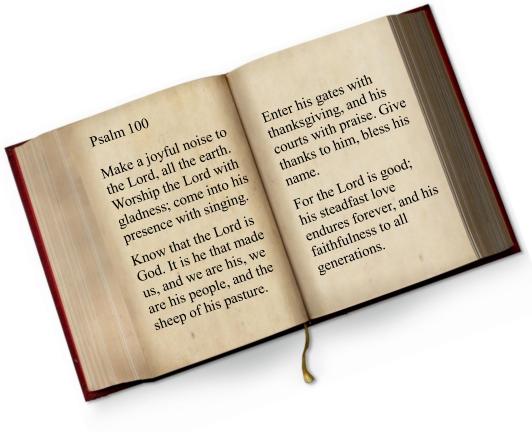


We thank you for spending a few moments a day reading some of the thoughts from those in our congregation as to what First Presbyterian Church of Fenton means to them. You may notice a universal theme of home, faith, and family throughout these devotionals. Our hope is that this booklet reflects and inspires some of the same feelings within you.

Why the tree on our cover? We are a growing and vibrant congregation planted on a strong foundation of faith 176 years ago. It also reflects our growth potential, not only now but as we move forward into the future, ever reaching up—branching out.

In Christ,

Completing the Miracle Spiritual Committee





Alleluia, Alleluia, Give Thanks

One of my favorite hymns (#106 of The Presbyterian Hymnal "Alleluia, Alleluia, Give Thanks") sets the theme for my devotion.



Jesus is Lord of all the earth. He is the King of creation.

FFPC is dedicated to the glory and praise of God with a mission to grow in service to Jesus Christ. My faith journey is nurtured by the shared worship of and response to the many blessings of the Lord. I am thankful for the continuous efforts of our staff and committees to provide more meaningful worship, education, and mission experiences to the glory of God.

Come, let us praise the living God. Joyfully sing to our Savior.

I very much appreciate the upbeat message of God's love and the joyful response as we work together in service. I am especially appreciative of the opportunity to worship God through music.

I am grateful that the Lord has provided First Presbyterian Church of Fenton (FFPC) as a church home. My husband Chas and I have been a part of the church family of FFPC since 2006. Thank you FFPC for making a difference in my life and in the lives of our church members, our community, and our world.

Alleluia, Alleluia, Give Thanks Cheryl Kopplin



"You yourselves, as *living stones*, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

1Peter 2:5

Buildings need a solid foundation to hold up through time. Likewise, our faith foundation must be strong to see us through the challenges of life. Engineers tell us when our building is strong. Scripture tells us our strength in faith comes from Jesus Christ as our *cornerstone*; metaphorically this is also true of our building. It's a marvel



to me that as followers of Christ, we come together as *living stones* – our actions are part of the building blocks of our collective faith. What we do in this physical space moves and breathes toward caring for one another, often reaching people we've never met. What joy and peace this brings to our souls!

But as a *living stone*, what does this physical church space mean to <u>me</u>? I will tell you that in times of great despair, I have raged at God and cried in our sanctuary – alone and with others. I have shared tears and laughter, joy and pain, study and prayer in every place of our church. I know this building like God knows me, and I love every inch of it. This church has fed the seeds of my faith, watered the sprouts with God's love, nurtured and strengthened by the light of God's Word, and my faith has grown immensely by the gift and work of the Spirit, deepening my roots and lifting me beyond my own failings.

I am forever changed by my encounters with God because of FFPC. So I ask you to prayerfully consider how this church has changed you and what acceptable sacrifice you can contribute to glorify God in this faith community, now and for future generations. After all, as a *living stone*, it is the right thing to do!

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief *cornerstone*. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." Ephesians 2:19-22

Tina Ritchie



Our experience with FFPC came about over a period of years. In looking for a church home, I attended several different churches in an attempt to find qualities that I felt were essential for spiritual growth. In this attempt I found myself repeatedly back at FFPC. After a short time, my husband joined me in attending FFPC on a regular basis. It was Harry who first suggested that we become members. This was surprising due to the fact that prior to this he had not shown any interest in belonging to a church.



