

# Parish Happenings

October 2020

## **FROM PASTOR CHAD**

### **Strange Times**

These certainly do feel like strange times. I've not experienced anything quite like it in my lifetime, but every generation will face adversity and the challenges of our time are compounded by the conflagration of a national reckoning with systemic racism (metastasized throughout our entire culture), a world wide viral pandemic we know as COVID-19, and the startling effects of climate change.

As we enter the last third of 2020 our news feeds are no doubt full of presidential campaign news, political turmoil, CDC updates, case rate charts, protests in our streets (most peaceful and some not), and continuing debates about how to safely reopen our economy. There is a present darkness that seems to have settled in every morning.

So where do we find hope in times like this?

Where does one turn when feelings of hopelessness begin to take root?

What resources does our faith hold?

The writers of scripture regularly take on the reality of the dangerous and broken world. In scripture we discover that we aren't the first generation to feel squeezed into an ever tighter space by circumstances out of our control.

I found Psalm 80 to have a certain resonance in this moment:

Restore us, O God;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

O LORD God of hosts,  
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?  
You have fed them with the bread of tears,  
and given them tears to drink in full measure.  
You make us the scorn of our neighbors;  
our enemies laugh among themselves.

Restore us, O God of hosts;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Turn again, O God of hosts;  
look down from heaven, and see;  
have regard for this vine,  
the stock that your right hand planted.  
They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;  
may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance.  
But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,  
the one whom you made strong for yourself.

Then we will never turn back from you;  
give us life, and we will call on your name.

Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

*Psalm 80 (3-7 and 14-19)*

When I'm not sure where to turn in scripture I tend to turn to the psalms because there is something comforting about reading the prayers of others that have been prayed for generation upon generation. We are not the first people to have prayed for God's face to shine on them again. We are not the first generation to pray to be saved from the tumult. There is comfort in knowing that our ancestors have been in this place and that God has heard their prayers. There is comfort in knowing that God's love, faithfulness, and justice have and will prevail.

In this present moment we find ourselves in an in-between space or as some have called it a "liminal" space. We are hardly the first to live this way for many of the folks we've read about in our scriptures have had to do the same: Abraham leaving his homeland, Joseph sold into slavery, the Hebrews wandering in the desert for 40 years, Esther faced with the genocide of her people or possibly her own end, countless prophets longing to be heard and see their people repent, Mary dwelling on the angel's strange declaration, the disciples waiting in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, Paul blinded by the light of Jesus himself, and that dark sabbath day when Jesus lay in the tomb.

The witness of scripture is the promise that when we are waiting, when we are living in liminal times that God hears our prayers. So, we keep worshiping (even if it is virtually) and we keep praying for peace and justice and salvation. Our small church community continues to be a place to gather to struggle together to live as faithful disciples and to call out together for God to restore us.

We don't know when we will be able to safely and responsibly gather the whole number of our congregation for worship in our sanctuary again, but we continue to read scripture, pray, and gather in small numbers with masks as well as online each Sunday. In this time of waiting we are also actively doing the work we've been called to do: our mission team is working on a virtual giving fair, small groups meet for study and encouragement, the garden produced food all summer and we continue to reach out to neighbors with the love of Christ. The witness of scripture holds the assurance that God hears, and that out of liminal spaces new and surprising life will spring forth. I approach each day with hope and expectation for the restoration that God will work in us.

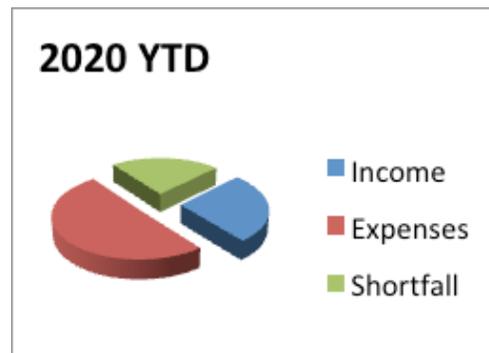
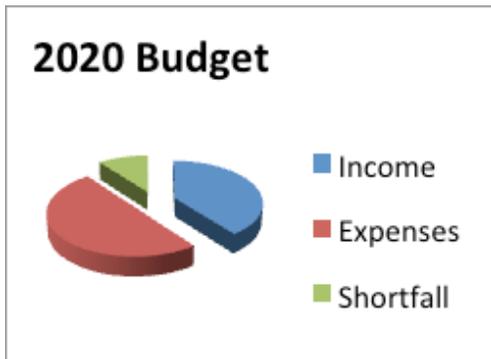


## NEWS FROM THE FINANCE TEAM

This year has impacted all of us in ways we could never have imagined. We have gone from worshipping in the Sanctuary among familiar faces, as well as many new faces, to worshipping online and now together again in the Parish Hall. We have had to forgo in-person fellowship, Sunday school, our annual Church Picnic, the ASP trip ... the list goes on and on.

The pandemic has had a negative impact on our financial situation as well. When we created our 2020 operating budget in January we were expecting to withdraw about \$43,000 from investments throughout the year to make up for an expected shortfall in our budget. Unfortunately, we have withdrawn \$56,000 from investments already this year to meet our expense obligations. Both our pledge receipts and non-pledge receipts have fallen behind.

We did receive some assistance through the CARES Act so that we were able to keep our employees employed, and fortunately, our investments have performed well throughout the year; thus, our withdrawals have had minimal impact on our bottom line. However, we are concerned that our need for investment withdrawals could continue as we move through the remainder of the year. If you are able, please consider bringing your pledges up to date so we can avoid any negative impact on our financial position.



