

FIRST FOCUS

A Note from the Pastor

Pastor Matt Wilcox

Say the weird thing. Do the kind thing. Last year, I would see the same video clip come across my social media feed. It was a woman looking directly into the camera saying, "Say the weird thing. People are desperately seeking realness."

What came after that part was anything from a funny joke to a nifty trick to an insightful observation. I want to tweak this just a bit. I'm not staring into a camera, but I hope you can hear my voice as I say this: Do the kind thing. The world desperately lacks kindness.

Within the pages of Scripture, we find several passages that implore the people of God to kindness: Love is kind. Be kind to one another. Clothe yourself in kindness. The fruit of the Spirit is kindness. The Lord requires that we love kindness. Continue in God's kindness. Over and over, we read to lean towards and to practice kindness. I believe that is an instruction we need to be taking seriously, especially right now. There is much in the world right now that causes sadness, anxiety, outrage, and despair. As the people of God and followers of Jesus, let us offer something more. Let us offer something that can push back against the dark. Let us offer something that can bring people relief, hope, and joy. It is easy to get caught up in the maelstrom of tragedy and negativity, but our source does not come from the storm. Our Source stills the storm.

I implore each of you to choose kindness. In your daily interactions with strangers. On your phone calls, where patience is wearing thin. As you encounter that person whom you hold some measure of hard feelings for. When the choice is between convenience or generosity. During those moments when it feels like there is nothing you can do. In all of these circumstances and more, we can show the world who Jesus is by practicing and expressing kindness. It will not always be easy. There will be times when it does not seem fair to offer kindness. But I believe wholeheartedly that the world will be made a better place with every decision and act of kindness we share. Even, and maybe especially, when it would not be popular or rewarding to be kind. Then again, the way of our Savior has never been popular or easy or profitable. But it is the narrow path we are called to walk, and with every faithful step, we praise and offer the name of Jesus Christ.

Save The Date for April 18 – BLONO GO!

BloNo Go! 2026 will be the morning of Saturday, April 18th. We hope you and your family will join us in serving our community!

Mark your calendars!

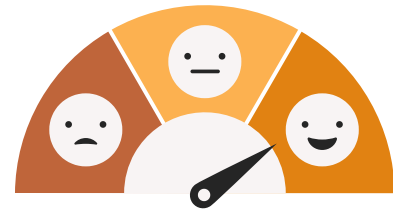
February 2026

"There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness."



Feb. 22 – Lent Adult Discipleship Study

Join us Sunday mornings between worship services during Lent, starting February 22, as our pastors lead a conversation on discipleship and what it looks like to follow Jesus steadily in everyday life. We'll explore what it means to grow in faith, patience, and commitment as we walk together through Eugene Peterson's classic on faithful discipleship. This study is a chance to reflect more deeply on discipleship and practices that shape us as followers of Christ. All are welcome.



IF YOU ATTENDED BIBLE IN A YEAR

WE'D LOVE YOUR FEEDBACK!

Did you participate in Bible in a Year during 2025? We'd like to hear about your experience! Please complete this survey by Sunday, Feb. 8: <https://tinyurl.com/3b7jrr8s>. Thank you!

Join us on Sunday, Feb. 8th. We will have one combined service at 10am, followed by the Annual Congregational Meeting. Copies of the Annual Report will be available on that Sunday at the Welcome Center.

Join us after the meeting, for an all-church potluck in the Great Hall.

A graphic for the Annual Congregational Meeting & Potluck. It features a background image of a table with papers, a laptop, and a pen. Overlaid on this is a dark orange banner with white text. The text reads: "Sunday, February 8th" in a script font, followed by "FOLLOWING THE 10AM SERVICE" in a bold sans-serif font. Below this is "ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING & POTLUCK" in a large, bold, white sans-serif font. At the bottom, in a smaller orange font, it says "Please bring a dish to share" and "Annual Reports will be available at the Welcome Center on Feb. 8th."

Sunday, February 8th

FOLLOWING THE 10AM SERVICE

ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING & POTLUCK

Please bring a dish to share

Annual Reports will be available at the Welcome Center on Feb. 8th.

Please bring a dish to share based on the FIRST letter of your LAST name. Drinks will be provided: A-D: Dessert | E-L: Main Course | M-Z: Side Dish.

RIGHTNOW MEDIA

February Featured Resources



RightNow Media login instructions

To find these and thousands of other video studies for individuals, kids, families, and groups:

- Scan the QR code to the right
- Text FPCNORM to 49775
- Or visit app.rightnowmedia.org/join/firstpresnormal (this is also linked to our website) to log in to your free account
- Contact Pastor Karol if you have any questions



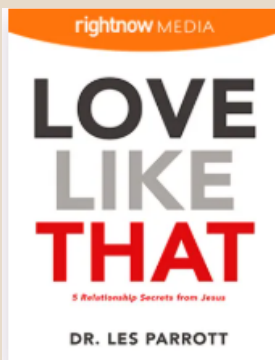
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WIRED

WIRED

The Wired Word – Weekly Discussion Class

The Wired Word discussion guide chooses a weekly current event and explores how it relates to Scripture, encouraging thought-provoking discussions on how we can apply God's word to our everyday lives. With each week's lesson being independent of the others, feel free to come any time. We'll offer this class beginning February 22.



