

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.*



January 2024

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editor: Lee Ann Kurash

from the Interim Pastor..

"IF CHRISTMAS TEACHES US ANYTHING..."

If Christmas teaches us anything beyond the wonder of God's incarnation in Christ, it is that Christ was born into the uncertainties of grinding poverty and tyrannical power. Hunger, rampant disease, and short life spans made life miserable. Joseph and Mary had much to fear.

Across our church's 168-year history, life has also been hard. Diseases now curable brought early death. Life expectancies were shorter. For years, there was no 9-1-1 to call for help. To romanticize any earlier era is to ignore the everyday challenges our forbearers faced.

In our founding year of 1855, civil war threatened. Denominations divided (*biblically!!!*) over slavery. After 1865, bitter debates raged over the 14th Amendment, Reconstruction, readmitting Confederate states, not to mention our nation's heinous treatment of Native Americans.

Before World War I, bigotry, discrimination, eugenics, ignorance, inequity, Jim Crow, poverty, racism, racial violence, white supremacy (Confederate statues!) and xenophobia, etc., were pernicious social plagues. The downsides of industrialization only added to our many challenges.

1917-1945 brought a flu pandemic (1918) and Great Depression. Communism and fascism infected Europe. Hitler and Stalin, two of history's deadliest dictators, gained power. Meanwhile, Imperial Japan wreaked havoc in Asia. Untold millions died and nations were left in ruins

The post-World War II era (1945-1965) generated unprecedented prosperity for many, plus a huge "Baby Boom." Religious participation statistics at the time were like "a pig in a python," a numerical bulge never seen before or since. Our church is a microcosm of that history!

As Tom Brokaw's "greatest generation" aged and died, civic and religious organizations did as well, as did the manufacturing sector that supported their prosperity. We then witnessed the great "emptying out" of cities, factories, and churches, changing our landscape dramatically.

After peaking in the 1960s, it has been downhill ever since for denominations and churches. Now, 60 years later, the bottom has fallen out. People under 40 have abandoned institutional religion in great numbers, even evangelical churches. Yes, they also are seeing decline.

By 2023, our 168-year-old German Reformed church finally gave way to the unrelenting social forces of the past 60 years, eroding us from almost 1,000 members to 132, while the closest UCC seminary (Lancaster) just welcomed only two new Master of Divinity students.

If there was ever a time calling for creativity and courage, change and innovation, it is now!

The very thing we are so tempted to do is the worst thing we could possibly do: to seek to go back to an imagined time when America was "great" and the churches were full. Seriously?

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You resisted the temptation to call a savior-pastor to refill your pews (without changing anything, of course!). You acknowledged reality and made the courageous decision to move towards an unknown landscape, like your ancestors. They persevered in faith, and you can, too!

While uncertainty will be our constant companion in 2024, so will Christ be our Companion as well! May he grant us grace, peace, and courage for the days ahead!

+ Bruce Greer.



FROM THE PULPIT IN JANUARY

[Sermon emphasis is on the underlined passage(s).]

1ST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY – JANUARY 7 (Epiphany Observed)

“By Another Road”

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14;
Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 3:1-12

2ND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY – JANUARY 14

“A Strange and Wonderful Calling”

1 Samuel 3:1-20; Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18;
1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:41-53

3RD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY – JANUARY 21

“Get Up, and Go!”

Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Psalm 62:5-12;
1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20.

4TH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY – JANUARY 28

Rev. Keith Tussing, guest preacher



REV. GREER'S SCHEDULE

Bruce is usually in Myerstown Sundays (8A-Noon), Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. He works at home in Baltimore on Mondays (feel free to contact him there). The “Pastor’s Day of Rest” is Friday. The Church Office will be advised of any changes to his schedule. Drop by to say “Hello!”

Bruce’s Contact information:

Email: revbgreer@gmail.com

Cell: 617.599.6305

(calls, texts, 24/7)



Cancellations Due to Inclement Weather

If the weather is bad, we may cancel a worship service. Information will be sent in an email blast as soon as the decision is made. Those who do not use email may contact Pastor Greer or Marie Hibshman (717-343-3247).

If you would like us to call you, please notify the church office at 717-866-5252.

***** ADULT STUDY OPPORTUNITY: ISRAEL & GAZA

Starting January 14, the Sunday Adult Class will study the Israeli-Palestinian conflict using Walter Brueggemann’s 60-page study book, *Chosen? Reading the Bible Amid the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (2015). We thought it was time to study this horrible problem more deeply, because there is “no straight line from the Old Testament to this war.”

The author, widely respected across the theological spectrum, offers four chapters: (1) “Reading the Bible Amid the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” (2) “God’s Chosen People: Claim and Problem” (3) “Holy Land?” and (4) “Zionism and Israel.” Brueggemann offers a balanced, biblical, historical approach to the problem that avoids biased, one-sided support or opposition.

Rev. Greer will lead the discussion and offer another weekday study group starting in February should there be sufficient interest. Please let him know so he can order more books.

P.S. My heartfelt thanks to all for the generous cash gift for Christmas! Much appreciated!





JANUARY

- 9—Hannah Rosen
- 13—Carol Batdorff
- 14—Deborah Miller
- 16—Russell Brightbill
Kory Leppo
- 21—Kimberly Rittle
- 28—Jim Miller
- 30—Larry Eisenhauer



Thank you!

Dear Members of Myerstown UCC:
 We were recently notified of your gift of \$1,000, which was placed in our Benevolent Fund. Your generosity will touch the lives of real people and enhance our mission to provide compassionate care and services.

UCC Homes' greatest area of need continues to be the securing of sufficient funding to meet the growing financial need of residents who are unable to pay for the cost of their care and who do not have access to governmental assistance programs. We are able to meet this need because of your commitment to our ministry to the elderly.

Helping people, reaching out a helping hand to someone who needs our concern is what UCC Homes is all about. Because of your continued support in this effort, it is what you are about also.

Sincerely,
 Victoria Velez,
 Dir. Of Public Relations & Fund Development



Important! If you would like to receive your end-of-year giving statement, either email or a paper copy by mail, please let the office know by Thursday, January 18th, 2024. Our email is myerstownucc@comcast.net or call 717/866-5252 to request a copy.

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



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<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRDGqMFCollc92-GCEsUQ@myerstownucc2072>



Blessings to you in the New Year

May peace fill your world,
 May love fill your home with contentment
 and happiness too—
 In wonderful ways
 May this year of new days
 Be filled with sweet blessings for you.