

# The Grapevine

A PUBLICATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF OKEMOS

**From Pastor Lisa Schrott**



*Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old.  
I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. --  
Isaiah 43:18-19*

*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being! – 2 Corinthians 5:17*

As we celebrate the New Year, these scriptures from the prophet Isaiah and the apostle Paul seem particularly appropriate. However, I want to take a moment to look backward at 2023.

Last year on Epiphany Sunday, we distributed Star Words. Star Words provide us with a way to look for God in our midst, both actively and in hindsight. We will distribute Star Words again this year on Epiphany. My Star Word for 2023 was Thanksgiving. In that spirit, my heart is full of gratitude, and I give thanks to God, for the staff and congregation of PCO.

PCO Staff. It truly is a blessing to be part of a church staff who are talented, dedicated, and a joy to work with. We share prayers and laughter in our meetings each week, a rhythm that keeps us going through busy seasons.

Generosity of PCO. Amen and amen. PCO is an incredibly generous congregation! Giving in 2023 met our needs and we expect to have a small surplus. Thank you! Our stewardship campaign focusing on our *Gratitude for the Past, Present and Future* met our goals for the 2024 budget year. Thank you! In addition, generosity abounded as we collected for special offerings and needs. Of particular note, was the roughly \$12,000 collected for the CROP Walk and the amazing number of gifts for the St. Vincent Refugee Giving Tree.

Joy of the Advent and Christmas Season. From the creation of a new Advent barrier to the pageant on Christmas Eve morning, we have celebrated intergenerational ministry – with the youngest and the not-so-youngest joining together as a family of faith. What a joy in the relationships formed and strengthened. And what joy is our Music Ministry! From the Youth Instrumental Choir (and youth playing on Christmas Eve) to the delightful ringing of the handbells to beauty of the chancel choir anthems and introits, we have been beyond blessed. And Lessons and Carols was the cherry on top of this magnificent musical Advent! **Cont. on next pg.**

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\* For the most up-to-date listing of happenings around PCO, please visit the website calendar at <https://okemospres.org/calendar/>

\* A winter weather reminder —If Okemos Public Schools are closed due to weather, PCO will be closed as well. On a Sunday morning, we will notify you through email and/or social media if worship will be online only.

**Cont. from previous pg.**

Celebrating Our Past and Looking Ahead. The Journey to 2030 visioning committee is hard at work, putting together a detailed survey you will receive later this month. This survey reflects the ideas, enthusiasm, and dreams from the visioning exercise that was conducted in November. Thank you for your input so far. Keep it coming! A planning committee for the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration has begun work. Stay tuned for more details as to how you can be part of the action. And mark May 4 and 5 on your calendar for the festivities.

It is with deep appreciation for all of you – for the gifts and love you so freely share- that I eagerly look forward to ways the Spirit will move through PCO in 2024, deepening our faith, serving the world and celebrating as a joy-filled community.

**Pastor Lisa**

### **January & Early February Worship**

While we may have just celebrated Christmas, Lent is around the corner. Ash Wednesday is February 14! In this short season before Lent, our worship services we will celebrate two special Sundays in the beginning of January: Epiphany (January 7) and Baptism of the Lord (January 14). On Epiphany we will celebrate the Lord's Supper and receive guiding Star Words for the Year. The following Sunday we will reaffirm the promises made at baptism.

January 21, 28, and February 4 will feature a three-week sermon series from the Book of Acts that will dovetail with the Adult Education sessions on "Who is My Neighbor?" (see Grapevine article for more details). As the early church was gathering and forming, they learned important lessons on widening the circle of the faithful. We will look at these texts as models of expanding our capacity to welcome and include.

### **Interactive Worship Space Coming to Our Sanctuary**

Have you noticed just how much our children and youth love to be part of worship? The joy it brings them to be included? It signals that the church belongs to them, and they belong to the church. It lets us adults know they feel welcome and valued here.