LOVE LIKE THAT – 6 SESSIONS

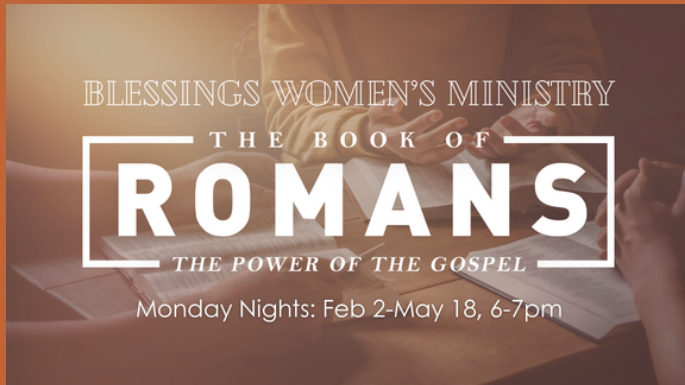
As followers of Jesus, we were meant to radically love those around us and give the world a glimpse of what God is like. But this is easier said than done. In this series, Dr. Les Parrott examines Jesus's life and character traits to give a practical definition of what it means to love like Jesus. The Holy Spirit invites us to trade detachment, exclusivity, judgment, fear, and self-concern for mindfulness, approachability, grace, boldness, and self-giving.



Black Church Studies – 9 Sessions

Rev. Dr. Marshall Hatch takes viewers on a journey through the history and impact of the Black church in America, from the religion of white slaveholders passed to enslaved peoples to the role of the church today in the era of Black Lives Matter. He teaches on the Civil War, Reconstruction, the development of Black denominations due to segregation, prominent Black church leaders and theologians, the Civil Rights era, and the new time of racial reckoning in America today.

ADULT DISCIPLESHIP CLASSES



Blessings Women's Ministry is offering a study on the book of Romans. We will meet every Monday evening, 6-7pm, February 2 – May 18. A study guide can be purchased for \$10. Other social events will also be planned for the winter and spring months. All women are welcome to attend. Sign up on the website under the "Resources" tab and then click "Sign-Ups". Contact Irene DenBesten at 309-824-5611 with any questions.

Evicting the American Dream amplifies the voices and stories of children and families confronting eviction and homelessness. Often when we hear the words 'homelessness' and 'eviction', there is a dominant narrative that says: "There is nothing we can do to prevent this from happening." This film seeks to reframe, humanize, and transform how the wider public understands eviction and homelessness and the ways in which this is preventable.



A FREE denomination-wide film study will be offered **Mondays Feb. 2, 9, 16, 23** at 6:30-7:45pm (CST). This group will gather weekly on Zoom after having watched each week's segment of the film to hear from featured speakers and discuss issues of redlining, housing commodification, eviction, the impact of housing insecurity on children, and ways to take action in our own communities. Advanced registration is required to receive the meeting links and instructions to view the film segments each week: <https://hubs.ly/Q03-cQ9p0>.





Congregational Care Ministry Commissioning: February 15

Since last summer, we have been praying for and developing a new Congregational Care Ministry to bridge the gap between the care that our pastors and deacons provide. Several members of our congregation began training in October, and we look forward to launching this ministry with their commissioning at the 11am service on February 15. This has been a delightful ecumenical venture in partnership with Wesley UMC. If you would like to learn more about this ministry, please contact Ann Lamkey or Pastor Karol.

Ash Wednesday Supper and Service: February 18

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent, six weeks of preparation for Holy Week and Easter. Join us on February 18 at 5:15pm for supper and 6pm for worship where we will acknowledge our failure, our frailty, and our utter reliance on God's grace. If you'd like to join us for the supper (soup, salad, and breadsticks), please sign up online by Sunday, February 15.



Join The Prayer Team

Our church prayer team (prayer chain) is an email group that commits to praying for those in our church who share a request. Starting this month, we will be expanding our prayer team to receive an email with the community prayers that are shared in worship each week. Here's how to get connected:

1. To join the prayer team, go to the [website signup page](#) or join the [group in CCB](#).
2. To leave the prayer team, you can unsubscribe from any email received or leave the group in CCB.
3. To send a prayer request to the prayer team, fill out a [prayer request form](#) on the [website home page](#) or in CCB, or contact one of the pastors.

The Green Team's Natural Prairie Update

On November 24, 2025, 57 varieties of native seeds were planted on two acres of church land. All of these plants are native to this area and are important food sources for birds, butterflies and bees. Many of these plant species need to over-winter in order to germinate in the spring (in a process called "stratification"). During winter, seed coverings expand, contract, and react to moisture and soil temperature levels in order to sprout at just the right time in the spring. Ash Wednesday, February 18, begins our liturgical time of waiting and preparation for Easter. Similarly, this season represents a time of anticipation for the glorious sights and sounds of spring that await us in the prairie. For more information on the prairie and Green Team, check out our web presence at <https://www.firstpresnormal.org/green-team>.



ELDERS SERVING ON SESSION

CLASS OF 2026

Matt Blue
(Family Ministry)

Angela Brant
(Personnel)

Kirk Sampson
(Affirmation & Inclusion)

Dana Sutton
(Matthew 25)

CLASS OF 2027

Matt Johnson
(Stewardship)

Julie Koh
(First Steps)

Beth MacDonald
(Worship)

Carol Morris
(Nominating)

CLASS OF 2028

Eric Barbour
(Playmates)

Josh Hoffman
(Finance)

Allie Plumb
(Strategic Transformation)

Jan Weyhrich
(Adult Discipleship)