

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.



May 2023

Volume 42, Issue 5

editor: Lee Ann Kurash

from the Interim Pastor..

“What’s Next?”

After worship on June 4, we will gather for a “Town Hall Meeting” regarding what’s next for our church over the next 1-to-3 years. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of this meeting and the decision that looms before us: Do we stay put, hoping for the best, or close our church?

Yes, the decision is that straightforward: stay open or close.

Our “Vision Team” has gathered data, read a lot of material, and interviewed folks. Nine options emerged: from the most passive (continue “as is” as long as possible), to the most aggressive (3-to-5-year renewal plan with a full-time pastor), to the most draconian (close and disband), and other in-between options. The question is this: which one makes the most sense for such a time as this?

The Team will weigh the pros and cons of each option. If we continue “as is,” how long can we survive? If we aggressively pursue renewal, do we have the pastoral and lay leadership, the funds and the will, to go for it? Or, should we “complete our ministry” and close our church in a thoughtful way?

What is the most responsible use of our God-given resources? Do we have the spiritual, emotional, and physical energy to keep going? If we open our facilities for wider ministry and community service, do we have sufficient staff and volunteers to manage our property? Is continuing “as is” good stewardship, with our spacious, well-maintained facilities empty 95% of the time?

Can we say in good conscience that we are making a good faith effort? Are we working towards finding clarity of purpose and direction? Even if we do not have all the answers, can we agree on a sense of direction? What do we need to do *together* over the next 1-3 years? Should we continue downsizing, or should we “resize” for renewal? So many questions needing answers!

I have studied church growth and decline since the 1970s, devoting seven of those years to post-seminary graduate education, research, and publishing. “Mainline” Protestant churches and denominations like ours have declined steadily since Baby Boomers came of age, especially from the 1970s onward. The downward trend continues. Church closures and clergy shortages are increasing.

I also chaired a task force 20 years ago to explore merging three southern New England conferences (i.e., Regions) in my denomination, with the help of a consultant from our national headquarters. These Regions are now even weaker. Programs, staff, and budgets continued to decline. Why? They balked at merger. They kicked the can down the road! Inaction has only exacerbated the problem.

At both the regional and local church level, I consistently encounter limited knowledge of broader cultural and religious trends; limited knowledge of who is doing well, and why (plus, ill-informed criticism of megachurches); and, limited knowledge of best practices. I continually encounter archaic ministry models and by-laws, risk aversion and change resistance; worst of all, *inaction!*

In 2006 I became the Interim Senior Minister at one of my denomination’s largest churches. The outgoing Senior Pastor believed that the church’s decline was her fault (from Easter attendance of 1500 down to 850 during her 13-year tenure). My reply: “It is your fault. It’s everyone else’s fault. It’s no one’s fault!” She and they excelled in so many ways; but fell short in other ways.

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Even congregations with the most talented pastors and staff, lay leaders and congregants, excellent ministries and programs, experience decline. At Myerstown UCC, "It is your fault. It's everyone else's fault. It's no one's fault!" The external and internal causes of our decline are many. It started 50 years ago and bottomed out during COVID. And so we grieve our losses and wonder what's ahead.

The choices we must make are right in front of us. We can be proactive, reactive, or inactive. We can accept the challenge and engage opportunities, or sit back and pray for the best, or just give in and give up. What does God want from us? That's the question!

+ Blessings, Bruce Greer, Interim Pastor

FROM THE PULPIT IN MAY

Rev. Greer preaching each Sunday.

(Underlined = passage receiving primary emphasis.)

5TH SUNDAY OF EASTER – MAY 7

"How Can We Know the Way?"

Asking for directions or longing for guidance?

John 14:1-14

6TH SUNDAY IN EASTER – MAY 14

"Now What?"

(Mother's Day; Ascension Observed)

From Book 1 to Book 2, now as then?

Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47;

Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-53

7TH SUNDAY IN EASTER – MAY 21

"Is This the Time?"

What do we do in the meantime?

Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68;

1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11; John 17:1-11

PENTECOST SUNDAY – MAY 28

"Amazed and Perplexed"

Filled with wine or fired up with hope?