### Per Capita – What's that?

One item in our budget which never receives much attention is our Per Capita expense. This is a fixed dollar amount, \$39.00 per member in 2020, which we pay to our Presbytery each year. But what is Per Capita and what is this money used for? Newton Presbytery describes it as follows:

“In general, it is one of the main ways we live out who we are as Presbyterians. We are a connectional church, and the Per Capita allows us to pool our resources to do many more ministries, missions and programs than any church could possibly do on its own. These dollars are part of the glue that holds Presbyterians together, and allows us to work not only with other Presbyterian churches in our presbytery, but also in our Synod region (the northeast), across the country, and in partnership with other Christian churches around the world. It is how we covenant together to be the larger presence of the church.”

Your offering envelopes contain a Per Capita envelope. Each year we ask each of our members to pay their portion of the Per Capita, but we usually fall short. Our church's Per Capita this year is \$5,300, yet we have only received about \$780 from our members to cover this expense. If you have paid your 2020 Per Capita, thank you! If you have not, we hope you will consider doing so at this time.

## HOUSE AND GROUNDS

The House and Grounds team, with the help of Pastor Chad, managed to cross a few items off our to-do list this summer. Before welcoming their students back to school in September, Happy Face needed to increase the ventilation in their classrooms. In order to accomplish this, Warren and Chad replaced one of the existing window panels in each classroom with small windows which open. We cleaned out several storage areas in the church; it's amazing what accumulates over 150 years! The sheetrock repair and window replacement in the Parish Hall women's room was completed and the room is now ready for paint. The gutters at the Manse were in bad shape and starting to cause water damage on the building; we had all the gutters cleaned, repaired and installed gutter guards to hopefully cut down on maintenance needs in the future. The Manse front steps and porch had deteriorated to a dangerous state; we had the front steps and railings replaced and the porch patched.

We had hoped to get one more project completed this year, but are quickly running out of warm weather and free time. The shed needs to be power washed and painted, and the roof needs to be de-mossed. If anyone can assist with this project, even if you can only do one part of it, please contact Karen (908-763-9483) or Warren (908-763-6094).

## MISSION NEWS

The Mission Team met this month and is planning a Virtual Giving Fair. Due to restrictions on the number of people allowed in the Parish Hall, we have decided to give virtually. Mike Reaves is working on creating a Virtual Giving Fair Website that we can link to our church website. We are requesting each organization to send in a short video clip that explains their mission statement. We are also asking for a brief written description of the organization, a few photos, and their giving wish list. Each organization will have a link on the website. Cards and organization inserts will be mailed out upon request. The Virtual Giving Fair will begin on "Giving Tuesday" which is on Tuesday, December 1<sup>st</sup> and will close on Saturday, December 21<sup>st</sup>.

The church will be selling Christmas Trees beginning on Saturday, December 5<sup>th</sup>. Volunteers will be caravanning to BJ's Tree Farm on Saturday, November 28<sup>th</sup> at 7 a.m. to pick up the trees. Contact Ken Ernst (973-769-9213) if you are able to volunteer with tree pick up or sales.

## BIBLE STUDIES AND YOUTH GROUPS

**Women's Bible study** meets the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays of the month, 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.

### **Middle School Youth Group (6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders)**

Yes, we are living in a difficult time to gather a group of middle schoolers and let them run wild in the Parish Hall for an hour and a half each week, however, we all still need community. We will begin middle school youth group again on Wednesday, October 7 from 7-8:30. You'll need a mask and we'll remain socially distanced, but we can gather for some 9 square, prayer, bible study, and other socially distanced games.

### **High School Youth Group**

We're kicking off our year on Sunday, October 11 from 7-8:30. Because of COVID protocols we will meet in the Parish Hall. Bring a mask and we'll share in some community building, bible study and prayer together. We'll also be spending some time talking about what it means to be part of the church and specifically the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for those students considering confirmation. All are welcome so bring a friend.

## WHAT A BEAUTIFUL SUMMER IN THE GARDEN!

In the summer of COVID, our community garden became a refuge for so many people. We had a lot of new gardeners join us this year and we all had a wonderful summer growing, harvesting, making new friends, having lively conversations, and enjoying and sharing the bounties God has blessed us with. Take a picture walk through the garden with us!

## A BOUNTIFUL HARVEST!



# BIRD, BUTTERFLIES AND BLOOMS



## Upcoming Servers

Date	Liturgist	Ushers	Communion Servers
October 4	Warren Newman	Mike Reaves and <b>OPEN</b>	N/A
October 11	Al El-Zahr	Kim Rodgers and Peggy Macaoay	
October 18	Peggy Macaoay	Mike Reaves and <b>OPEN</b>	
October 25	Karen Newman	Renee Ollerenshaw and Judy Eckwielen	
November 1	Marilyn El-Zahr	Karen and Warren Newman	N/A
November 8	Kim Rodgers	Marilyn and Al El-Zahr	
November 15	Renee Ollerenshaw	Peggy Macaoay and <b>OPEN</b>	
November 22	Warren Newman	<b>OPEN and OPEN</b>	
November 29	Karen Newman	Judy Eckwielen and Mike Reaves	

**If you are able to serve in one of the OPEN spots, please let Claudia know. Thank you!**

Lower Valley Presbyterian Church  
445 County Road 513  
Califon, NJ 07830  
October 2020

## **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.