

**The Easter Life of the First Presbyterian Church:  
Calling, Vision, Being, Need, and Becoming  
Autumn 2014**

**Calling**

Like all Christians in every time and place, we have been called by our Lord to be his Easter people and a light to the world. We have been called in our own time and place to bear witness to God's redeeming love for his creation through our worship, fellowship, and service. We have been called to be persistent bringers of compassion, hope, and new life to all those we meet, whether they sit next to us during worship, or live beside us here in downtown Lansing, or look to us from distant faith communities in Lebanon, Cameroon, Nicaragua, Kenya, and wherever else the missionary outreach of our church touches lives. In our faithful response to Christ's calling, we reaffirm—again and again, day after day, and year after year—that all people, no matter their circumstances, may find rescue in God's love and welcome in our Christian fellowship.

**Vision**

We have been called to be a light to the world, and our congregation has always been eager to answer that call. At times our response has been truly courageous. Since the founding of First Presbyterian Church on 17 December 1847, we have been a visionary presence in Lansing. Our congregation was not only the first Presbyterian church to be established in Lansing, but it was also the first formally constituted church of any denomination to be established here. From its founding, First Presbyterian stood at the physical and spiritual center of Lansing, serving the community as Christ instructed. During the 1850s, for example, our congregation took a principled stance on the most important social and political issue of the day by opposing slavery. In 1858, Rev. George Duffield, who later became our pastor (1876-1879), wrote the militant hymn *Stand up, Stand up for Jesus*, inspired by the dying words of a much-persecuted abolitionist pastor whose last words were, "Tell them to stand up for Jesus." Rev. Duffield explained that, "in those pro-slavery days . . . it was thought that these words had a peculiar significance in his mind; as if he had said, 'Stand up for Jesus in the person of the downtrodden

slave.” (Rev. Duffield’s hymn is now pasted into many of our copies of the *Presbyterian Hymnal*.) Our church was located only one block from the Civil War muster ground, now the site of the State Capitol. There the women of First Presbyterian cared for soldiers leaving for battle. They cooked, washed clothes, and wrote letters home for those who could not write. From the pulpit, our pastor, Rev. Chester S. Armstrong (1856-1864), urged local farmers to cultivate more fields to help feed the Union Army. Many men from First Presbyterian left their homes to join the Union Army. Rev. Armstrong’s pastorate continued until September 1864, when he, too, left Lansing to accept a commission as the chaplain of the Michigan 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry.

The leaders of First Presbyterian continued to help shape the city, state, and nation after the Civil War. Our church was home to the Central Michigan Presbytery during the 1860s. What is more, through the inspired leadership of Henry N. Lawrence, one of the original elders of our church, our congregation was the principal sponsor and supporter of the first African-American Sabbath School in Lansing, established in 1866. Later, with the spiritual and material support of First Presbyterian and the interfaith American Home Missionary Society, that Sabbath School grew to become the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which laid the cornerstone of its own church on 12 October 1879.

Our congregation outgrew its Genesee Street building by 1887 and built a new church in 1889 on the corner of Allegan and Capitol streets. There, our congregation continued to be spiritual and civic leaders. Session leaders worked in the community and in the State legislature to promote community sanitation at a time when cholera, typhoid, and malaria too frequently claimed the lives of Michigan residents. During the early days of Lansing’s industrialization, First Presbyterian members cared for those whose wages were insufficient to feed their families and for those who could not work. The church invested in the well being of youth by supporting the YMCA with sports and social programs. Through the home missionary work of First Presbyterian, some members of our congregation went on to become the founding members of North Presbyterian Church, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Plymouth Congregational Church, and Mount Hope Presbyterian Church. In 1943, after the United States joined in fighting the Second World War, our pastor, Dr. Peter H. Monsma, like Rev. Armstrong nearly 80 years before

him, asked that his pastoral relations with us be dissolved so that he could accept a commission as a military chaplain.