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104;

1 Corinthians 3b-13; John 7:37-39



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

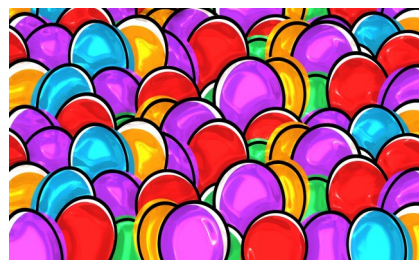
Cell: 617.599.6305

(calls, texts, 24/7)



Our Indoor Easter Egg Hunt Was a Success!

Sophia, Julian, Jacob, Noah, Meadow, Ava, and Max had a fabulous time hunting for Easter eggs. Noah was heard counting to 19 as he was placing eggs in his overflowing bucket. Mrs. Derr is in the background. She and her husband left their daughter's home in VA at 6 am with Ava and Max to arrive in time for the "frondtastic" Easter Egg Hunt this Palm Sunday!



Thank you Melanie Bennetch for organizing our 'frondtastic' Easter Egg Hunt!

THE COST OF AGING GRACEFULLY

We all know that as we grow older, various health issues appear that require health care maintenance. Hopefully, with proper care, we all age gracefully.

Well, aging issues are also prevalent in our church's physical structures. In order for our facilities to age gracefully, they require constant maintenance. This past year has presented an extended list of those aging issues that need our attention.

Starting with our Christmas Eve heating problems and facing 'must take care of' repairs, such as partial roof replacement, elevator pump replacement, old parish house boiler replacement, exterior column repairs, Mt. Hope Cemetery driveway repairs, and various lesser problems, we are committed to a financial burden of over \$150,000.

All of these aforementioned costs are in addition to our normal annual expenses. Of course, this places additional financial costs on all of us at a time when many of our personal expenses are increasing due to inflation.

With trust in our Christian mission, and our full resolve to support the future of our church, we will be assured she will continue to grow older, gracefully.

Ed Hibshman

"VISION TEAM" UPDATE

The "Vision Team" continues to prepare for our next open forum with the congregation: a *Town Hall Meeting on Sunday June 4th after worship.* Please pray for the Team: Lindy Bennetch, Travis Bicher, Doug Bohannon, Bill Brown, Lee Ann Kurash, and Charlee Redick, led by Interim Pastor, Bruce Greer.



Mother's Day is Sunday, May 14th, 2023
image by Katchi from Pixabay



Thank you to our congregation for helping with the beautification of our church's sanctuary for Easter Sunday!

Decorating Committee

Dear Myerstown UCC Members:

Penn Central Conference has recently notified us of your 3/21/2023 gift of \$1,000 from the people of Myerstown UCC which was placed in our Benevolent Fund. Without congregations like yours, so many people would not be able to receive the assistance they need. UCC Homes greatest area of need continues to be the securing of sufficient funds who are unable to pay for the cost of their care and who do not have access to governmental assistance. Please convey our thanks to your congregation. 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 M. Velez

Dir. of Public Relations

Dear Myerstown United Church of Christ:

Thank you for your continued support of LCCM and our vision: Investing in People. Improving Lives.

Your blessing will help LCCM to provide for the record-breaking numbers of households being served. The first six months of our fiscal year saw over 1,000 households served from our pantry, over 2,500 households served in our Federal program distribution, and almost 14,000 noon meals served.

Sincerely, Bryan D. Smith

Lebanon County Christian Ministries

May Wish List

We are in dire need of the following personal care items

- ~ size 6 and 7 diapers
- ~ alcohol-free mouthwash
- ~ men's & women's deodorant
- ~ bar soap
- ~ disposable razors
- ~ feminine hygiene products
- ~ shaving cream
- ~ toothpaste (5 oz. or larger)
- ~ tissues
- ~ toilet paper
- ~ paper towels
- ~ dish soap
- ~ laundry detergent

Current Wish List

- ~ canned pineapple in fruit juice
- ~ 24 oz. jars/cans tomato sauce
- ~ soups—Chunky/Progresso (ready made—no water added)
- ~ instant brown rice and whole grain blends
- ~ salad dressing
- ~ olive oil
- ~ Whole grain pasta
- ~ ketchup, mayo, mustard

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

LCCM 2023 EVENT SPONSORSHIP GUIDE

Golf Tournament - May 12, 2023

Lebanon Valley Golf Course

\$75 per golfer (\$300 per foursome)

Online registration at lccm.us

Proceeds benefit all programs at LCCM

Hurdles to Housing—August –September

This 30-day fundraiser is a peer-to-peer event happening over the course of a 30-day period. Individuals and teams can complete challenges on their own time to raise funds.

