

# This Week @ First

## First Sunday Food Collection

Thank you for your continued support of First Sunday Food Collection! We will be collecting donations this Sunday, February 4, 2024. Your food donations are brought alternately to Second Harvest and to Elder Care Services (ECS). A list of the most needed items includes cereal; peanut butter; canned fruits, vegetables, and meats; and hearty soup or stew. Please leave items in the narthex or church office.

## Presbyterian Women

Our PW Winter Gathering will take place on Sunday, February 11, immediately following worship, in the Westminster Room. Please join us for a delicious salad luncheon followed by a time of fellowship. In addition, we will have a brief but important presentation by our guest, Leah Wiley, from the Capital Area Justice Ministry. Mark your calendars, bring your salads, come renew old friendships, and make new ones. We look forward to seeing you on the 11th.

## Notice of Congregational Meeting and Election of Nominating Committee

Near the end of worship this Sunday, February 4, we will hold a congregational meeting for the purpose of electing a Nominating Committee.

This committee will be charged with nominating the Elder Class of 2026, as well as nominating members to fill vacancies on the Board of Trustees and Endowment Management Committee. The committee will also be charged with nominating a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) which, in turn, will begin the process of calling a new pastor.

The slate proposed for the 2024 Nominating Committee consists of four elders who have just concluded their active service on the Session and were willing to serve in this role when asked. As required by our polity, it also includes one active elder. The pastor serves as an ex officio member of the nominating committee, without vote. Nominations can be made from the floor by any active member of the congregation, and those attending online will have an opportunity to vote with the congregation. The nominees are:

Emily Bruno  
Carol Grondzik, Chair  
Theresa Heiker  
John Hightower, Active Elder  
Carol Weissert

## Worship & Music

To watch our Sunday worship at 11 AM, connect with us on [YouTube](#) (find the bulletin [here](#))! Looking ahead, there will be an Ash Wednesday service on Wednesday, February 14 at 6 PM.

## Spiritual Formation

**Church School:** the combined adult class will meet in the Westminster Room, with a [Zoom](#) option. Jane Atkinson will lead a workshop on community organizing using the [Midwest Academy](#) Strategy. The children's class will meet in Room 306. Classes begin at 9:30 AM.

## Worship Ministry Team

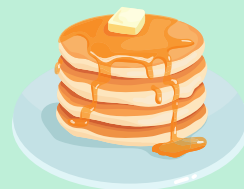
Please email Carolyn Bradley to set up or serve communion ([carolynbradley@gmail.com](mailto:carolynbradley@gmail.com)), or Martha Kutter ([mkutter@maclay.org](mailto:mkutter@maclay.org)) to volunteer for ushering.

## Compassion & Social Justice

Please consider signing up to help serve at Grace Mission on February 11 from 4 to 6 PM. You can sign up for that or future dates [here](#).

## *Laissez les bon temps rouler!*

Join us on Shrove Tuesday, February 13, for a pancake supper and family fellowship in the Westminster Room beginning at 5:30 PM!



To submit an announcement for an upcoming issue of *This Week @ First*, please use [this updated link](#).

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## Pastor's Note

“The soul is healed by being with children.” — Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Jesus knew the truth in this statement when he declared his welcome, “let the little children come unto me.” And as we come to this Sunday, the last Sunday in Epiphany, I suspect the Magi knew a similar truth. They might say, “The soul is healed by being with the Christ child.” This is true.

Last week in Epiphany-tide, as we prepared for the baptism of Ollie and Theia Groll, there was joy, like knowing the truth of healing under God’s wings. While spending time with the Groll family in advance of the children coming through the waters of the font, there was much new to be learned. There were the practicalities of water and of Word, in worship and through the power of the Spirit. There also was the mystery of how the microphone amplified your voice, and the curiosity about the pulpit being so elevated. In my study, the children traced their hands, and wrote their names, and were asked to think about God’s hand resting upon them through their own baptism — saying to each, “You are my beloved.” Or simply, “Jesus loves you.”

Healing is there, in those baptismal waters. We affirm it each Sunday as water is poured into the font and we respond to the call, “Hear the Good News of the Gospel” with “In Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven.” We know Christ’s healing and we know we are God’s beloved when we remember our baptisms, and are thankful. This Sunday, with the Worship and Music Ministry Team’s assistance, we will hand out Epiphany stars as Epiphany 2024 comes to an end. Maybe this star will help you to remember your baptism and be thankful.



Maybe you took a card last year, and reflected upon your life and faith through that word? I pulled the star with the word, wonder. Of all the words I could have pulled, I was pretty satisfied with “wonder.”

