County needed some

help—and they turned to Jay to help get them on their feet. Jay served as an organizing pastor for The Blue Ridge Presbyterian Church and, eventually, was called as pastor. In addition to the usual pastoral duties, Jay did all kinds of fundraising and other work to help make the church viable. For example, their space was too small, so they raised the money to purchase a giant office building—and they hauled it across the mountains to the church. Jay helped them get to the point of being viable, but he was worn out. As happened with the Building Goodness Foundation, Jay felt it was time to turn over the project to the next person to come in and generate the burst of energy it would take to move the project forward. It was as he was feeling this way that Jay began conversations with an Associate Pastor Nominating Committee in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

### **MOVING TO ANN ARBOR**

The Associate Pastor Nominating Committee voted to call Jay, in part because of his breadth of experience. They also saw Jay as someone good at building relationships, who worked well with others, and who wanted to be part of a collegial team.

For his part, Jay was attracted to Ann Arbor for several reasons. He liked the idea of returning to a large church to finish out his career. He had known one of the Associate Pastors, the Rev. Melissa Anne Rogers, from the time they overlapped as small group leaders at the Montreat Conference Center in North Carolina. Jay loved the idea of mentoring pastors at the start of their careers. Among his gifts are mentoring, tutoring, facilitation, and helping young people learn to reflect beyond the experiences they are having. Especially in his work as a youth pastor, Jay taught people how to



reflect on their experiences. Jay was also drawn to the strong history of commitment to mission work at First Pres.

When Jay arrived in the fall of 2013 with a mandate in Resident Ministry and Mission, it seemed that the lines had fallen into pleasant places. The first winter was brutally cold and snowy, but Jay and Beth loved it. They loved being in the big church and Jay loved the ministry.

He set to work with the committees on Mission. Over the coming years, First Pres developed an annual grant program that led to strong relationships with mission partners. Global mission work had a somewhat different outcome. Some of the projects that First pursued around the world were reaching fruition. Still, Jay remained committed to expanding local and global missions.

Resident Ministry required recruiting and a new round of fund-raising following the end of the original grant from the Lilly Foundation. So there were challenges ahead, but the work was interesting and the congregation was congenial and genuinely supportive of the pastoral staff's quest to pursue issues of intellect and justice and healthy church community.

Several years into Jay's tenure, a number of nettlesome leadership and personnel issues came to the forefront. It was a challenging time as Session navigated how to deal with those issues and address the concerns about the senior pastor in a thoughtful, equitable, and compassionate manner. It was difficult for the pastors and for other staff — some of whom chose to leave. Over the course of several months, there was a transparent and painful sharing of the issues and solutions with the members led by the Presbytery of Detroit.

The situation culminated with the departure of the senior pastor, the Rev. Dr. Fairfax Fair, in the fall of 2018.

After her departure, Jay, together with his colleague the Rev. Rogers and the Session carved out a path forward for the church. Trying to hold body and soul together, planning worship life for the congregation, and resolving staffing issues, they looked for the church to rebound.

Jay was called to help move the congregation past this troubled time and, by all accounts, provided solid leadership. He and the Rev. Rogers worked together with the committees to create the culture for the church to reset itself. It took a lot of conversation with hundreds of members and transparency about the administrative record. It also took a willingness to move ahead with important hiring decisions. Jay urged the session to move







forward with hiring an Interim Pastor sooner rather than wait for the dust to settle further. While some preferred to go more slowly, Jay and others thought it best to move forward in hiring an Interim Pastor. The new Interim Pastor, the Rev. Dr. Rick Spalding, arrived in October, 2019

The troubles had disrupted the whole congregation, changed the priorities and the arc of Jay's time at First, but also allowed the church to look into a sharp mirror and set its priorities going forward. A generous, welcoming church with a long history of excellence in preaching, music and fine arts, and engagement in mission re-emerged in the mirror. And, with a renewed commitment to transparency and to creating a healthy leadership culture, the Session took ownership of its authority.

