



First  
Presbyterian  
Church  
of Waynesboro, Virginia

# The Columns *Online*

November 30, 2022 | Waynesboro, Virginia | *a newsletter supplement*

## **A once-dying church hopes to reinvent itself with coffee and kindness**

*Embrace Church had two years left to live. Rather than wait for the end, the church sold its building, reinvented itself and invested in a local coffee house.*

By Bob Smietana, *Religion News Service* — Community Covenant Church in Kirkwood, Missouri, had a problem common to thousands of churches around the country: an aging congregation, a shrinking budget, a too-big building that spent most of the week empty. And the clock was ticking.

“We had about 22 months left,” said pastor Chad Wible.



Teleo Coffee in Kirkwood, Missouri. Courtesy photo

Rather than wait for their reserves to run dry, church members decided to make the most of the time they had left. They sold the building to a local school, put the money in the bank and began praying for the future. Then they met Olivia Tischler.

A graduate of St. Louis University, the 20-something Tischler had a degree in theology and entrepreneurship and a dream of starting a coffee shop, where she could pay people well, buy from local suppliers and treat customers — and her staff — like family. She also had a business plan and barista skills from working her way through college. But she had no money.

“The banks weren’t really looking to give a 22-year-old a big loan,” she said. “There weren’t also a lot of investors who were super interested in that either. I was stuck.”

Believing that God told her to start the coffee shop, Tischler began praying and following what’s known as a “Daniel fast” — 40 days of eating nothing but vegetables and drinking only water, following the example of the beloved Old Testament figure. On day 31, she got an email from the leaders at the church asking if they could meet up. That meeting would — after a long delay during the COVID-19 pandemic — eventually lead to the founding of Teleo Coffee in Kirkwood, Missouri, home of the Love Your Neighbor Latte, a tasty sea salt mocha that satisfies customers and helps raise money for charity.

## Reinvent, continued.



Olivia Tischler at Teleo Coffee in Kirkwood, MO.

Courtesy photo

Teaming up with Tischler and investing in the coffee house proved to be a godsend for the congregation, now known as Embrace Church.

Rather than owning a building that was empty most of the week, they're part owners of a thriving third space — filled every day with the sounds of conversation and friendship.

“Now we get lines of people every morning coming into the coffee shop and creating goodwill,” said Wible.

The ongoing decline of organized religion in America has led to an existential crisis for tens of thousands of congregations across the country. Over the past two decades, the median size of a congregation has dropped from 137 people in 2000 to 65 people in

to 65 people in 2020, according to the Faith Communities Today study. Thousands of churches close every year, leaving empty buildings behind. Some are sold and the proceeds used to start new churches or shore up denominational ministries. Others become breweries, gyms, nightclubs or some other commercial venture. Many more are demolished to make way for affordable housing or other ventures, like a skate park.

Often the decision on what to do with the building is put off until the church shuts down. But at least a few congregations are beginning to rethink how to use their buildings before that happens.

Recently the Memphis-based Church of God in Christ announced plans to turn unused church property into affordable housing. Other churches have become shared working spaces or spaces for nonprofits. By doing so, they've turned buildings that were once seen as expensive liabilities into assets for the common good.

The key is starting early, said Tyler Krupp Qureshi, a developer in Madison, Wisconsin, who has helped religious groups develop their space. Too often, he said, churches or other faith groups wait until they are in crisis before rethinking what to do with their space. That leaves them few options but to sell to the highest bidder.

“Creative possibilities often take time,” he said.

*Continued*



## **Reinvent, continued.**

“It’s the dance between death and resurrection,” she said.

While inspired by faith, Teleo Coffee has few outward signs of its partnership with Embrace Church or its Christian roots. Rather than a Christian-branded coffeehouse, Tischel said she wanted to run a business that lives out its faith in practice. For her, that has meant using local suppliers, like Bridge Bread, a bakery that helps people who had been homeless get off the streets, and the Switch Coffee Collective, a coffee roaster that helps employ people who had been incarcerated. The coffee house will also host a training program for students with special needs — something Embrace Church has long hoped to be part of.

The shop has won kudos for its environment — located in a converted house, the coffee shop is known as being kid-friendly — and its tasty treats and innovative menu, which features “coffee flights” that allow patrons to sample several different brews at the same time. Kindness also is a hallmark of the shop, said Tischler. That means small things like remembering people’s names and favorite drinks and being genuinely interested in them.

“We make everyone feel known and loved when they walk into the shop,” she said.

While there’s no branding about Embrace’s partnership with Tischler, church members are often at the shop for special events and other happenings.

“That’s part of the big experiment,” said Schmitz. “Can we be Christians without putting a big cross on the building? I think we are still working through that.”

### **WORSHIP THIS WEEK:**

**LIGHTING THE CANDLE OF LOVE: MICAH 3: 1-4**

**PSALM 72: 1-7, 18-19**

**MATTHEW 3: 10-12**

**SERMON: HOW BROKEN?**



## MUSIC NOTES FOR DECEMBER 4

For the second week of Advent, we will sing hymns that have been around for centuries.

*Comfort, Comfort Now My People* dates back to the 16th century. Louis Bourgeois (c. 1510-1559) adapted the tune and published it in The Genevan Psalter. This collection of 126 melodies was composed and collected between 1539 and 1562 at the request of John Calvin for the Reformed churches in Geneva, Switzerland. The English version we sing this week was translated by Catherine Winkworth (1827-1878) and published in 1863 in the Chorale Book for England.