Did you notice Christmas Eve morning how enthusiastically adults followed the children and youth into the Christmas story? What a gift! We all long to be a part of what God is doing, and for us as Presbyterians, that begins with worship - the time we come to praise God, be fed by the Word, and respond in grace and gratitude as we are sent out to live as Jesus taught us.

If you have children, or have been around children and youth, you know that they hear and pick up on everything - even when we don't think they do, and even when we wish they didn't. By being present in worship, they get to hear and pick up on love, welcome, belonging, forgiveness, grace, peace. Words and ideas we hope they embody and repeat in the midst of a world that tells them - and us - you are never enough.

So it is with all of this in mind, we are creating an interactive space in our sanctuary that signals welcome to children, that embraces their energy, and moves them close to the action. Our sanctuary is wonderfully adaptable, and we'll be making space in the front on the pulpit side. A rug will mark the space and there will be quiet activities designed to help children engage in what they are seeing and hearing. And, this is a space for more than children. Many youth and adults struggle to pay attention, or stay awake, and this space offers a place of welcome for those who need to move their hands and bodies to be more comfortable and engaged.

On January 14, we will celebrate the Baptism of the Lord Sunday and reaffirm the promises we make at baptism. One of these promises is to nurture the faith of all who are baptized into our family, including the youngest. So it is fitting that on this Sunday we will inaugurate this space. Parents, adults, and youth are encouraged to accompany children in their faith formation in this space. If you have any questions about this new space, please reach out to Rebecca Mattern, Interim Director of Faith Formation or Pastor Lisa.

### **Save These Dates**

**Saturday, January 20**  
**Mission Committee Retreat**  
**9:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m.**

*(All are invited. You do not have to be a member of the committee)*

**Sunday, January 21**  
**Cabin Fever !**  
**Following Worship**  
**11:15 a.m.**

**Sunday, February 4**  
**Annual Meeting**  
**Following Worship**



## What's Happening with Youth Group

**January 7:** 11:30 a.m. -1:00 p.m. at Art Unlimited - Soup Bowl painting is back by demand! It has been a youth group favorite to make bowls and auction them off to raise money to help feed the hungry during Souper Bowl Sunday. The auction is being postponed to fully celebrate Jazz Sunday and pancake breakfast- stay tuned!

**January 14:** 5:00—7:00 p.m. Youth Group at PCO

**January 21:** Cabin Fever at PCO! No evening youth group.

**January 27-29:** Senior High Ski Trip: fun, fellowship, outdoors (and indoors), and an intro to spiritual practices for connecting with God, self, nature, and each other. Graciously hosted by the Meland, Locke, and Boldrey families.

*Youth and parents:* Watch your email for the details!

*Congregation:* These youth and adults are going to be hungry! Would you help feed them? Rebecca Mattern will be gathering the food - please contact her if you are willing and able to contribute. **Requested Items:**

- Uncrustables
- Frozen biscuits
- Doughnuts
- Fruit— apples, Oranges, bananas
- Gatorade
- Cocoa packets
- Juice
- Pretzels and Potato Chips
- Cookies
- Garlic Bread
- Cups & paper plates

## Confirmation Class

Confirmation class is coming soon!

In the sacrament of baptism, we welcome infants into the family of faith, acknowledging that God loves us before we can even respond to that love. In Confirmation, youth explore what living a life of faith in Jesus Christ means and have the opportunity to claim the faith for themselves.

Youth who have not yet been confirmed and are 8th grade and older invited.

More information is forthcoming. Please contact Rebecca Mattern, *rebecca at okemospres dot org* (standard email setup) to receive information and/or enroll a student in the class.

## Conversation & Contemplation

Wednesday, January 10 at 10:00a.m. is the first meeting of the group in the new year. We will discuss the format of the group and explore what new directions we might engage in to further our spiritual growth. This is the perfect opportunity to join the C&C group and grow with us. We welcome new seekers! The group meets each Wednesday morning from 10-11:30am on Zoom. Log in to Zoom 905-709-104, password 48864. If you would like help with the process or have questions, please contact Jane Bobay, Jill Shaberg, or Jennifer Gordon.