One observer noted that Jay was a rock that held the structure of

the church together as it emerged looking forward to a new day of promise and hope. Another observer credited Jay with being an essential continuity person. Jay played a fundamental role in helping the church stay in operation during the interim period between the senior minister's departure and Rick Spalding's arrival. The same observer also credited Jay and Mel with working extremely well together.

With the arrival of the Rev. Dr. Spalding, Jay was able to exhale and return his focus to working with mission and resident ministry.

Then a few months later, COVID hit.

#### **THE QUEST CONTINUES**

Jay is planning a fruitful retirement in which he will be engaged with the Presbyterian Church doing some consulting and some

transitional ministry work. He is not necessarily seeking to be an Interim Pastor. He recognizes that there is always change within the church. Living congregations are in constant transition to the next thing.

Jay will enjoy being part of that process, trying to influence it in healthy ways. Jay envisions being able to be helpful in a generative role whether consulting with churches or not for profits.

Over the years, Jay has learned much. He seems to learn wherever he goes. From R. J. Reynolds High School through the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. From carpenters, the faculty at Yale, and the people in his horse community, Jay is constantly observing, listening, and learning. It comes as no surprise, then, that Jay has taken two courses in transitional ministry training in preparation



for the next phase of his ministry.

Jay has a keen idea of social justice born in the South and refined and articulated at Yale and put into practice in the years since. He also seems to know which scholars, pastors, and churches are doing the Lord's work in fascinating and effective ways. He is a walking bibliography of resources and connections to places and people across the country. All this is true. He is also a workhorse with an institutional vision.

Throughout his professional career, Jay has given credit to colleagues and mentors for the learning that has taken place, for the ability to foster conditions for success. In Ann Arbor, Jay credits Melissa Ann Rogers, among others, with his successes at First Presbyterian of Ann Arbor. He says, "I owe a lot of my effectiveness to our friendship and the way we learned to work and collaborate together. That relationship [with Mel] has been super-powerful," he said.

Ask Jay, and he'll tell you he is on "a quest to help people realize opportunity and hope for finding their calling, their belonging, their purpose, their future—and for helping churches do the same; something generative."

While his quest continues, Jay also understands that change is constant—which is why he turns to Octavia Butler.

*All that you touch  
You Change.*

*All that you Change  
Changes you.*

*The only lasting truth  
Is Change.*

*God  
Is Change.*

—Octavia Butler, Parable of the Sower (1993)

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Jay is thoughtful,  
intelligent, and deep.  
And fun.

LINDA ROBINSON,  
OPERATIONS MANAGER

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PERSPECTIVE

# COLLEAGUES IN MINISTRY

BY REV. MELISSA ANNE ROGERS

**My dear friend Jay Sanderford is retiring, and I find it hard to imagine serving First Pres without him!**

Our time together begins with a fond memory of sitting on my porch at my home with Jay when he was being recruited by our APNC. He was the leading candidate for the position he has held for nearly 10 years. To be honest, there was another candidate for the position that I had recommended — and I really wanted that other person to get the position. When Jay was chosen, I admit I was disappointed. Yet, trusting in the Holy Spirit, and the awesome search committee filled with wise and faithful members — we sat down for a chat — and we were probably interviewing one another. Jay and I talked about what ministry together might look like and any issues or landmines he should know about before accepting the call. Our conversation was

defined by transparency, authenticity, and mutuality. It was clear to me this was the person we needed. My excitement that day was sparked by being in Jay's presence and fully realizing his unconditional commitment to God's call in his life and his unqualified acceptance of people as they are. My enthusiasm only grew as I watched his mind work, discovered his love affair with books (something we share), his passion for our residency program, his willingness to give his heart and his time to mentoring young pastors, and of course, his love of animals (another gift we have in common). Jay was God's perfect choice. Over the next years, particularly as we faced serious transitions, I was so grateful to have Jay alongside me as an Associate Pastor. His



skills in administration, his depth of knowledge about Presbytery and personnel matters, and his excellent leadership of Session meetings kept me steady and, truthfully, kept me from leaving at a time when I had other options to move and was in the process of discerning whether I could really stay at FPC A2. While Jay and I both have felt deeply appreciated for the work we did through transitions at First Pres, we have not been spared criticism. A part of the ministry, it is to be expected — but having a colleague who keeps your ego in check and who is willing to vent with you (often over a beer at Wolverine Brewing) has been invaluable to me.