The closing hymn, *Bereden väg för Herran* (Make Way For the Lord), is a Swedish tune from before the 16th century.

It was first published in 1697 in a collection called Then Svenska Psalmboken (The Swedish Psalm Book). Franz Michael Franzén (1772-1847) married the popular Swedish tune with the Advent text. The English text was adapted in 1958 by Augustus Nelson (1863-1949), a Swedish immigrant who settled in Minnesota in 1883 and was ordained as a Lutheran minister in 1898.

## OUR WORSHIP CHANNELS



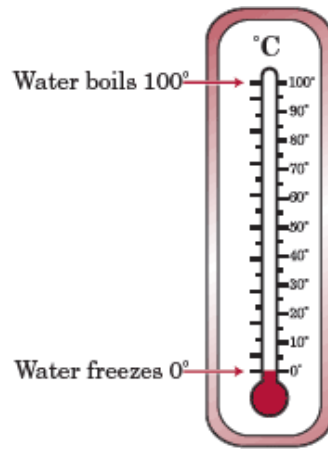
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## calvin and hobbes



# This Week in History.



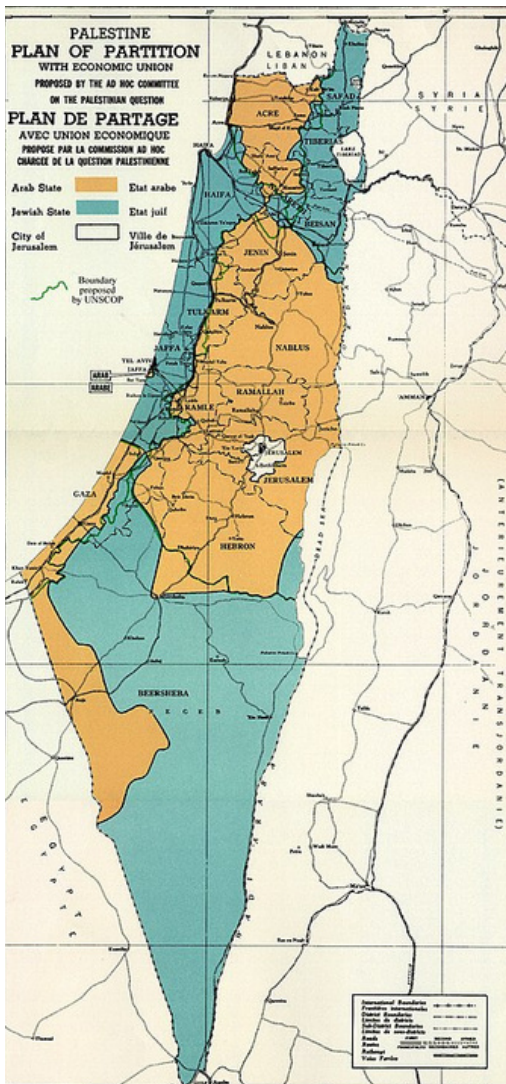
Anders Celsius is born in Uppsala, Sweden. An astronomer, physicist and mathematician, he served as professor of astronomy at Uppsala University from 1730 to 1744, and in 1742 proposed a form of the Centigrade temperature scale - later renamed Celsius in his honor.

**November 27, 1701**



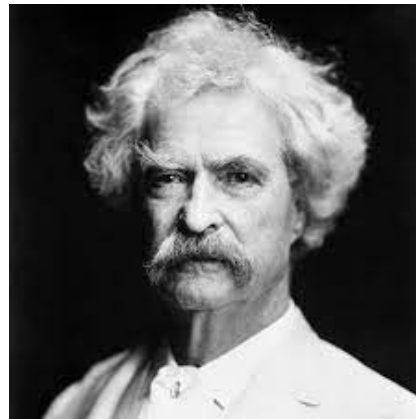
Seeking to circumnavigate the globe, Portuguese explorer Fernão de Magalhães crosses from the Atlantic into the Pacific ocean, through the straits located at the southern tip of South America (now called the Straits of Magellan in his honor). He would die in battle in 1521, but his crew would complete the round the world voyage.

**November 28, 1520**



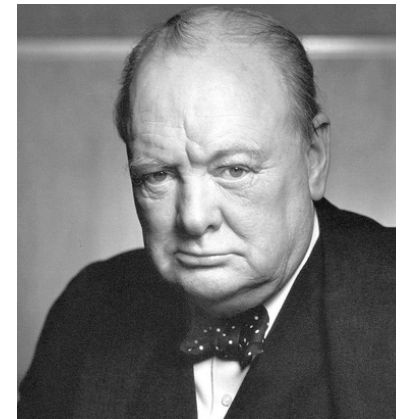
Palestine was partitioned into Jewish and Arab land by the U.N. General Assembly, resulting in the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel the following year.

**November 29, 1947**



Samuel Langhorne Clemens is born in Florida, Missouri. Under the pen name Mark Twain, he wrote classics, including *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *Life on the Mississippi*.

**November 30, 1835**



Sir Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill is born in Oxfordshire England. After careers in the military, journalism and public service, he was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, 1940-1945 and 1951-1955.

**November 30, 1874**



Rosa Parks is arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery, AL bus, sparking the modern American civil rights movement. A year-long boycott of the city busses by African Americans led to legal actions ending racial segregation on municipal buses throughout the South.

**December 1, 1955**