In discussing this idea, we both shared the belief that this congregation was the most welcoming one we had ever experienced. Their commitment to the community and each other was evident in everything they did and said. Moreover, they displayed their Christian beliefs in their missions, their gifts, and their educational opportunities.

Since we have become members, our gratitude to God for leading us here cannot

fully be expressed. We have experienced a higher level of spiritual growth, a wonderful church family, and the belief that a wonderful loving God led us here to experience what being a Christian is meant to be.

Yours in Christ, Pat Tucker and Harry Clark



In the 40+ years that I have been a member of Fenton First Presbyterian Church, so many

things have changed. That is to be expected. The things that haven't changed in all those years are the things that bring

us together, here at FFPC, as sisters and brothers in Christ.

This is a place where our faith is strengthened. We are comfortable, but we are still challenged as we learn and grow in our faith. We celebrate together and grieve together. This is a place where we can share our thoughts and not be condemned. We work together and play together to make a difference in the lives of our church family

and in our community. We have so many opportunities to participate in the life of the church and to share our individual talents and strengths in God's service.

Fenton First is my church home, where I worship God in fellowship with other believers who share in this faith journey with me. I am blessed, and I am grateful.

Lynne Watters



Hi, my name is Kara Kinser, and this church makes me feel very loved and welcome. I love being around my friends and elders. I like spending time visiting during coffee hour and greeting others. I really enjoy being able to go on mission trips, experiencing the hard work, and also feeling rewarded by it. I get to spend time not only with my youth group, but others I meet along the way. I enjoy going on trips and getting to experience all the fun

times with the people I love being around. This church means so much to me that it is something I don't ever want to lose. This church is my other home, and the church family has become my very close friends and family.

Kara Kinser



First Presbyterian Church of Fenton is my family. Coming through the church door every Sunday is coming home. These ties have evolved over time in many different ways. We worship together, we pray together, we teach our children together, and we work together.



It took some time for me to find this family. I was raised Catholic and went to St. John's school for eight years. In my world, there was no such word as "divorce." So when I got one I was devastated. When I met my husband and started dating him I felt like a hypocrite, so I stopped attending church. My husband Doug would say I seemed to be searching for something, and I was. I felt I had a firm faith foundation but no home—no family. When Doug and I got married, we came to Fenton First. He had been baptized and raised in this church, and many of his family were members. The saints in this church wrapped their arms around me—Jean Browder, Jean Herman, Donna Jean Browning (Doug's

cousin), Gail Strom, Bonnie Griffith, Jennifer and Kipp Verner, Bev Welch, Peg Fowler, Beth Grahl, Mitzi Uebel, and so many more. We studied the Bible together, we worked on funeral dinners, and we taught Sunday school. When Sara Wrage started her stretch class, we exercised together. Aulene Becker, Alice Maletic, and Isabel Book became closer friends as we laughed at our crazy socks.

The deacons asked me to serve. Each Christmas and Easter project brought more friends together. And there were many more projects including Relay for Life, Breakfast with the Christmas Angel, Vacation Bible School, and Women's Retreat. Every hour spent made our family ties stronger. Many new members have joined, and we've had many go before us. We're all still family, brought together to do what Jesus taught us to do—love each other, support each other, help and care for each other. I feel the Holy Spirit in our family, and I know others feel the same. So I'm no longer searching for family. I've found my family. Now my quest is to better love and serve Our Lord.

Jan Jacobs



The church? What does it mean to me?

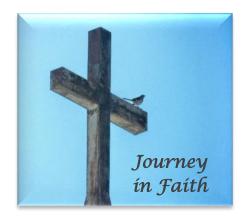
When first asked to write something about what our church means to me, I thought that should be easy to do. After all, I've been going there since we moved to Michigan. WRONG! At first, this is where I went because I always went to a Presbyterian Church.