### DEEP ROOTS

My time knowing Jay has deeper roots. Jay and I had met years ago, when I was about 21, at a Montreat Youth Conference. He had more hair then, and as I recall, it was red.

He had two adorable children who were with him. What I could see right away at that age was that Jay loved young people, their energy, their faith and doubts, and their utter joy. He was one of those young pastors I met at a tender time when I was deciding between law school and seminary - and I am in the ministry today because of Jay and others like him. Jay will never retire from shaping young pastors — it is just a matter of where and how.

### MINISTERING THROUGH CHALLENGES

Finally, a lasting memory that will always be precious to me. Jay came over to my house in the pandemic so that we could talk with Rev. Rick Spalding about whether our church would be a good fit for him. With Rick in Boston, Jay and I sat on my deck with my phone on speaker and fielded Rick's questions. He wanted an honest assessment of

our congregation, while exploring if we could all work together. We simply couldn't tolerate any more difficulties, and needed a slam dunk of an interim. Rick was it. Our two-hour phone call was one of the most exciting conversations I have ever been a part of — a sure feeling that it was God's will to put the three of us together with the rest of our gifted but traumatized staff. I will remember the gift of that day, and the treasure of being able to work with Jay and Rick as a team.

Jay is one fine pastor — who gives of his mind, heart, spirit, and energy. And with his beloved partner Beth — they have shaped our First Pres family in incredible ways. To “Jay-bird” — may you live fully into all the moments before you with love, courage, and wonder. Amen, and Amen.



### 2022 FPC STAFF

from left to right, Pat Gilbreath, Anna Miller, Hannah Lundberg, David VanderMeer, Jay Sanderford, Linda Robinson, Mark Mares; front row: David Prentice-Hyers, Megan Berry, Melissa Anne Rogers with Haddie, Adrian Prundeanu









PERSPECTIVE

# Loving Our Neighbors

BY HELENA PRINCE, LOCAL MISSION CO-CHAIR

**AS I REFLECT ON THE TIME JAY** has served at First Pres, I am most grateful for his leadership of our Mission program. As chair, and then co-chair of Local Mission, I enjoyed working together with Jay. He was always open to my ideas and those of others. I appreciated his wisdom, knowledge, and passion for Mission, which helped further the program. His many years of experience in Mission work, and constant reading and seeking information about global and local mission was invaluable in enhancing our mission partnerships, developing new ones, and helping to establish best practices for our work. He was always about partnership in our work together and with others. Even during the COVID pandemic, while global mission

work was suspended, under Jay's guidance, we continued providing services through a special funding program for local social service providers addressing community needs.

The work of mission is challenging because of the passion that many of us bring to the work, and differences in ideas and approaches. However, Jay was constant in helping us work through our differences and remained constant in his love for us and our work together.

Again, thanks to Jay's commitment to partnership, and a desire for First Pres to reach out to our neighbors in need in the Ypsilanti West Willow neighborhood, he initiated a conversation with the pastors of New Covenant Missionary Baptist Church in West Willow. This conversation over several years has resulted in what we hope will be a partnership to address needs in the West Willow community, and I have appreciated the opportunity to help further this connection.

I am also very appreciative of Jay's leadership in the Social Justice arena through his sermons on issues and his work with our Dismantling Racism group. I am thankful for the direction, patience, and calming of troubled waters he has brought to a group wrestling with difficult topics and differing opinions.

Jay appreciates people's passion for their cause(s), and many of us have benefitted greatly for the passion he has brought to his work at First Presbyterian. He will be greatly missed!

# RESIDENT MINISTRY AND BEYOND

Jay loves the Resident Ministry at First Pres of Ann Arbor. He loves helping resident ministers connect with the congregation.

BY DAVID YNTEMA

Jay has a remarkable ability to bring people into relationships. One First Pres member said, “Members have been able to make relationships with resident ministers who come through, and part of that is due to Jay. Jay makes an effort to connect the resident ministers with members of the congregation. He is great at helping them establish relationships with other people.”