And now, our own *Vision 2015* has moved us to renew ourselves once again to become an increasingly effective instrument of Christ's reconciling love. We have rededicated ourselves to becoming a more significant presence in our inner-city neighborhood, to providing greater human support services, to expanding our sense of "self" into a more widely diverse community of faith, and to providing more and ever-better programs of Christian education and aesthetic enrichment. We have in fact formally declared our church to be part of the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s "more light" mission that seeks to welcome all marginalized peoples, especially those in the LGBT community, into our fellowship and through us into mainstream American society. First Presbyterian Church has always been a leader in promoting the inclusion of diverse peoples in its congregation and in the civic life of Lansing. Precedents for our leadership go back a long way. In 1879, for example, the YMCA of Lansing organized a Sunday school for "the benefit of all who wished to study the Bible in concert, irrespective of age, sex, or *previous condition of servitude* [italics added]." Not surprisingly, the leadership of the YMCA chose Elder Lawrence as the first Superintendent of this multi-racial, interdenominational, and inter-generational institute of Christian education. He had long before established his own credentials as a social reformer, and in accepting the position as Superintendent he continued to give witness to our church's enduring commitment to social justice and human reconciliation.

From its very beginning, then, our congregation has accepted its responsibility to be an enlightening presence in Lansing. One symbol of First Presbyterian's luminous heritage is its splendid "Alpha" stained glass artwork, one of only two physical artifacts that survive from our 1889 church building.<sup>1</sup> In our stained glass image, Alpha (the first letter of the Greek alphabet) appears as a bright golden capital "A." Our Alpha glass now hangs on the south side of the gathering space between our sanctuary and the Molly Grove Chapel and overlooks our inner courtyard. There it catches the sun all the year 'round and reminds us that we serve a living God who is the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end," the creator and purpose of our lives, and the God who is constantly making "all things new" (cf. Revelation 1:8; 21:5).

Like the individually cut pieces that make up the Alpha glass, each of us has a unique character. Each of us has an individual mixture of life experiences, knowledge, interests, and strengths. No one else can be who each of us is. And each of us, when we let our better selves shine, is a reminder to all who meet us that we have truly been created in God’s image. Individually, we can have our splendid moments, yes, but only when the talents and brightness of our individual selves join with those of others in our congregation can we create greatness. What holds us together, like the interweaving band that holds all of the separate pieces in the Alpha glass together, is the Spirit that we know to be Holy, in which we “live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). We have been called at First Presbyterian to be the continuous fulfillment of the Alpha glass’s promise—that we shall always be “beginning,” that we shall always be waking to new challenges and new opportunities with the same conviction, courage, and joy that moved our forebears, and that we shall always be what we have always been—Christ’s radiant Easter people.



### **Being**

For over 166 years, First Presbyterians have striven to keep faith with the risen Christ, with our founders and forebears, and with each other. As members of a living “priesthood of all believers,” we have continued to seek out ever more meaningful ways

to serve each other in the worship of God and in the joyful proclamation of the Gospel. We have endeavored to honor our Reformed heritage by continuing to minister to our community and the world. Over the last five years our efforts in all of these matters have been shaped—even inspired—by *Vision 2015*.

Adopted by the Session in 2009, *Vision 2015* proposed a bold strategy to revitalize our church. The statement speaks to four broadly envisaged facets of our church life: *Hospitality and Inclusiveness*; *Mission*; *Congregation Connection Groups*; and *Education*. In all of its parts, *Vision 2015* calls for us to seek new ways for our members and friends to grow in faith together. In its call for our congregation to reflect the world we live in more completely, *Vision 2015* urges us to expand our sense of “self” into a widely diverse community of faith. More than this, *Vision 2015* expresses our determination to find greater ways to reach out in love to our local community and to the world. We have charged ourselves to become a more significant presence in our inner-city neighborhood, to provide greater human support services, and to provide ever-better programs of Christian education and aesthetic enrichment for all people.

### *Hospitality and Inclusiveness*

*Vision 2015* pledges our church to be a welcoming and sustaining community of faith for all people—for those who are already members, for those who seek to learn more about the Christian life through us, and for those friends of the church who have found in us a safe refuge and nurturing environment, regardless of their own faith backgrounds and personal circumstances. We have it on the authority of Christ, himself, that “all who labor and are heavy laden” may find welcome and rest in him (Matthew 11:28). And so, too, may all find welcome and rest in us. More than this, we recognize that “God’s reconciling work in Jesus Christ and the mission of reconciliation to which he has called his church are the heart of the gospel in any age” (*The Confession of 1967*).

