

# The Vineyard

A publication to encourage and motivate participation in the family of God  
and an aid in ministry for the members of Myerstown United Church of Christ.



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editor: Lee Ann Kurash

*from the Interim Pastor*

## *“What Can Passenger Trains Teach the Church?”*

Arlo Guthrie’s popular 1972 recording of the “City of New Orleans” captured the sadness so many felt when pre-Amtrak passenger trains disappeared. Songwriter Steve Goodman’s bittersweet lyrics describe his nostalgic Chicago to New Orleans ride on the *City of New Orleans* in its last days, before Amtrak took over almost all long-distance and corridor passenger service.

Once a premiere passenger train, many cars long and amply powered, the streamlined *City of New Orleans* traveled 921 miles on the straight, speedy tracks of the Illinois Central Railroad on a daily, morning-to-late evening, 16-hour schedule between Chicago and New Orleans. Speeds in excess of 100 miles per hour were common across the flat-as-a-pancake farmlands of Illinois.

Although the *City of New Orleans*’ luster had faded less than most passenger trains by 1970, its impending demise inspired songwriter Goodman to reflect on the loss of America’s passenger trains and their place in American culture. Though Amtrak still operates a daily train each way on that route, with the same name, it falls far short of the speed and spirit of the original train.

The last verse of the song captures its somber mood:

**And all the towns and people seem to fade into a bad dream  
And the steel rails still ain't heard the news  
The conductor sings his song again  
The passengers will please refrain  
This train got the disappearing railroad blues.**

(<https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/1150572/Arlo+Guthrie/City+of+New+Orleans>)

That’s how I’ve felt about the historic (“mainline”) Protestant denominations, their churches and seminaries, for 40 years. Like so many great trains from an earlier era (e.g., the *Broadway Limited*, *20<sup>th</sup> Century Limited*, *Super Chief*, *California Zephyr*, etc.), they have sung “the disappearing religion blues” hoping for the best, hanging on, merging here, consolidating there, etc.

What about state-of-the-art passenger trains in Europe, the U.K., China, and Japan? What about the ingenuity, engineering, and determination it took to conceive, construct, and operate trains that run 200+ miles per hour between major cities, on newly constructed rights-of-way, smooth-as-glass track, with new equipment, all built by their own people? How did they do that?

While Amtrak saved American passenger trains from oblivion, it started service with hand-me-down equipment and waited up to ten years for new equipment; plus, it hosted passengers in dilapidated stations. 50 years later, Amtrak still operates mostly on freight railroads, dodging slower freight trains, struggling to stay on-time, despite schedules slower than 60+ years ago.

Even the Amtrak-owned Northeast Corridor (Boston-New York-Washington) falls woefully short of state-of-the-art service because it operates on old-to-very-old infrastructure. High speed *Acela* trains, capable of 165 miles per hour, compete with hundreds of slower trains and congested trackage. State of the art? Hardly! Hurry up! Slow down! 150 mph here; 60 mph there!

Bottom line: we cannot reimagine an essential mode of transportation, or life-enhancing faith communities, while using outdated means and methods, aging facilities and equipment, and provincial attitudes. Like Luther, we need to “love God and sin boldly.” In God’s love, we need to break all molds, patterns, and practices that restrain and constrict us. *Break free! Innovate!*

Dear Siblings in Christ, if only a few folks are riding our Sunday-only train, what is God calling us to do about it? To keep going until the fuel runs out? Until there’s no one left to operate it? Until we have a major derailment of some kind (e.g., an expensive repair)? Yes, it’s pleasant to ride together, singing hymns and sipping coffee, while the rails beneath us still feel smooth.

Or, is God calling us to “sin boldly” – to step out, break free, innovate, and risk for the sake of Christ’s mission and ministry? If what we do is much less effective than it once was, why do we keep doing it? Though the Message never changes, our methods must change as our culture changes. Methodological conservatism and righteous resistance are the death of the church!

So, why did I mention the high-speed rail countries? Because they did not hold back. They built integrated transportation systems for their people: rural bus and rail service, urban bus and transit service, high speed rail for short-to-medium distances (<500 miles), while air travel is reserved for longer distances. Plus, high speed rail stations are built into major airports! What a concept! They didn’t lavish money on highways, defense spending, and questionable wars.

Declining denominations, seminaries, and churches cannot hold back either. Hesitance and timidity hold us back. Clinging to the past, however meaningful, weighs us down. Loyalty to custom and habit anchor us in the shallows. With our grief and sadness acknowledged, we *must* press on, for the advancement of Christ’s work. Grieve we must; go forward, we will, in time.

+ With sorrow and hope, Bruce Greer, Interim Pastor

## Julius Muthengi

### Mission Moment

Dear Friends at Myerstown UCC,

Greetings in the matchless name of our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ. I trust this e-mail finds you well. Agnes and I are doing well by the grace of God, through which we live, move and have our being. Our family is also fine in the Lord. Just to inform you that on Tuesday, June 27th, Agnes' older sister and her husband lost their daughter due to breast cancer. Please pray for the family following their loss of the beloved Tabitha. She was laid to rest on Saturday, July 8th, 2023. As you are aware, between October last year and June 2023, we have lost four close relatives. However, we thank God for his grace and mercies which always prevail under all circumstances his children face.