Each week we share our joys and concerns, are led in meditation and prayer, and reflect on scriptures from the week's lectionary. In the past, we have studied books led by members of the group, and have enriched our study with musical theater, poetry, visual art and writing. Lectio Divina has been our study method for scriptural understanding, using contemplation and group discussion to deepen our faith. Please prayerfully consider joining in in January.

## Adult Education Series—Who Is My Neighbor?

Led by Sean Clark, Jack Harkema, Zach Krawczyk, and Rebecca Mattern

**January 7: Who is my neighbor?** Explore our Biblical understandings of neighbor through various texts and look at the demographics in our area and evaluate how they meet or deviate from our perceptions.

**January 14: Being a neighbor:** Encountering our neighbor with authenticity and openness asks that we examine who we are and what we have been taught by others. We will examine bias - What is it? Who has it? How does it affect how we interact with others? How do we attend to it in our own lives, congregation, community, and world? Why does it matter?

**January 21:** Cabin Fever, no Adult Ed

**January 28: Meeting your neighbor, part 1:** What does it mean to be an ally, advocate or activist and countering Islamophobia and Anti-semitism.

**February 4:** Congregational Meeting, no Adult Ed

**February 11:** Jazz Sunday and Pancake Breakfast, no Adult Ed

**February 18: Meeting your neighbor, part 2:** Gender and Sexuality 101: defining sexual orientation, sex, gender identity, and gender expression and examining our own identities and identities of others.



## Women's Connection in January

Please mark your calendar and plan to join us for conversation and lunch, followed by Jill Schaberg's presentation of her life and faith journey. Jill is a long-time PCO member and has served in many capacities including Elder and Deacon. Her talk will be inspiring and a good opportunity to get to know her more personally.

All women are welcome and encouraged to invite friends. Questions: Shirley Rumminger 655-4123 or *srumming at yahoo dot com* (standard email setup)

## Retirees in Winter

The Retiree Group is open to all who are retired, those working part time and have an hour a month to drop in or people who would like to be retired and wonder what they will do at that time. We are meeting on Zoom for the winter months and will resume meeting in Fellowship Hall in April.

Open discussions, sharing favorite scripture, books, and movies, learning about opportunities for volunteering, inviting guests to facilitate discussion about topics of interest, and making new connections with PCO friends have kept our members engaged in the group. We are looking for new ideas for 2024 and invite you to Zoom in on the third Monday of each month from 12noon -1:00 p.m. on Zoom 711-799-804, password 48864. Our next meeting is Monday, January 15 at noon.

## Caregiver Support Group

We invite you to join our group discussions on the fourth Wednesday of each month from 5:00-6:00 p.m. on Zoom 517-329-2320, password hello. All are welcomed as we focus discussions on various aspects of caring for a loved one. Bring your questions, concerns, success and share with others. Topics vary each month, depending on needs and interest of those attending. Our next meeting is Wed., January 24.

## Coffee & Fellowship

Sign-up sheets for Jan. & Feb. have been posted on the kiosk. Please consider taking a turn making coffee and/or providing snacks. This fellowship time after worship is treasured by our members. You may bring whatever you prefer, savory and/or sweet, purchased or homemade, and it's best to keep it simple.

Questions: Shirley Rumminger 655-4123 or *srumming at yahoo dot com* (standard email setup).

## Adult Christian Education & Fellowship

**Password for Zoom meetings unless otherwise noted is 48864.** *Days and times subject to change. Please watch Friday e-Announcements for changes.*

### SUNDAYS

**Adult Education**—Weekly, **11:30 a.m.** in person & on Zoom 434 304 558 (*check the Sunday bulletin for topics. Enjoy a time of fellowship after worship when no adult ed is scheduled*)

**Writing Life's Stories** — 1<sup>st</sup> Sundays, **2:00 p.m.**, Zoom 848 6124 7191— **next meeting is January 7.**

**Birthday Cake Sunday**—3rd Sundays following worship unless otherwise noted. This month will be on **January 21.**

**Women's Connection**— 4th Sundays at **12:30 p.m.** in Room 108. This month will be on **January 28th.**

### MONDAYS

**Women's Dinner Out**— See weekly announcements for current info.

**Retirees** — 3rd Mondays at 12:00 noon on Zoom 711 799 804 in January, February and March. Next meeting is January 15th.