We have opened our doors and our hearts to all who seek refuge, recovery, and reconciliation with each other, with us, and with God. We have also opened our facilities to our neighbors, friends, and many civic groups that need our building’s resources and our support.<sup>ii</sup> In this way, too, we strive to be a light to the world, so that all may see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven (cf. Matthew 5:16).

Among the variety of community organizations and events that First Presbyterian hosts is a large number of musical and theater arts groups that rehearse and perform in our church. They come to First Presbyterian for three reasons, chiefly. Our Sanctuary and the Molly Grove Chapel are superb performance venues. We have a sophisticated musical staff made up of gifted singers and players whose connections to the performing arts in the greater Lansing area are extensive. And we have a band of First Presbyterian fans and friends of the arts who enthusiastically embrace the psalmist's exhortation to praise God in his sanctuary with word and song, trumpet and sound, lute and harp, timbrel and dance, strings and pipe, and with sounding cymbals—even loud clashing cymbals (cf. Psalm 150, etc.).<sup>iii</sup>

### *Mission*

*Vision 2015* reminds us that Jesus' ministry was one of healing and reconciliation and calls us likewise to "serve the poor and marginalized in our nation, world, and especially our community." Jesus, himself, promises that those "who are blessed by my Father [will] inherit the kingdom prepared for [them] from the foundation of the world." We may glimpse what life in the Father's kingdom might be, for Jesus describes the ministry of the blessed in his "Parable of Last Judgment" (see Matthew 25:31-46). His parable presses upon us a moral obligation to minister to the most vulnerable among us with generosity and compassion. Jesus' parable comprises six "corporal acts of mercy": providing food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, welcome to the stranger, clothes for the naked, care for the sick, and solace for the prisoner. Early in the history of the church, perhaps as early as the third century, one more corporal act of mercy was added to Jesus' list, which was to provide a dignified burial for the dead poor (see Tobit 1:16–21, in the *Apocrypha*).<sup>iv</sup> We believe, as Jesus assured us, that whenever we extend these mercies to the least among us we extend them to him (see Matthew 25:40).

We reach out from the depths of our own suffering to relieve the suffering of others, for we Christians know, perhaps better than any other people, "that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Like that of our Lord and Savior, our lives, too, have known disappointment and grief, hardship and humiliation, physical pain and emotional trauma.

But we know, too, “that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint” (Romans 5:3-5a). We know that sharing our suffering with a supportive community of faith has made us a stronger people, more compassionate and insightful, more willing to console than condemn, better able to heal than to punish, and ever more willing to bear “a present witness to God’s grace in Jesus Christ” (*The Confession of 1967*). We believe that lives of endurance, character, faith, hope, love, and resurrection are real possibilities for all those who now suffer and are in need. We believe these things because we have repeatedly seen them to be true in our own lives and in the lives of fellow Christians.

We have made missionary commitments and taken action in a multitude of ways to fulfill our own vision statement, but more importantly to keep faith with Christ and the church universal. We have found a missionary and ministerial calling within the scope of our own congregation.<sup>v</sup> We have also found missionary work in our neighborhood and across the city.<sup>vi</sup> And thanks to the diversity of our congregation, we play an active role in missionary work around the world. We have members who have come to us from Lebanon and Cameroon, and we have developed close ties to church organizations in Nicaragua and elsewhere in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and around the United States.<sup>vii</sup>

### *Congregation Connection Groups*

In *Vision 2015* we committed our hearts to embracing one another more fully by creating a more caring and celebratory community of faith. We committed ourselves to strengthening already existing fellowship groups and to establishing new groups that would extend our contacts and caring to every member and friend of our congregation. Our staff has grown to reflect this commitment. In addition to the Pastor/Head of Staff position, our congregation also supports formal and informal ministerial positions in Christian Education, Youth and Family Ministry, and Pastoral Care. Over the past few years we have endeavored to find ways for our congregation to feel more closely connected to each other, to build a stronger sense of church identity, and to serve one another in more places and ways than one ordained pastor could achieve alone.