Jay has loved the opportunity to be a colleague and partner in ministry to developing pastors. Jay says, “It is a wondrous relationship, to be able to be in a partnership with this dizzying array of skill sets and talents and interests. With people from different parts of the country, different senses of call, and help them uncover their spiritual depth and core, help show them the resources that are really life-giving in terms of discerning and developing your own deep call and your own appreciation for God’s inner dialogue with you.”

Jay will tell you that clergy share a way of looking at the world. Pastors also share an imagination about walking alongside, stimulating and challenging and being prophetic witnesses to a community, a congregation, and individuals. This is something that has intrigued Jay for a very long time. And it raises a question: How do we as a congregation create a community in which we can engage with, develop, grow and challenge the pastoral imagination of young leaders? This has been at the core of what Jay has tried to do. It’s part of his quest as a pastor, not just for young clergy but for everyone. He wants to bring people into relationships so that they can be part of a generative conversation centered on action and reflection.

As Jay prepared for his retirement, he remains interested in developing a pastoral imagination in young pastors and creating the circumstance by which people create and grow a conscience for their community and a functioning faith for the future.

Jay says: “The fact that I had good mentors has been instrumental in understanding the role of friendship and of gentle firm guidance that is so much of the work here as a mentor to residents. [You’re] not always seeing eye to eye but enjoying the relationship.”

Jay has been on a quest to build relationships in a generative way that moves people and the church forward in their spiritual journeys. And the relationships are essential, both to the process and to Jay, personally.





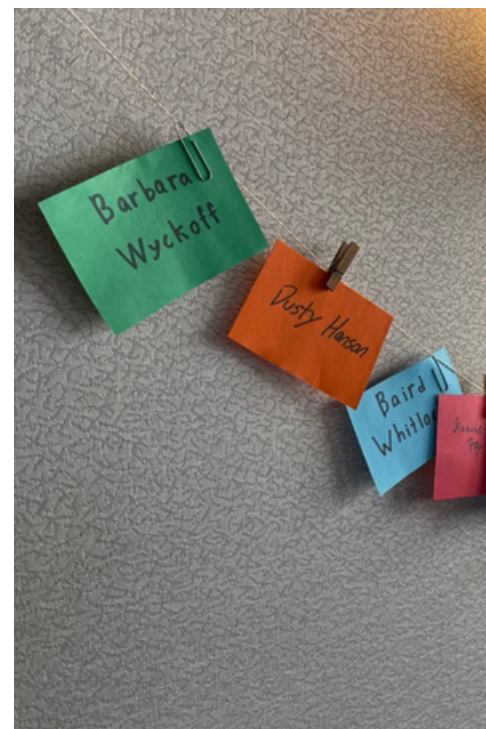
# Encountering God in New Ways

At 11:15 worship in Monteith Hall, God sometimes moves in surprising ways.

BY REV. HANNAH LUNDBERG

**THROUGHOUT THE FALL**, 11:15 worship fostered a vibrant community, carving out room for more responsive, participatory, creative worship with a low barrier to entry. Recognizing the diverse ways that each of us bear the image of God, this service is one way we are transforming worship and trying new things to be more welcoming and inclusive to all at First Presbyterian Church.

While 11:15 follows a similar pattern to the 9:30 Sanctuary service, a few aspects set it apart. Each week, the congregation is invited to respond actively to the sermon through a response activity—it may be a journal prompt, a simple art project, a small group conversation, or a new way of reading Scripture. During the passing of the peace, we share personal reflections on questions like “Where did you see God this week?” or “Who embodies Christ’s love for you?” These moments go beyond greetings; they involve sharing stories and faith, ensuring everyone’s voice is heard.



Early on, we embraced the concept of 11:15 as a “wiggly” service, encouraging movement and creativity. All are welcome to stand and move their bodies freely, a table of playdough and craft supplies welcomes those who find focus through hands-on activities, and our patterns and rituals stretch and shift from week to week. 11:15 has become a laboratory for trying new things while maintaining familiar traditions, and already we are finding ways to bring certain elements of this small service to worship in the Sanctuary as well.

