

Parish Happenings

January 2021

FROM PASTOR CHAD



Looking To 2021

It would only be natural to say goodbye to 2020 with a retrospective on what a difficult year it has been. I've certainly read a lot of Christmas letters that have done so and even written some newsletters and preached some sermons of my own with the same sentiment. Such reflections are no doubt going to continue to be important as we grieve what was lost and reflect on how we might take on a pandemic the proportion of COVID-19 in the future.

However, I think the time has come to begin looking forward to 2021 and beyond. The past year of quarantine and working, schooling, shopping, and worshipping online has most likely awakened us to some things we've taken for granted, some things that we can let go of, and some things that we want to change, and some things we never want to repeat. Our future has been forever changed and reshaped by the past year as is always the case – even if most often in much smaller and less profound ways – but this turning of years seems to hold a unique significance for us.

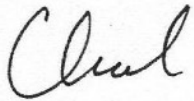
So, what does looking forward mean even as we continue to be in the throes of a viral pandemic. For starters, I think it means taking some time to reflect on our hopes for this next year. It certainly means thinking about family, career, and personal goals, but I am the pastor of a worshipping community and this is after all a church newsletter; so it must mean some reflection on what we hope church to be in 2021.

Although 2021 holds hope of gathering again for worship in our sanctuary that reunion is still sometime off. My thoughts turn to what we want our church to be even as we are still virtual and our activities will be curtailed for the winter and spring. How will we stay connected as a community? What needs to change so we can engage more with our community? How can we start reconnecting even before we worship in person? We've been without a Sunday School for 7 months, what will it take to get restarted? I know most of our session members are looking to get support for the areas of church life they are focused on be it finances, spiritual formation, worship, congregational care and fellowship or whatever.

It is my hope that as we escape 2020 for 2021 we are less concerned with running away from a hard year than we are with running into the new thing that God is doing among us. I pray that we will all find fresh engagement and investment in our life together, imagine new ways to connect, and new means of sharing God's grace with our neighbors.

May we prioritize our worshipping community even as we await the time we will gather in person. And may the words of the Apostle Paul sustain us,

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.



STEWARDSHIP REMINDER

As the Finance Team and Session work on preparing our 2021 budget, we would like to thank all of you who have pledged to participate in the financial support of our church for the coming year. Your gifts are what allow us to do the work God is calling us to do. No gift is too small and we appreciate each one we receive. If you have not yet returned your pledge card, it's not too late. You can drop it in the mail, drop it off at the church office, or email the amount you would like to pledge to our Financial Secretary, Rich Ehrlich, at rnr.ehrlich@gmail.com. Peace and blessings to all!

BLOOD DRIVE

The American Red Cross will be holding a Blood Drive in the parish house on February 2 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. All COVID-19 safety protocols will be in place. Please consider donating. All donors will be automatically tested for the COVID-19 antibodies.

MISSION NEWS

The Virtual Giving Fair raised \$4,090 for organizations that participated in this year's Giving Fair. We are very thankful for the members that volunteered their time and wisdom to make this virtual giving possible.

Tree Sales were very successful this year, selling all 105 trees in two weekends. The church made \$3,918 in profit. We had many volunteers which also made it easier this year. Thanks to all who donated their time.

The Mission Team is always looking for volunteers to join the team. If you are interested in joining, please contact Marilyn El-Zahr.

BIBLE STUDIES

Women's Bible study meets the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month (January 6 and 20), from 7:00-8:30 in the Parish Hall. We are currently studying the book of Esther. Please join us!

Men's Fellowship: There's plenty of bible study, but that's not all. Join us on Saturdays at 8 a.m. on Zoom. We share life and wrestle with scripture together. At the present we're spending time in the Gospel of Judges. Contact Chad to join.

LET IT SNOW, LET IT SNOW, LET IT SNOW!

The Buildings and Grounds Team is putting together a list of people who would be willing to help with some of the snow blowing and shoveling during the winter months. No experience necessary; training provided! When it snows, we have our parking lot and driveways plowed, but the sidewalks, walkways, and front steps need to be cleared by us. Of course, the workload may be lighter this year due to the fact that we are currently worshipping remotely. However, Happy Face is still in session and the church office is still open, so there is some clean up that will need to be done. This is NOT a commitment to head to the church every time it snows. We'd like to have a list of people who we can contact as the need arises. If you are willing to be added to the list, please contact Warren Newman at wnewman115@gmail.com or 908-763-6094.

SESSION WISH LIST

- Peggy wishes we can all come together to find ways for more local community outreach;
- Ken wishes all future Christmas Tree Sales are as smooth and successful as this year's was, and that we can return to worship in the Sanctuary as quickly and as safely as possible;
- Krista wishes for the bell choir to return, and for the pandemic to create opportunities to rethink/question/reimagine our traditions and worship so that we return a little transformed;
- Marilyn wishes more people would join the Mission Team, and to find ways to get people involved in church activities during the pandemic;
- Karen wishes the beautiful music performances we've enjoyed this year continue for a long time, and that there are no more bathrooms that need to be painted anytime soon;
- Warren wishes for a plumbing and heating repair-free year;
- Lisamarie wishes for a new electric kettle for our tea drinkers to enjoy when we can safely resume Sunday morning fellowship;
- Renee wishes to find new and creative ways to connect as a congregation as she feels a bit disjointed from many of the church members we used to see on a regular basis; and,
- We all wish everyone a year filled with good health, the peace and love of God and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that we can all gather together again soon!

Lower Valley Presbyterian Church
445 County Road 513
Califon, NJ 07830
January 2021

The Vision of our Church

Lower Valley Presbyterian Church is a community of believers who worship God in word and deed, nurture each other through prayer, friendship, and education, and seek to serve others in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Our four areas of ministry are faith development, caring for each other, outreach ministry and supporting ministry.