Under the broad umbrella of member care, involvement, and fellowship, our congregation has sought ways to increase our care for another and to strengthen our sense

of community.<sup>viii</sup> *Vision 2015* has also moved us to find more ways to involve more people in the worship and service of the church. Sunday worship now routinely includes the assistance of the Director of Youth and Family Ministry or the Director of Christian Education, along with a member of the church who serves as Worship Leader. Other members of the church assist the Deacons as greeters before the service, as ushers during the service, and as coffee servers during the fellowship hour after service.

Whether participating in worship or in service, members and friends of First Presbyterian have turned their shared labors into inviting opportunities for fellowship and joy. Since our adoption of *Vision 2015* we have established *LINK* (Linking Neighbors in Koinonia [i.e., fellowship/communion]) groups made up of members and friends who live near each other. *LINK* groups may find themselves discussing church matters from time to time, but mostly they gather to get to know their each other better and to enjoy each other's company. The goal is to create a sense of family in the congregation by helping us see that we are members of ever-widening circles of love and care. One among many examples has been the success of our pager-prayer ministry that has bolstered the spirits of dozens of people who have been undergoing extended periods of convalescence or suffering severe medical conditions.<sup>ix</sup>

### *Education*

*Vision 2015* calls for us to strive with renewed commitment to fulfill the twofold purposes of discipleship: 1) to know Jesus Christ better and 2) to grow in our understanding of how best we may serve one another and the world in his name. We accept seriously our own responsibilities, repeated as our congregational promise at every baptism, that we tell new disciples, both young and old, the good news of the Gospel, help them know all that Christ commands, and by our fellowship, strengthen their family ties with the household of God (cf. *The Worshipbook*, pp. 44-45). In both our youth and adult education programs we have sought more effective ways to bring the evergreen truth of Christ's redemptive love to all generations.

Our youth education programs continue to bring the young people of our congregation to greater understanding of our faith and the nature of our worship. For the teachers of our youngest children, the greatest challenge is to provide age-appropriate

instruction that increases real knowledge in a nurturing environment that continually reaffirms God's love. Guiding young minds through the transition stages from thinking exclusively in literal, concrete terms to entertaining abstract concepts such as holy, spirit, truth, goodness, love, faith, sacrifice, redemption, salvation, communion, Trinity, and church is the most challenging of all educational endeavors. It is the most important task in the world, and can be the most rewarding. That our Sunday school teachers accept this challenge gladly is to their great credit and our children's great benefit. The culmination of all of this good work is the participation of our eighth graders in Confirmation Class, which prepares them for the responsibilities of adult membership in the church.<sup>x</sup>

In a paradoxical reversal of processes, the challenge that our senior high and adult education programs face is to assist Christian disciples, both young and old, in their translation of broad knowledge and lofty concepts (and ideals) back into the world of concrete reality. Many of the events during the year for our youth put them into contact with other young people in Lansing, in the Presbytery, and around the country.<sup>xi</sup> Our Adult Education programs include Wednesday morning lectionary Bible study, Adult Forum programs on Sunday mornings after worship, a monthly Sunday evening women's Bible study program, a recently formed men's Bible study and discussion group, and some seasonal programs related to Advent and Lent, among others. Since the adoption of *Vision 2015*, our Adult Forum programs have especially emphasized bringing our congregation to a better understanding of our place in our local community and our congregation's direct involvement in missionary work abroad.<sup>xii</sup>

### **Need**

As true descendents of the Reformation, Presbyterians have always seen the life of the church as a life that is in a constant process of "becoming." The "Nicene Creed"—the first creed in the Presbyterian *Book of Confessions* and the most widely used creed among Christians—captures this sense eloquently by concluding with the extraordinarily positive affirmation that we Christians look "for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." The great Latin statement from the Reformation that captures this sense of the church's continual renewal reads, *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbi dei*, which may be translated as, "The church is reformed and is always

being reformed according to the Word of God."<sup>xiii</sup> The obligation for us to re-examine and thereby constantly renew ourselves is the very essence of being alive. It is an obligation as old as Socrates' saying that "the unexamined life is not worth living" and as new as next Sunday's sermon or our evening prayers. In his own pithy Greek, Paul expresses much the same sentiment by exhorting us to "test everything [and] hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Like the church in every time and place, we are dynamic, always in a process of becoming and always being called to face new challenges. The year 2015 comes hard upon us, and we must now test ourselves again, "re-visioning" and revising ourselves where we must, but in good faith holding fast always to what is good.