### TUESDAYS

**Men's Group** — Weekly, 8:00 a.m. Zoom 813 7514 8286. **Hybrid** (*In-person and on Zoom*) **this month Tuesday, January 9th.**

**PCO Crafts Ministry**— No meeting scheduled in January.

### WEDNESDAYS

**Conversation & Contemplation**—Weekly, 10:00 a.m. Zoom 905-709-104 (**Resumes meeting on Jan. 10**)

**Caregiver Support Group** - 4th Wednesdays, January 24. 5:00 p.m. on Zoom 517 329 2320; password is **hello**

### THURSDAYS

**Bible Study** — Weekly, 9:30 a.m.  
Zoom <https://msu.zoom.us/j/5147440526>

**Deadline for the February Grapevine is Tuesday, January 23rd.**

## Winter Collections

Starting on January 14 we will be doing two clothing collections.

The Love Clothing Center is in need of new pajamas for both boys and girls, sizes 4 Toddler to adult. A bin labeled for this collection will be in the PCO coatroom.

The second collection is for Cristo Rey Community Center. They have asked for used coats for children and adults. As you bring out your "winter woolies" and find old coats you no longer need, please consider bringing them to the church during the weeks of January 14 to January 28. Please help those in need this winter as you have generously done in the past. A table will be set up in the coatroom for this collection too.

Any questions call Jayne Z at (734)474-2853. Thanks so much!

## Many Thanks!

**The Alternative Christmas Market** at PCO was a lot of fun and well attended by community and church members. The vendors and charities were happy with their sales and donations which totaled over \$7000.00! This money helps both local and international organizations who serve lower income individuals. Thank You!

Bread Bites a restaurant in Okemos, provided delicious food and a time of fellowship was enjoyed by many. Thank you to all of you who came and shopped, worked and enjoyed the time together.

A special thanks to the women of our Crafters group at PCO who created beautiful Christmas ornaments and raised \$620.00 for Community in Schools, Michigan. Our Youth Group sold cookies and hot chocolate and raised \$520.75 for Advent House Ministries. Thank you!

Thank you to Pastor Lisa for her guidance on the planning of this event. Thank you Becky Gillespie and Sally Belloli for serving on the planning committee. Thank you to Matt, Carl, Bill and Anna for helping us advertise the market. A special thanks to Edward for set up and cleanup and to Gary Sturk and Keith Camann for their assistance in putting tables and chairs away. Also, thank you for the many volunteers who manned tables:

Tom and Jill Schaberg, Michele Arbour, Kent, Bill and Barbara Givens, Beth Layhe, Jean Cymbalski, Sue Knapp, Paula Franz, Jennifer Gordon and Lydia Morgan and Rebecca Mattern. It was a successful market due to all of you!

**Jayne Zuhlke**

***(Pastor Lisa wanted to add—"And an enormous thank you to Jayne. We're so grateful for her hard work and dedication to this event!")***

Thanks to Shirley Decker Prescott, one of the owners of **Mert's Specialty Meats**, Advent House guests enjoyed a turkey dinner on Christmas! The night before Thanksgiving, Shirley called a member of our Mission Committee to ask assistance in donating three turkeys that hadn't been sold. With just a few texts and calls we learned that Advent House would love to serve turkey at their Christmas dinner. It is great to see that PCO is seen as a community source to feed hungry people. And we truly appreciate Merts for this wonderful donation.

