



**WORSHIP SERVICE ON
SUNDAY, MARCH 7, 2021**

Our Scripture readings for next Sunday, March 7, 2021, the Third Sunday in Lent, are: Psalm 19; and 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. The sermon title is "Foolishness," and the Bulletin is available here: https://fpcovictoria.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/3-7-2021-Bulletin-CommunionPDF.pub_.pdf

On Sunday, our music ministry will feature Robert Wyatt singing "Think of Me" as well as C.F. Schneider playing "Break Thou the Bread of Life." Please join us in person or via the Internet to enjoy the beautiful music with which we offer praise and

glory to our God.

Also, as is our custom, we will celebrate the Lord's Supper on this first Sunday in March. If you will be celebrating with us in the Sanctuary, please remember to observe the protocols we have in place as a result of the pandemic: maintain social distancing; keep your mask on until you are served the elements; receive (do not take) the bread from the Elders; take your own cup and dispose of it as you return to your seat.

If you will not be celebrating with us in person, please be prepared to take communion from wherever you may be watching us on our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/fpcovictoria/>) or our website (<https://www.fpcovictoria.org/>). As always, bread of any sort is suitable, including crackers, tortillas, etc.; any sort of fruit juice would be appropriate, as would wine or even water.



2021 SESSION RETREAT

As previously announced, your Session gathered last Saturday, February 27, 2021, at the Broadax Ranch (near Tivoli) for prayer, fellowship, and planning. Yes, we had a good time as we ate well and breathed clean, fresh country air, but we also worked hard to plan, vision, and even dream about the future of FPC, Victoria, now in its 180th year of existence in this community.

As we met, we could feel the presence of the prayer support of this congregation, and we were mindful that one of the most important duties of a Ruling

Elder (whether serving or not) is, in turn, to pray for and seek to serve the people of this church with energy, intelligence, and love. *Presbyterian Book of Order* W-4.0404h.

After reminding ourselves of our many joyful responsibilities to this church and to our triune God, we allowed ourselves to think and plan large about where the Session could best devote its attention and energy in the coming year. In group discussions, and in informal conversations with one another during our breaks, several broad themes emerged, which I want to share with you:

- First and foremost, we realized quickly that we do not want to become a dormant church. It would be easy to find a hundred excuses for us to “settle in” and allow our church simply to run on automatic pilot until our congregation and budget shrank to the point where we were no longer viable as an active church. This has already happened in smaller communities (the now-closed Presbyterian churches in Alice and Taft come to mind). The impact of COVID, the loss of financial resources, and the aging of its congregation are understandable reasons for a church to close, and may God bless those churches that have ceased their operations (but not their faith) with dignity and good stewardship.
- The Session does not believe, however, that such a fate necessarily lies in store for our church. We will dedicate ourselves to a style of leadership designed to invigorate, renew, and sustain our church into as active a role in this community as our energy and resources allow. This is not a blind dedication based on wishes and dreams, ungrounded in the reality of our current circumstances. It is a dedication based on faith and trust in the Holy Spirit, and a respect for what is realistic rather than pie-in-the-sky. We believe the Holy Spirit will lead us to try sensible new ideas, to quickly forgive and forget the mistakes we may make, and to be encouraged even in dark times. We believe that God still has plans for our church and its members. Having weathered Hurricane Harvey and the COVID pandemic, we believe that God is leading us in new and exciting directions.
- We also decided that we shall not wait until the COVID pandemic is clearly over in order to begin planning for the resumption of, and an increase in!, our church’s activities. “Post-COVID planning” for our church begins *now*! In the

coming days, we shall plan for an increase in our fellowship activities, a restoration (and enlargement!) of our music ministry (including the choir), and a return to the meetings of PW, our Adult Sunday School Class, and our youth activities (including a resumption of our Vacation Bible School), when and as the way be clear. We are even considering some plans for additional organized Bible Study (led by your pastor) as well as, equally important, plans for community outreach. Of course, the timing for all this remains uncertain because the status of the pandemic remains uncertain. We shall not be caught unprepared, however, when God finally spares us from this awful scourge. If you have any ideas about how to get ready for a post-COVID church, please share them with an Elder on the Session. And as always, please continue to pray for your Session.

- Finally, we sensed that as God has led us to do that which is necessary to broadcast “virtual” worship services via the Internet, he is also calling us to treat that ministry as part of our church. There may be another entire “congregation” watching us on Facebook and on our website that is likely never to visit us in person. It would be wrong, we realized, to assume that the only ones watching us on social media are those of our members who cannot come to the Sanctuary because they are COVID-careful or otherwise homebound. There may be worshipers tuning in because they have found something that speaks to them during our services. The Session, therefore, is committed to doing more research on who our Internet audience is and how we might better serve them as an extension of our church, even if many viewers are not formally on our membership role. Once more, we welcome suggestions as well as prayer as we pursue these initiatives.



Therefore, this is how we plan to proceed. We are ready to use the church's email address and your pastor's cell phone number to sign up for any of our members who still need an appointment. So, we invite members and their loved ones (as well as friends of members and their loved ones) to contact us (just as before) here at the Church Office. We will take the needed information, and we will make sure that the person who wants a vaccination gets an appointment. When the Health Department contacts the church (whether by email or by phone), we will confirm the appointment and contact whoever we need to with the relevant information about that appointment.

We have already registered one member of our that congregation in that manner, and when we did, we were informed that while all of the appointments for Thursday, March 4th, have been filled, our member will likely be assigned an appointment for the following Thursday, March 11th. So, slowly but surely, we are taking care of those folks who need help. As of today, we have already been successful in obtaining approximately 8 appointments, and we want to continue our string of successes!

As a reminder, this is the information we need: name; address (including county; it does not have to be Victoria); date of birth; telephone number; and, if you have one, email address. These are the eligibility requirements: the vaccine recipient must currently be within eligibility categories "1a" (healthcare workers) or "1b" (over age 65 or otherwise 16 years of age and older with at least one chronic medical condition that puts them at increased risk for severe illness from the virus that causes COVID-19; for further information: <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/immunize/vaccine/EVAP-Phase1B.pdf>).

Finally, allow me to again say (as I did last week) that if you have any reservations or anxieties about taking this vaccine (aside from what your doctor may have informed you), I would like you to feel free to discuss those concerns with me. These vaccines are nothing short of God's miraculous gifts to his suffering people. It would be a sin to let gossip, Internet conspiracists, or other misinformation dissuade any of God's children from accepting such a potentially lifesaving gift.

Peace, grace, and mercy,

Pastor Jim

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