We need each other not only to minister to our own in-house concerns, but also to minister to a growing crowd of others who are in need of what Christians working together are uniquely equipped to provide. As we face a new period of "reformation," we need most to face those matters that have most hampered the fulfillment of our potential as Christians and as Presbyterians. We need to ask why the number of those who are taking an active part in the life of our church has decreased steadily, despite the vast array of activities that this church offers and supports. We need to know where our efforts to create a vibrant community of faith have failed. If members and friends of our church have come to feel alienated or disengaged or unappreciated or unheard, we need to know why and how their relationships with the church may be made whole and glad again. And conversely, we need to know what has brought new members to our congregation and what about our Presbyterian approach to the Christian life has drawn them into active participation. We need to know how we can build on the successes we have had. In short, we need to see ourselves as we are, to agonize over our failings, to confess our sins, and to pray once again for forgiveness, reconciliation, and a renewed commitment to living the life that Christ has called us to live.

### **Becoming**

We have been called to be Christ's Easter people and a light to the world. We have been called and we have responded, mostly with joy and courage, but also with failure and disappointment. We are fallible instruments called to fulfill the perfect will of God.

The challenges can seem daunting. Daunting they may seem, but with God's help doable. We have the assurance that "God demands of us only what God working through us can accomplish."<sup>xiv</sup>

We also have the wisdom imbedded in our Alpha stained glass image to help us. Look at the image again. It is beautiful, but it is flawed through and through. It is, after all, made of *stained* glass, not perfectly transparent, window-clear, uniformly cut pieces. On close inspection, it seems cobbled together of odds and ends of broken glass bound to each other in a crazy-quilt patchwork of color. And all of these odd, imperfectly colored, lumpy-textured bits of glass are bound together with the drabest of leaden bands. Our Alpha glass is terribly flawed, but it is beautiful nonetheless.

Look at it one more time. It is beautiful *because* it is flawed. A balanced work made of perfectly shaped; window-clear glass segments would say nothing to us. It would have no distinguishing features, no depth of expression, and no intriguing coloring and texture to draw us in for a closer look. A perfectly clear glass pane would in fact be *invisible*. But our Alpha glass is expressive. It draws us to it with an irresistible combination of meaning and beauty. What turns the odd lot of stained glass lying on the glazier's workbench into a work of art are a visionary insight into some worthy truth and the determination to make apparently disparate elements come together to give truth a fresh, fully realized, and radiant expression. The work can only be accomplished by willing oneself to begin the labor.

And so, we are back to "beginnings" again—the eternal Alpha of our faith, the everlasting commencement of our labors, and the constant reaffirmation of the meaning of our lives found in our service to the risen Christ. If we are imperfect it is because we are being called to show the world what beauty and goodness can be made when flawed hearts, minds, souls, and strengths such as ours are bound together in God's reconciling love. If we are fractured, stained, blemished, and nearly cast away, it is to reveal what glory the Holy Spirit can make of us, even with our flaws. We are called to be the living, breathing, thinking, speaking, and serving embodiment of our splendidly imperfect Alpha glass. We are called today, as on every day, to begin again, *reformata, semper reformanda*, not to be content simply with being, but to strive always toward becoming our better selves and a truer church, more fully Christian and more fully Presbyterian.