Restoration and healing belong to God. When Jim and I were married in 1989, the congregation sang the hymn, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling.” Stanza 4 reads:

*Finish, then, Thy new creation;  
Pure and spotless let us be;  
Let us see Thy great salvation  
Perfectly restored in Thee;  
Changed from glory into glory  
Till with Thee we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,  
Lost in wonder, love and praise.*

“Lost in wonder, love, and praise.” Children help me to keep that sense alive. Like the children who came down from the balcony to draw near to their friends coming through the waters of baptism, to walk with them. The wonder in that moment was to see the community of faith being built, from the youngest to the eldest, making their way together. We are pilgrims on this journey where we are called to love one another with Christ’s belovedness. Might it be so.

God’s peace, God’s presence.  
Anne

The Tallahassee Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, in partnership with the Tallahassee Bach Parley, will present organist Timothy Olsen (University of North Carolina School of the Arts) in recital at **3 PM on Sunday, February 4**. Dr. Olsen will perform works by Dieterich Buxtehude, Jan Sweelinck, Guy Bovet, Paul Hindemith, Ethel Smyth, Johannes Brahms, and J. S. Bach.

A post-concert reception will be held in the Westminster Room. This concert is free and open to the public; all are welcome.

# Living Into Harm Reduction

by Emily Bruno

I started following Kevin Nye, the speaker who kicked off our January Inquirers' series on homelessness, on the platform-formerly-known-as-Twitter a little over a year ago. A tweet of his had just gone viral. In it, he told the story of administering Narcan to someone while on his way to the movies. He concluded the story, "People who use drugs deserve love, life, flourishing, friendship, medical care, and grace as much as any one of us. If you agree, SPEAK UP!" Soon thereafter, he had stickers made that read: "Jesus would carry Narcan." (You can [buy one](#) from him, if you're interested.)

I was so moved by Kevin's story that I started following him on social media, then bought and read his book, and then invited him to speak to our class last month. And yet, it was only last week that I finally did start carrying Narcan. It was one of those things I sort of meant to maybe try to do one day... but I never followed up on those intentions. And I suppose in that year+, I didn't come across anyone overdosing. Or at least... not that I noticed.

As we did our Inquirers' class on harm reduction and drug use last week, it occurred to me that this simple act of carrying miraculous, life-saving naloxone had not felt especially urgent to me because I'd not felt it likely that I would ever need it. "Not in my circles," was the unspoken sentiment underlying my inaction on the matter.

The first thing to unpack there is, of course, the fact that the opioid epidemic touches all circles. I started to reflect on whether I notice when those around me show signs of the deep pain at the root of opioid addiction. When I think I don't regularly interact with anyone at risk, is it actually that I haven't cared to notice? Have I let relationships fall by the wayside when they got to be uncomfortable?

It's also true that the people I surround myself with tend to be similarly privileged. We have access to housing, networks of support, and the ability to afford healthcare, rehab, and treatment if needed. These things all mitigate the risk of overdose death. I celebrate with my loved ones who are in recovery thanks to these things.

So this past Sunday, I suddenly found myself feeling rather indicted by this realization of my own subconscious risk assessment: low. My inner actuary looked at who I am in relationship with and said, "overdose is a problem for other people, not you and yours."

My guess is Jesus would carry Narcan, as Kevin's sticker suggests, because he would be in relationship — authentic, loving relationship — with people at a high risk of experiencing an opioid poisoning event. It might be among the miracles Jesus performs, bringing a modern-day Lazarus back to life before our very eyes with a simple nasal spray you can carry on your person. Jesus would not avert his eyes from the folks he encounters out and about, even if they may be using drugs — especially *because* they may be using drugs. He would notice the people sleeping outside on the walk into church or into the grocery store or at the intersection. He might ask about their struggles and know the specifics of their unique pain. He would know them by name and know who is particularly vulnerable.

I confess that I cannot often say the same of myself.

It's so hard to cross over the boundaries that capitalism and society construct around us. Those forces try mightily to constrain us to lines that divide. But Jesus calls us to be the beloved community, the one that draws us together and affirms we each belong. In this little act of carrying naloxone in my bag I see potential for the kind of radical transformation needed to more faithfully follow Jesus. It says, "I may not know you now, but I love you. I want you to live. And I will equip myself with the miracle that can make it so." It is a seed of love that might grow a much greater, barrier-crushing love. It is a covenant to try to notice more. Listen more. Relate more. Love more.

I hope everyone at First Presbyterian will carry Narcan and enter into this covenant. I wonder how our membership might grow when we collectively and fully embrace harm reduction principles to meet and welcome people where they are. In so doing, we might affirm that when we sing, "God Welcomes All," we mean that people who use drugs are welcome in our midst, with all the attendant circumstances they bring with them. We affirm that we are a people ready and able to save their lives as we draw into community together.

For more information about harm reduction, check out [this](#) faith-based resource.