We thank God for his ministry both in the university, and also in the village. My teaching has been progressing well, as well as supervision of students' theses. I am also continuing my research work. On Friday, June 30th, Agnes had a wonderful ministry among the women. She shared God's word, provided lunch for the ladies, and also gave them foodstuffs to take home! As our partners in God's ministry, we want to assure you that we highly value your role in our lives and ministry. Indeed, it is because of your prayers and financial support that we are able to continue serving the Lord here in Africa. We acknowledge with grateful hearts your gracious gift of \$100, sent through Grace Community Church in July, 2023. May God bless you abundantly as you continue the work of advancing his kingdom globally. Thank you so much for being there for us in this ministry.

In Christ,

Julius and Agnes Muthengi

*‘Africa’s greatest need is not economic or material in nature. Rather, it is that of transformed lives....men and women who are daily being renewed by the power of the Gospel and the ministry of the Holy Spirit...who treasure the word of God and are being captivated by its enduring power. This is a fundamental truth of Christianity whose value is as relevant today as it was centuries ago!’* Prof. Julius Muthengi



*Happy Birthday!*

## AUGUST

3—David Behm

Jean Wartluft

6—Sally Kulp

7—Dena Boltz, Jane Derr,  
And Ed Hibshman

9—Wyatt Houtz and  
Loretta Firestine

11—Alan Zeller

12—Norman Miller

15—Darryl Brown

18—Melanie Bennetch,  
Sharon Diem and  
Suzanne 'Suzie' Wartluft

19- Abigail Frantz

23—John Diem

24—Glenn Derr

## *ADULT BIBLE STUDY*

The Adult Bible Study will begin its fall session on September 10th. This discussion-style class which is led by Jim Diehm, Marie Hibshman, and Charlee Redick meets after worship for about 45 minutes. The Upper Room will be used as the background for each week's lesson and the format is very informal. New participants are enthusiastically welcomed!

**Marie Hibshman**

## **FROM THE PULPIT IN AUGUST 2023**

**\*\*Please note: Rev. Greer is on vacation through 8/6\*\***

**PENTECOST 10 – August 6**  
**Guest preacher: Rev. Keith Tussing**

**PENTECOST 11 – August 13**  
**“Walk on Water”**  
Matthew 14:22-33  
Rev. Greer preaching

**PENTECOST 12 – August 20**  
**“Mercy Extended”**  
Matthew 15:21-28  
Rev. Greer preaching

**PENTECOST 13 – August 27**  
**“Solid Rock or Stumbling Block?”**  
Matthew 16:13-28  
Rev. Greer preaching

### ***Bruce's Contact information:***

Email: [revbgreer@gmail.com](mailto:revbgreer@gmail.com)  
Cell: 617.599.6305  
(calls, texts, 24/7)



## ***Thank you...***

Dear Friends,

For more than a century, the United Board for Ministerial Assistance (for the Pension Boards) has been expressing heartfelt thanks to retired and active pastors, and lay church workers and their families facing financial need, with direct assistance to supplement pensions, help with the cost of medical insurance, provide a thank you gift at Christmas, and meet emergency needs.

Your gift to the Christmas fund always goes to help people in need, when they need it. Thank you for your generosity.

With heartfelt appreciation,

Rev. Dr. Paul Leon Ramsey  
Philanthropy Officer

# Lebanon County Christian Ministries

## August Wish List

**We are in dire need of the following personal care items**

- ~ size 5, 6 and 7 diapers
- ~ men's & women's deodorant
- ~ bar soap
- ~ laundry detergent
- ~ paper towels
- ~ shaving cream
- ~ disposable razors
- ~ feminine hygiene products
- ~ youth toothbrushes
- ~ toilet paper
- ~ tissues
- ~ shampoo, conditioner

## Current Wish List

- ~ instant brown rice and whole grain blends
- ~ 24 oz jar/cans tomato sauce
- ~ soups—Chunky/Progresso low-sodium soup (ready made—no water added)
- ~ Bisquick (Heart Smart)
- ~ olive oil ~salad dressing
- ~ whole grain pasta
- ~ ketchup, mustard, mayo
- ~ adult diapers size XL & XXL

If you have a need, please call LCCM at 717/272-4400.

## Thank you from LCCM

On behalf of LCCM, I wanted to express our heartfelt gratitude for your generous donation of \$1,440 during this Independence Day season. Your support has made a significant impact on our mission to provide food, shelter and support to those in need in our community.

Thanks to your donation, we have been able to provide nutritious food, safe shelter and essential resources to those facing homelessness and food insecurity. Your generosity has helped us create an environment where individuals can regain their independence, rebuild their lives and strive towards self-sufficiency.

We are so appreciative of your very generous support. Together we can make a difference by: Investing in people. Improving lives.

*Bryan D. Smith*

Executive Director

**WE ARE WHERE YOU ARE!  
PLEASE LOOK FOR US!**

<https://www.facebook.com/myerstownunit-edchurchofchrist>



<https://twitter.com/myerstownucc>

<https://www.instagram.com/myerstownucc/>



<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRDGqMFCollic92-uGCEsUQmyerstownucc2072>



**Amended Office Hours for August 1st through August 18.** Lee Ann will be in the office Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. Normal office hours will resume Monday, August 21st.



There are many exciting upcoming events at the **Lebanon Expo Center**, not only the Lebanon County Fair.

for more information visit:

[lebexpo.org/event](http://lebexpo.org/event)