Of course, over the years I even began to question why. Was it the beautiful old building, ...familiar hymns, ...the connection with my grandparents, ...the same minister, ...the familiarity with the service, ...getting to know some of the smiling faces, ...just being comfortable especially after A/C and padded seats(LOL), ...thinking of many of the folks as friends and my family away from home, ...the choir? Most of those items changed over the years. Some I noticed, some I didn't; but what remained the same was my belief that I needed to keep going every week and participate in various positions to try and give back to this church. Why did I need to go? It became a revelation to me that I needed to pray and reach out to God—not always asking for something, but thanking Him and having my own private conversations with Him. Over time, and upon realizing how he kept 'touching' me in times of need (such as my grandparents' deaths, my grandchildren's trials, or national tragedy), I came to realize He was always there for me and my loved ones.

On first thought, it's just a building, just a place. Oh, but it is so much more. It is the people and their common beliefs, love, and needs to commune with God. It is a place where we can go to share and worship together and know we belong not only in this building, but we also belong to Him.

Greg Dean





Our journey in faith brought us here quite a while ago. Within these walls we have learned, laughed, cried, soul searched, and, yes, just meditated. Through God's redemptive love we have found renewed strength and energy. The foundation of His legacy was nailed into place with every wedding, baptism, and sadly our son's funeral. The support we received from each of these events brought us closer and closer to our church family. This congregation is a testament to the reality of the Holy Spirit at work through which we have developed lasting

relationships. Could this have happened without the forethought of our past members here at FFPC? They laid the foundation of this church many years before we came along. The church waited patiently for our commitment to a life with Christ, as we began our walk in faith.

With that being said, then what is our responsibility to sustain these walls for those who follow in years to come? I'm proud of the impression we as Christians have imprinted in this community at large, offering services of many kinds in our outreach programs. JoAnn and I will continue to support FFPC during this building campaign, just as FFPC has continued to support us throughout the years.

Dennis Beardslee



The First Presbyterian Church of Fenton has become a very big part of our lives over the last twelve years that we have been members. In the beginning, it was because of the very warm welcome we received when attending our first Sunday service. The members went out of their way to make us feel at home. We have never left a service since then and felt anything but spiritually uplifted and accepted as part of the church family.



Over the years, we have become very involved in the workings of the church through active participation as a deacon and an elder. Additionally, serving on committees has allowed us to give input to various functions and events within the church and at the same time foster relationships with many of the church members. We enjoy the outside activities of golf, camping, and gatherings in members' homes, as well as the heartwarming camaraderie each Sunday service gives us. Our church is our second home, and the congregation is our second family.

Recently, our church has been going through a time of transition as we searched for a new-called pastor. Our congregation has been blessed with a team of retired pastors that has stepped up, giving of themselves to help make this transition much smoother for all. Along with our pastor team, members of the congregation have taken on various leadership roles which helped to lighten the load placed on the interim pastor team. Only a strong congregation could accomplish this potentially trying situation.

Attending church services and Bible studies at FFPC has been instrumental in allowing us to grow and strengthen our faith in God. Now it is up to us as a faithful congregation to financially support the great work being carried out at the First Presbyterian Church of Fenton.

Jan and Jon O'Connell



Special Church Family

When I was playing on my 10th grade football team, our team meetings could become a bit braggadocio. We all know that boys can be very full of themselves. But then our coach would quiet us down by quoting Ralph Waldo Emerson, "What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say."



Our church family is full of quiet, unassuming disciples who regularly demonstrate their faith rather than bragging about it. They meet regularly to learn more about their faith; they have even formed three covenant groups. They visit the sick and afflicted—they delivered over 125 meals to families during 2015. They reach out each month in local mission opportunities—second grade students get excited about reading to dogs in our Read and Feed program. They have regular fellowship times together (and they get noticed in Culvers on Monday nights). They worship together each week to keep God central in their lives. Our youth Sundays and the musical talent raise us to new insights.