**Ellen Hoekstra**

## Cabin Fever!



If you don't have Cabin Fever yet, it will be here soon! Seriously, we have the classes just about lined up for our own PCO version of Cabin Fever which takes place immediately after the church service on **January 21<sup>st</sup>**.

In the coming weeks, look for Cabin Fever flyers on the tables in Fellowship Hall. These will list the class schedule so you can start thinking about which classes you want to attend. And thank you in advance for all the PCO members who have volunteered to teach!



***Above—Picture from note card received at the church.***

***Below— Message from recipient of PCO's generosity***

*Just a note to say thank you for the Meijer food cards for Thanksgiving. I really appreciated getting them. God's blessing. Thank you again.*

## Green Team Update—Saving Resources & Money

### PCO RECYCLED PAPER PRODUCTS

The Green Team continues to look for environmentally friendly options at PCO as they relate to paper products. We can preserve Earth's precious resources and save money at the same time. The **paper towels** used in our restrooms are a prime example of moving to recycled options at PCO. Below is a snapshot of the costs of the recycled product we currently use compared to the non-recycled product we used to use:

	<u>Sheets/pack</u>	<u>Packs/carton</u>	<u>Total Sheets</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Cost per Sheet</u>
Pacific Blue 2-ply, white	120	12	1440	\$61.99	<b>4.3 cents</b>
Pacific Blue 2-ply, white-recycled	125	16	2000	\$44.29	<b>2.3 cents</b>

If you would like to compare more products and rankings, visit the church website at <https://www.okemospres.org/nrdc-paper-towels>



### STYROFOAM CAN BE RECYCLED!

Below, we've listed a number of places where you can recycle Styrofoam:

- Meridian Township recycling center, 5976 E. Lake Dr., Haslett
- E. Lansing Recycling Center, 1800 East State Rd. E., Lansing (EL Public Works dept)
- Dart container Foam recycling drop off, 432 Hogsback Rd., Mason

If all else fails, you can bring it to the church and deposit it in the Styrofoam recycling bin by the kitchen. If you have a very large amount, please call or text Dorinda VanKempen at 517-388-1625. Thank you for caring about creation!

## Public Policy Report By Ellen Hoekstra

Governor Whitmer has set April 16 for special elections in the House seats vacated because these two legislators were elected as mayors of Warren and Westland. Setting this date was complicated by the presidential primary on Feb. 27 and the new voting rules requiring nine days of early balloting. New complications have now arisen due to a new federal court decision ordering 13 Detroit-area legislative districts to be re-drawn due to the court's finding that the current districts deny Black voters appropriate representation.

Following a fast and furious fall, the Legislature adjourned on November 14 as a result of the vacancies. Please note that 67 new laws, including the "red flag" and safe storage laws, won't take effect until February 13, 60 days after passage, not having had the two-thirds vote needed for immediate effect.

Items of interest:

- Governor Whitmer signed bills creating the crime of institutional desecration against religious communities and institutions. This legislation was introduced in part because of the increase in hate crimes targeting these communities and institutions.
- Poverty rose in 49 of Michigan's 83 counties to 13.3% impoverished statewide. In 2022 16.3% of Ingham County households were impoverished and 18.0% in households with children, both higher than 2021.
- Two bills designed to protect domestic violence victims against gun violence were also enacted. Relatedly, PCO's Firearm Safety Task was dismayed to learn that firearms donated in gun giveback events were given to the State Police, who then sold them to Gunbusters, which re-sells firearms.
- A clean energy package also recently enacted aims to establish a 100% clean energy standard and reduce utility costs. Relatedly the current 800 state owned vehicles will be replaced by zero emission vehicles by 2040.
- Lieutenant Governor Garlin Gilchrist has signed bipartisan juvenile justice legislation. It includes changes to improve mental health services access and lowers costs to families of juvenile defendants by removing court fees.
- Due to a federal lawsuit settlement, Michigan residents with intellectual or developmental disabilities in the Community Living Support program will likely receive a \$31/hour increase in state funding. Funds can be used to pay caregivers and for transportation and expenses for outings. The case awaits only the approval of US District Court Judge Paul Borman.
- The U of M Institute for Healthcare Policy indicated that one-third of Michigan seniors were victims of scams in the last two years.