## Supplemental Notes

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<sup>i</sup> The other surviving artifact is the cornerstone of the 1889 building. Our Alpha glass is one of what was once a pair of stained glass works of art that included a companion “Omega” (Ω) Greek character, the last character of the Greek alphabet. Alpha and Omega were set side by side in the doors of our former church building. The Alpha’s diagonal lines and cross piece are adorned with 17 white “crystals” of cut glass that make it appear as if the character is inset with diamonds. The Alpha character itself rests upon a glowing, segmented field of textured ruby red glass that is adorned by spreading leaves of gold and green and by three white blossoms. (Perhaps in addition to suggesting the Trinity, these flowers are meant to represent Michigan cherry blossoms, for on either side of the Alpha character is a large, round, cherry red “gem” attached to a leafy stem.) Surrounding the field is a segmented border of blue glass. Above it all is a circular capital, also of ruby red, bordered by a halo of white glass. The whole of the artwork comprises some 131 individually cut pieces of finely crafted, colored, and textured pieces of stained glass. They are all bound together by leaded bands that encircle each piece and run throughout the whole design.

<sup>ii</sup> We now host: a biannual First Presbyterian Salad Luncheon for members, downtown neighbors, and state workers, the Global Institute of Lansing, the First Presbyterian Computer Lab, the Swedenborgian Church, the Downtown Neighborhood Association, the NorthWest Initiative, World Refugee Awareness Week, the Interfaith Network of Greater Lansing, the First Presbyterian Vacation Bible School (open to all), the Mid-Michigan Photo Club, the Southside Community Kitchen, the Annual CROP Walk, the MOVE Exercise Group, Lutheran Social Services of Michigan, the Lansing Area AIDS Network *World AIDS Day* observance, and the Sierra Club’s annual *Earth Day* observance, to name just the principals.

<sup>iii</sup> Among the artists who have accepted our invitation to create in our space are: the *Lansing Symphony Chamber Orchestra and Ensemble* Concerts, the *Glen Erin Pipe Band*, Highland Dance Classes, the *LanSingOut Gay Men’s Chorus*, the *Sistrum Women’s Chorus*, the *Men of Orpheus Chorus*, numerous piano and choral recitals performed by graduate students from MSU’s College of Music, the *Earl Nelson Singers*, the *Ingham County Choral Society*, the *St. John’s University Men’s Chorus*, the *Over the Ledge Theatre Company*, and the Michigan State Vocal Music Association (MSVMA), plus other occasional artistic events.

<sup>iv</sup> The most important instance of this act of mercy for Christians was, of course, Joseph of Arimathea’s provision of a tomb for our Lord (See John 19:38-42).

<sup>v</sup> We have visited our sick and comforted those who grieve. We have taken communion to those in our congregation who are no longer able to come to church. We have bolstered the strength and hope of our convalescing members through our pager ministry, and we have rejoiced together in moments of recovery, birth, marriage, anniversaries, graduation, employment, and personal and professional accomplishment.

<sup>vi</sup> In 2013 the Deacons and a host of volunteers from First Presbyterian invested more than 1,000 hours in our Food Pantry to provide food for more than 4,000 people. Ours is the second most active church-affiliated food bank in the city! Also, every year we provide over 80 Thanksgiving and Christmas food baskets for families who would otherwise have impoverished holidays. First Presbyterian has accepted a leadership role in One Church One Family Program to provide a home for a single mother and her four children who could not afford to purchase a home. We have named the home, “The Presby Home,” and members of our church continue to serve there as counselors, tutors, handy persons, and “guides” to city services and job skills. In addition to our

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direct involvement in community ministries, our Mission Interpretation Committee donates monies on our behalf to support the work of many, many charitable agencies, including: Loaves and Fishes, Open Door Ministry, the Greater Lansing Food Drop, City Rescue Mission, CROP, Haven House, Salvation Army, EVE (End Violent Encounters), Christ Community Soup Kitchen, Lansing Area AIDS Network, Care Free Medical, Shared Pregnancy, the Black Child and Family Institute, and a summer free lunch program for neighborhood children, among other endeavors.

<sup>vii</sup> We have supported local churches and Presbyterian-affiliated universities in Lebanon. We have sent books for a new library, provided medical supplies, contributed to a Bible translation project, and helped to establish a water pump and a pipeline for fresh mountain water for a village in Cameroon. Through our interest and contacts with CEPAD in Nicaragua we have learned much about ways to support local economic development among small-scale farmers in Latin America. We have also helped to establish *Casa Materna* (a home for high-risk pregnant women) in Nicaragua. Nowadays, we are an active user and distributor of “fair trade” coffee, chocolate, and olive oil from Nicaragua and elsewhere in Latin America. We have also been active in supporting projects to provide water filtration to increase the amount of clean drinking in various locations in Africa. Our mission work there has also embraced the *Macheo Children’s Centre* of Kenya that gives orphans and other disadvantaged children a better chance to have a healthy life and a good education.