Together, we are changing our lives and the community around us! This church family has changed my life!

Bill Black



Membership

Four or five years before our planned retirement in 2009 to Fenton from New York (we have family here), my husband and I decided it was time to find our church home in the area. Up to then, on the few Sundays we were visiting family here, we alternated between my mom's church and my sister's. Both were friendly, but neither was in the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition we wanted. Since we expected to spend more Sundays here, we wanted a church of our own.

We started attending a new church plant in Hartland, which we liked; but when they disbanded, we began looking in Fenton. On Easter Sunday 2006, we slipped into a back pew at First Presbyterian. What a service! The music, prayers, and sermon all spoke to us. We had to leave right after worship, but we were eager to visit again.

We returned a few months later and joined not only worship but fellowship time down those narrow steep steps in the basement (love our new fellowship area). We were so impressed by the Spirit-led and heartfelt worship, the warm, friendly congregation, and the amazing concerns for the physical (parish nurse) and mental (Bible and book study groups) as well as spiritual needs of the members. Equally amazing were the numerous outreach and mission opportunities. Here was, and is, a place where everyone's God-given gifts and talents are welcomed and appreciated. Here was, and is, a church we can call Home.



Jan Foster



My relationship with God has grown. Not overnight, or in a few weeks or months, but throughout the 26 years I have been a member here at FFPC. From the first Sunday Mark and I walked into this church, we were welcomed with "Hello's" and introductions. That initial acceptance kept us coming back.

Since then I have plunged into "Deeper Waters," volunteering for many 5-week Carpenter's Corner rotations. I was able to get to know the children, parents, and teachers of our church through this service. In turn I received a better knowledge of whom my co-parishioners are, as well as a closeness with Jesus and our Lord God.



After feeling comfortable with that opportunity, I jumped in with an idea to have a fundraiser for our building, a mystery dinner with actors from the congregation! I was not a deacon, elder, or a chair of any committee, and I was not sure I was "good enough;" but my idea was easily accepted, encouraged, and approved. Once again, I felt the hands of friendship and Jesus' love accept me.

I have found many opportunities to serve FFPC from teaching, participating in Bible study, cleaning up fellowship hall after coffee hour to planning events and attending meetings. If I cannot give my time or talent, I give my treasure. However, none of these things would be worthwhile if it were not for the caring and giving people of our church and the spirit of God I find growing inside me every time I participate.

Today I am an elder, and I will never forget the wholeness and warmth I felt when I took that pledge and the first time I gave communion. I believe the more I serve, the closer I am to love and God. I am still learning and growing in Christ, and I could not find any other place that I would rather be doing that than at Fenton First with this church family.

With Love, Julie Grams



Why did I start going to the First Presbyterian Church of Fenton? I was previously a Presbyterian and was looking for a church after I moved to Grand Blanc from Canton, Michigan. I first went to FFPC and Reverend Swihart asked my name on my first visit and called me by name every Sunday after that. I was impressed that he remembered my name. I felt like I was a person with meaning and not just a body that walked in the door.

I also met a couple, MaryLou and Gary Young. They took me under their wing and had me sit with them every Sunday. After many Sundays of doing this, MaryLou asked me why I didn't join the church. I did not want to make a commitment. I did not want to be asked to do too many things for the church. I did not want to invest myself or feel obligated. After a while, I took the membership class. I decided if I was going to serve God I needed to serve His church as well. It would be like having a family and not wanting to work and pay to support them. I found all of the members on the committees that I joined were very friendly, very grateful, and very Christ-centered. The more I helped, the more I wanted to I wanted to take care of my church family like I would take care of my earthly family. The more God gives me, the more I want to give God. And the more I give God, the more God gives me. It is a wonderful, beautiful, generous circle to be in.