The 11:15 service resumes in January until the end of the program year. We invite you to join us and witness how God may transform your worship experience. Your participation adds to the tapestry of this evolving and inclusive worship journey.









# Shaping Faith Through Love:

A Journey in Our Faith Formation Practices

BY REV. MARK MARES & THE FAITH FORMATION TEAM



**THE PHILOSOPHER, DESCARTES, SAID:** I think, therefore I am. In many ways, our Faith Formation practices have emphasized this belief. Treating our young children and youth like empty buckets in which we dump all the ‘necessary beliefs’ into. But another philosopher, Saint Augustine, said something different: We are what we love. The Christian philosopher James K.A. Smith commenting on Augustine said, “We are what we love, and love is habit. Our love is like second nature: it directs and propels us, often under the radar of conscious awareness, like breathing and blinking. It also means that our loves acquire direction and orientation because we are immersed over time in practices and rituals – or “liturgies” that train our hearts and desires.” What does it look like for our Faith Formation practices to be shaped with the idea that we are ‘loving creatures?’

Our Faith Formation work groups follow this guidance from the FPC Strategic Plan (2021): *Welcome and involve more children, youth, families and young adults in the life, programs, worship, and ministry of the church.* Our hope is to create loving, safe, welcoming, inclusive environments in which to have our young disciples join in the programs, worship and ministry of the church.

In the Fall, the Formation team planned to suspend formation classes for children and youth on the first Sunday of the month, so that our young people and families could worship together with our church family. We plan to continue this as we begin 2024,

and hope to add a few more days where our young people worship with us during the 9:30am worship service.

There are deep rhythms and movements that shape us when we worship together. When we gather around the table and font, worship is where the Spirit works to curate the desires of the heart—cultivating the love of God and neighbor, transforming us more and more into the image of God. And so, in the rhythm of God gathering God’s people for worship — of the proclaiming and hearing of God’s word and participating in the sacraments — we commune together as one body, and are sent into the world as image bearers of God’s love. All of this, forms us and gives us a sacramental view of life.

Mid-way through the Fall, Heather Polikoff, Coordinator for Children

Our Youth & Family Work Group decided on placing participation in worship as our goal for Sunday mornings and utilize our Sunday night youth group gathering as a “faith formation” space. This spring, we’ll be reading through two graphic novels (*What is Home, Mum?* with high school youth; *Courage to Dream: Tales of Hope in the Holocaust*, with middle school youth) that will center us and help us create space for youth to explore their own identity, questions of faith, and be curious about the world. While we still have lots of fun, food, and fellowship in youth group, we are also using the time within our safe, welcoming youth community to stretch our faith together.

When our young people feel welcomed, included and love being a part of a community, it gives them the ability to be vulnerable and

**Our hope is to create loving, safe, welcoming, inclusive environments in which to have our young disciples join in the programs, worship and ministry of the church.**

& Family Ministries, wanted to make some of our resources more available and accessible to children in worship, so she created a new space for them in the worship lounge. You can spot our children utilizing it on a weekly basis. Even when our kids don’t go to a specific faith formation class, when they worship with us, they are being formed in deep and profound ways—sometimes aided by these resources as well.

open to new learnings, ideas and growth. Immersing our children and youth within all of our church lives makes faith formation more than just a class on Sunday morning. These are just two ways, we’re hoping to create space for our young people to ‘attend to their loves’ this coming year.

## Upcoming Events

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### **Annual Meeting/Chili Cookoff**

Sunday, February 4  
10:30 am | Social Hall

### **Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper**

Tuesday, February 13  
6:00 pm | Social Hall

### **Ash Wednesday Services**

Wednesday, February 14  
5:30 pm | Monteith Hall  
7:00 pm | Sanctuary

### **Drive-Thru Imposition of Ashes**

Wednesday, February 14  
8:00 am & 12:00 pm

### **Open Doors:**

#### **National Arab Orchestra Takht Ensemble**

Sunday, February 18  
4:00 pm | Sanctuary

### **Alpha House Host Week**

March 18-24



#### **ANNUAL MEETING**

This year's annual meeting of the congregation will be held on Sunday, February 4, following 9:30 a.m. worship.