## BOOK NOOK

*By Ron Dorr*

### *Light in the Darkness*

According to the New English Bible (1962), the fourth verse of the book of John ends this way: “The light shines on in the dark, and the darkness has never quenched it.”

On Sunday, December 17, 2023, Mary Pipher introduced her essay in the New York Times as follows: “Whatever is happening in the world, whatever is happening in our personal lives, we can find light.”

Pipher, an author and therapist from Nebraska known for books such as Recovering Ophelia, The Shelter of Each Other, and Seeking Peace, elaborated ten sources of light. They seemed to be pairs. Look for light in sunrises, sunsets, and the rest of the natural world; pay particular attention to birds and their songs. Now “in the last decades” of her life, she urged readers to focus on family and friends; children, grandchildren, and even an Afghan girl, 9, brightened her days. So did art and spiritual rituals. The light of memory recaptured the gifts of Pipher’s mother and grandmother; others who had died still shine in her heart. Those living today, working for a more peaceful, safer, and more loving world, paired with our selves. “No matter how dark the days, we can find light in our own hearts, and we can be one another’s light.”

I want to add reading as another light in the darkness. Here I mean reading as part of the spiritual discipline of study, as Richard Foster conceives such endeavor in his book, Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth. For Foster, study is a special kind of experience, an ordering of the mind including repetition, concentration, comprehension, and reflection. At its best, being subject to the subject leads to understanding, illumination, truth, and delight. Freedom, reformation, even transformation follow.

Reading is an integral part of such study. I know of nothing more practical and liberating that I have done for and with students than teaching them to read well. Concerning books, Foster offers excellent advice: “The first reading involves understanding the book: What is the author saying? The second reading involves interpreting the book: What does the author mean? The third reading involves evaluating the book”: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the book? “Most of us tend to do the third reading right away”—did you like the book or not—“and often never do the first and second reading at all.” We judge a book “before we understand what it says.”

“To read successfully,” Foster adds, “we need the extrinsic aids of experience, other books, and live discussion.” He especially recommends reading the Bible as well as classical works in small groups. He also encourages reading studiously what he calls “nonverbal books.” They include nature (“if we love the creation, we will learn from it”), human relationships, “institutions and cultures and the forces that shape them.” And learn to ask questions—with humility, patience, and pertinence.

In the coming year, blending both Pipher’s and Foster’s recommendations, I will carefully read Margaret Renkl’s new book, The Comfort of Crows: A Backyard Year. Starting with winter and going through all four seasons, this week-by-week reflection on “the abundance of wonder in our own backyard,” contains 52 essays and 26 “Praise Songs” by Renkl, several quotations by other writers, and beautiful art work by her brother, Billy Renkl.

Because Foster recommends several readings, I will re-read Into the Mess and Other Jesus Stories, by Debi Thomas. Fifty-two essays deal with encounters, wonders, teachings, and mysteries concerning Jesus. How does Thomas define “mess,” handle “holy bewilderment,” and resolve the dilemmas, contradictions, paradoxes, and ambiguities in her own life?

I will finish Jonathan Eig’s mammoth new biography, King: A Life. In general, I want to understand more clearly the character and interpersonal relationships of Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as “institutions and cultures and the forces that shape[d] them.” In particular, I want to learn how, in speaking, King “employed many of same skills as the finest professional singers,” benefited greatly from the strength and skills of Coretta Scott King, and expanded his vision of nonviolence and the power of love so radically that it cost him his life.

In such varied works, I hope to find light in the darkness.



**Author & Therapist  
Mary Pipher**



**Author & Columnist  
Margaret Renkle**



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*The Grapevine* is a monthly newsletter of  
*The Presbyterian Church of Okemos*

**Sunday Worship 10:00 A.M.**

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