I want this church to be here for future generations. I want people to enjoy the spiritual family of this church. This church has the same kind of love that an earthly family has toward each member. This church works together and helps each other more than any church I have

ever attended. I feel like this is my spiritual family. I know I can ask for prayer and receive it at any time. I will give prayer and support to all members at any time. This is God's love in action. It is a blessing and a privilege to be a part of God's family. I am so grateful for those people who welcomed me with such sincerity. I am also grateful that I listened and obeyed when God spoke to me. Won't you also listen and obey when God speaks to you? The rewards are out of this world!



Linda McCleary



The Siniarski family was almost Episcopalian.

I was born and raised a Catholic, but I had become non-denominational. When Crystal and I were searching for a church to get married in, I suggested that we check out

St. Jude's Episcopal Church as a candidate. I was sure that their

service was at 9 a.m., so I was surprised when we



arrived there at 8:30, only to see that the service had started at 8. We saw on the FFPC sign that they had a 9 a.m. service, so that's where we went.

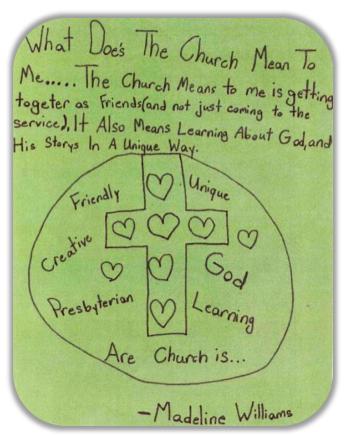
We believe that God led us to FFPC. Neither Crystal nor I have ever been a part of a congregation that embodies the Christian ideals as much as this one

does. From our very first visit, we felt welcome and a part of the FFPC family. Now, over three years later, we have been married here; and we have had our first child baptized here, with our second child's baptism soon to follow. We have both attended Bible studies here. I have been ordained a deacon here. We have many friends here.

What does Fenton First Presbyterian Church mean to me? It means Christian love and values. It means friendship. It means family.

Andrew Siniarski







Lillian Williams



When I put myself out into the world to search for a church, I walked into Fenton First Presbyterian and knew it! This feeling came over me; after my wayward journey, I found a home! As I was preparing to join, Dale and I met in his office. He told me that the church and Southern Genesee County had much to offer, but the chance of meeting the love of my

life at our church was non-existent. In the following years, I would occasionally hope that I would find a wonderful woman and imagine getting married in our church, but my hopes were always tempered. In 2014, Jenn had returned to Fenton First Presbyterian going

through a rough divorce. We became fast friends.

Jon Wenzel

We did become fast friends. Jon was involved with the youth group, in which my daughter, Madeline, was participating. We attended several youth functions and continued our friendship. Going through a rough divorce, I decided that I didn't want to be in a relationship again. However,

being around Jon and seeing him with not only my children, but other youth, melted my heart. He truly is a natural with kids. It was hard to consider a future with someone at that point, but Jon was someone I couldn't ignore. We quickly grew together as a couple and as a family. Gladly, I could give Jon one of his wishes, to marry in our church, which we couldn't do without the help of our congregation. We absolutely have a wonderful church, and I think I speak for the both of us when I say that we are so fortunate to be part of such a wonderful and loving church family. Thank you!

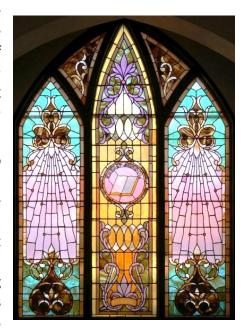
Jenn Wenzel

hebilitati



Many years ago, longer than I'd like to admit, we moved to Fenton. As I acquainted myself with the town, I noticed the beautiful stained glass windows of this church. Week by week, my meanderings became a ritual as to finishing my errands by purposely driving by FFPC. Slowly, I found myself asking what it was like behind those front doors and behind those windows.

Months went by until one day I decided to find out. So that Sunday, which happened to be Mother's Day, I gathered myself together and ventured into the unknown. Until this day, I never really considered myself of a religious nature. As I approached the front door I was a little apprehensive as to what to expect. When I entered the church, the most profound thing happened. I was immediately greeted by the ushers and was ushered into the sanctuary where I was



approached by Donna Browning. She wished me happy Mother's Day but was sorry that all the Mother's Day flowers were gone. Then she promptly took her flower off and pinned it on my dress.