<sup>viii</sup> We have also created several groups that bring our members and friends together to read books or to discuss films or to gather for a church picnic or to travel to interesting sites nearby or as far away as the Holy Land.

<sup>ix</sup> We have invited our young people to join with adults to visit homebound members, to call to offer assistance with food and shopping, and in other ways to help re-establish a sense of personal connection for them to the church. We have delivered Easter lilies and Christmas poinsettias to our homebound members and increased our usage of the pager ministry. Our congregation is also kept aware of prayer concerns on a daily basis through group emails. First Presbyterian has also established a presence on the Internet. Our website (<http://lansingfirstpres.org>) now includes comprehensive information about our church’s staff, programs (including a photo slide show), and its myriad activities (including some photos and videos), along with accessible links to past sermons (both as texts and as audios), newsletters, reports, contact information, maps, and directions.

Most poignantly, several members and one friend of our church grew to be so “connected” to our congregational family that they could not bear to be separated from us, even in death. These devoted souls have had their ashes interred in our Memorial Garden located outdoors on the east side of the Sanctuary. Among them are four couples, four additional members, and one friend of the church who in his short association with us so came to love us (as we did him) that he asked for special permission (gladly granted by the Session) to rest forever in our company and care.

<sup>x</sup> During the past five years, our teachers have been exploring new ways to impart the essentials of our faith while they also involve our children in learning to prepare and participate more fully in worship. To reinforce the value of the children’s experience, our youth educators have created a “Parents Parallel” program for young parents in our congregation. These parents meet on Sunday mornings in the parlor to discuss what their children are learning that day or topics concerning parenting.

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<sup>xi</sup> Our young people have participated in many local fellowship and discussion groups, traveled out of state to attend church conferences, and have worked on summer missionary service projects throughout the country. Here at home, our senior highs have been helping to lead children's worship and Sunday School and to serve from time to time as Sunday Worship Leaders for the congregation. Several times a year in fact our young people compose and lead an entire worship service for the congregation. They have taken an active part in service and social advocacy in the Lansing community. They have visited our homebound and sent them holiday greeting cards. They have helped to lead summer Vacation Bible School programs, made Advent wreathes, served Sunday meals at Advent House, and marched with others from our congregation in Lansing's Gay Pride Parade.

<sup>xii</sup> The Forums that have addressed our personal identity and the social issues that affect us are: our personal faith journeys, issues in medical ethics, elderly health care and end-of-life issues, African-American history, the national and global economies, the Presbyterian Disaster Relief program, bullying, human trafficking, the history and meaning of our church art and architecture, the faith and missionary connections that we have established with the families of our international members from Lebanon and Cameroon, and a brief overview of the long history of our church, among many other topics.

Also, our library includes a very wide variety of printed and electronic materials for children and adults. Our annual Book Sale in May raises money to purchase more resources for the library. **Note:** Our denomination's magazine, *Presbyterians Today*, has published three special issues entitled, "Welcome to the Presbyterian Church," "What Presbyterians Believe" and "What Presbyterians Believe 2." They include articles on "all things Presbyterian" – our heritage, what we believe, how we do things ("decently and in order"), our mission work, the way we worship, and principal tenets of Reformed theology. There's even an article on what Presbyterians *don't* believe! The Adult Education Committee has purchased multiple copies of these issues, and members, friends, and visitors alike may obtain free copies.

<sup>xiii</sup> See Anna Case-Winters, "Our Misused Motto," *Presbyterians Today* (June 2012), p. 27.

<sup>xiv</sup> Quoted from memory from, *The Presbyterians*, a documentary film narrated by Frank Reynolds, written by Lefferts Augustine Loetscher, Richard R. Goode, Richard R. Gilbert, Kenneth G. Neigh, and Frank Reynolds. Produced by the then United Presbyterian Church's Division of Communications-Interpretation, 1974.