After hearing Pastor Kelly give the message that morning, I decided to join FFPC. I've been an active member ever since that Sunday morning, and I have never regretted wondering what lies behind those beautiful stained glass windows.

Roberta O'Hara



It was not so very long ago that I was among the "unchurched," strongly a-religious. The god I believed in was distant—not a personal part of my life. Issues I faced between 2009 and 2012 required difficult and emotional decisions to be made and carried out by me. My wife Mary was a saint throughout, but there was no other family I could reach out to. I reached the point where my personal strength was below empty. As I plodded through an emotional vacuum, most of my friends and associates had a single suggestion: "Pray, bring your problems to God and ask for help."



It's always blackest just before the dawn. When I could go no further on my own and having nothing left to lose, I followed the advice. I prayed; nothing fancy, but sincere. I re-read the Bible, this time with new eyes and a different viewpoint. I concluded "Yes, this is true. I believe this." And God answered. Over a brief period and more than once, I am convinced I was visited by a messenger of God—perhaps even Jesus himself, and I found peace, and strength to face the tough times before me with resolution and in peace. Having been associated with FFPC for many years through the Boy Scout troop, I met with Pastor Dale at various times during the process. By spring 2012, I was

prepared to make a lifetime commitment to God, to Jesus, and to join the church family at First Pres.

My life and my personality changed. I was able to navigate the issues I faced. I know the peace of Christ Jesus. I've lost any desire for many of my prior vices, I connect with my God daily, and I belong to the most wonderful and welcoming church family I could ask for; and within the limited time available I look for ways to give back – to God and to my "neighbors."

I have been richly blessed; praise be to God. AMEN.

Larry Zimbler



My church building means so much to me. It is a place to open up and worship God. Personally, it's one of my favorite places. One of my favorite spots in the whole church is the

youth room. It is amazing that the youth have a space to call our own! Every Sunday morning I go there for Bible study. My friend Maddie and I grab a blanket, spread out on the couch, and listen to Tina teach us about the Bible. I like how we can ask questions like "If God created man and women in his image, why did God create a woman out of Adam's rib?" And, we have a safe environment when we ask these questions. It is the same for youth group. We can say anything and do anything, and we won't be judged.



Another one of my favorite places in the church is the choir room. On Wednesdays, kids are given the chance to go to the Illuminate choir. Right now we are doing a musical called the Bible Club. We eventually get to perform this in front of the congregation. We also sing praise hymns and share God's message through song.

This church, my church, is super important to me.

Skye Hodgkin



Hi, my name is Jacob Kinser and I have been attending this church for almost my whole life. I have made so many memories and great friendships along the way, especially in my faith in God. This church means a lot to me, and it also means a lot to my family—my grandmother attends almost every Sunday morning. It is a great and exciting experience to just listen to the sermons and the Bible lessons that are told.

Another thing that I love is Youth Group. Youth Group helps me answer questions and take a deeper look on the Bible that I could not comprehend that well. Tina Ritchie and Jenny Gibb have helped me in my journey through Christ, and they mean a lot to me. They are my greatest mentors. I thank everyone for all the support that has been given to us and all the kindness in our church.

Jacob Kinser

We have been going to First Presbyterian Church of Fenton for around 14 years, and it is the friendliest church that we have ever been to. Over the years it has helped us to instill values in our kids that we feel will last a lifetime. Proverbs 22:6 "Teach a child how he should live and he will remember it all his life."

Over the years we have seen First Presbyterian Church of Fenton go through some really good times and, what I consider, some rough times. One thing that has remained the same, as a congregation, is our faith in God through Jesus Christ. It is that faith that has made the



difference. As I have become more aware of the inner workings of our church, which is really God's church, it has become very clear that when decisions are made it is done so through faith and discernment.

When I look at God's beautiful church that we get to use, it is not the building that makes it strong but the people who worship in it. The friendliness of the people of First Presbyterian Church of Fenton is what made me want to keep coming when we were new, and it is also their faith and trust in God that keeps me coming now.



Roy Fetzer



The Day I Almost Became an Episcopalian

Many years ago, when my husband was transferred to Indiana, we attended a little country Methodist church. The congregation was comprised of mostly older folks and there weren't many new people joining the church. When David and I showed up that first Sunday, they welcomed us warmly. The fact that I was pregnant with our daughter, Halle, probably caused more joy because that meant another new member!

We attended McCordsville United Methodist Church for four years. During that time, we were very active with dinners and all sorts of church gatherings. It was much like First Presbyterian, but on a smaller scale. When Halle was 3 I taught Sunday school,

and she was one of the three children in the entire church!

When David was transferred back to Michigan, we landed in Fenton. It became my 'mission' to find the perfect church. I had been raised as a Presbyterian, but had enjoyed our time at the Methodist church. There was a Presbyterian church south of town, but I found that too small. The Methodist church down the street was too large. What to do?

One day, I thought I would 'try out' the First Presbyterian
Church in town. I pulled in between the two big buildings on
Leroy and parked behind the church on the right. I walked
along the side and into the front door. I was late (as usual) and
church was in progress. I noticed that they had kneelers, which I found

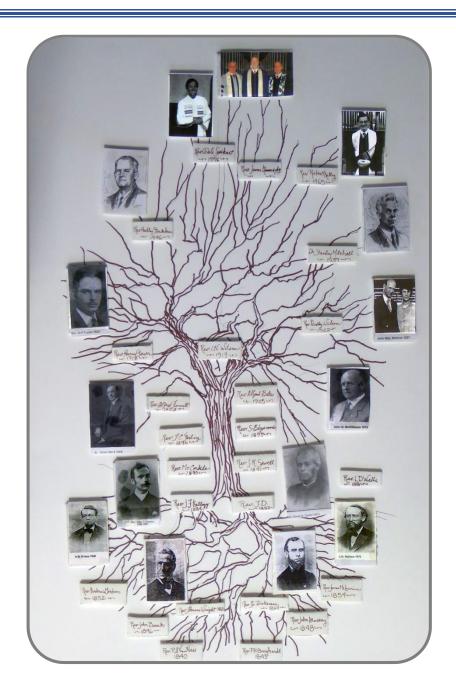
unusual

for a Presbyterian church, but I sat down anyway, next to an older lady. After a hymn and a few announcements, they repeated something that was totally unfamiliar to me. I asked the lady next to me, "Is this the Presbyterian church?" She said, "No, dear, this is the Episcopal church. The Presbyterian is next door." I quietly gathered my coat and went down the steps, crossed the street, and entered the 'correct' church. These folks were in the middle of the doxology, which I found very familiar and comforting. First Presbyterian is almost identical to First Presbyterian of Brighton, where I was raised. I was home!

Familiar and comforting—Home--Words that describe what my church means to me.

Terri Fisher







For nearly two centuries our team of pastors at First Presbyterian Church of Fenton have ministered to the needs of the community and faithfully led our congregation in prayer and sermons. We offer gratitude to the past as we look with excitement to be enlightened by our new pastors, Rev. Lindsey Carnes and Rev. Robbie Carnes. We look forward to their family becoming a part of our church family, as we serve Jesus together. With fresh anticipation, we welcome new opportunities to serve our Lord, Jesus the Christ.



Credits

We are grateful to all those in our church family who shared memories and feelings about what our church means to them.

We are also thankful to Emily Kinser for taking time from her busy schedule to create the cover image.

Our appreciation also goes to the staff and all the behind-the-scenes volunteers who committed their time to prepare the booklet.

Many of the images throughout the booklet were provided by church members. Additional images were downloaded from Creative Commons CCO at the www.Pixabay.com and www.Morguefiles.com websites.