To raise awareness of homelessness and funds for FRESH Start Emergency Shelter.

For information on any of these events, please contact Dan Trimble 717/272-4400 x211.

OUTREACH

One Great hour of Sharing

If you have not yet turned in your donation to OGHS, this is the last reminder from the Vineyard. Keep in mind that donations can be accepted any time but the Lenten and Easter time is the time that traditionally churches make the OGHS offering. Keep in mind also the many needs that exist in the entire world, of which we are a part. Any amount is appreciated and if our offerings can help just a few lives to be better then we will have fulfilled a portion of the overall offerings from many churches. Many thanks for your prayerful donations.

C. Williams



Thank You... 'It takes a village' of members and others who work behind the scenes to get things done that you may not have thought about! We want to extend a great big THANK YOU to the following:

- * Lee Ann Kurash and family, Ed & Candy Hibshman, Susan Herr and Carolyn Williams for supplying Conversational refreshments
- * Jen Blystone, Sarah Wagner, Susan Herr, Thomas Kissinger, and Mark Herr for providing magnificent Easter music
- * Marcia Bicher for decorating our sanctuary and other areas for the Easter season
- * Amber Beamesderfer and Gavin Bicher for helping with live-streaming our Sunday worship
- * Travis Bicher for manning the sound system
- * Jen and David Blystone, Steve Wagner for changing the altar paraments with each season
- * Fritz Firestine for repairing a multitude of property issues
- * Ed Hibshman for shouldering the responsibility of all the decisions needed to maintain our properties





May

- 2—Carl Gettle
- 3—Stephen Wagner
- 9—Gifford Krause
- 11—Brenda Baum,
Andrew Fields and
Suzie Schott
- 13—Jeremy Zimmerman
- 14—Mark Wartluft
- 15—Priscilla Kahl
Beckett Zimmerman
- 20—Matthew Berger
Dawn Hassler
Larry Hibshman
- 23—Bohdan Adams
Cathy Ryland
- 27—Delaney Houtz
Sheree Nordall
David Risser
- 28—Emma N. Behm
Warren Bennetch



Music to my ears...

Music is such a big part of our lives. We play music when we are happy, when we want to celebrate, when we are going through trials, we play music that speaks to our souls. Music truly is the universal language.

One such song that speaks to all of us, is the hymn '**Amazing Grace**.' That is the hymn that I remember my grandmother singing when I was a child. You could tell, when she sang it what it meant to her.

(cont'd in next column)



Music to my ears... (cont'd)

'Amazing Grace has become one of the most hauntingly beautiful Christian hymns in the world. Many famous faces have covered the iconic song, from Elvis Presley to Aretha Franklin and Johnny Cash.

It's estimated that Amazing Grace has been performed over 10 million times and has impressively appeared on over 11,000 albums worldwide.

Amazing Grace was written by author John Newton. In 1748, Newton was travelling from Africa to Liverpool and got caught up in an awful storm. The weather conditions were so severe that Newton was said to have called out to God asking for mercy. Newton considered himself to be an atheist at this point, so this was a last-ditch effort in an attempt to somehow survive. It's quite surprising to a lot of people that he then went on to write one of the world's most recognizable songs about God and faith. His arrival in beautiful Ireland played an influential role in changing his life, marking the start of his return to Christianity. Newton went on to become an Anglican Priest, a vocation that would enable him to write many hymns.

The song represents the personal journey many people can relate to; wanting to find meaning in our lives through faith. It offers hope to those who are wishing to become better and positively change their life, yet it does not appear judgemental. It is a song that has transcended any one meaning but its universal message stays the same.

Surprisingly, there was never any music written for the song. Newton's lyrics were attached to several different traditional tunes. Eventually in 1835 composer William Walker added the lyrics of Amazing Grace to a recognizable tune called "New Britain" and the rest is history.

It is a song people sing at defining moments in their lives, including funerals. It was also a song sung by human rights activists.

To think it all began in a violent storm that led a man to the shores of Ireland, inspiring him to take a new path in life. The story behind the song is pretty remarkable.'

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.'*

excerpt from [www.connollycove.com/
amazinggracesong](http://www.connollycove.com/amazinggracesong)



Memorial Day, the holiday, was created to honor the many American men and women who died in military service. This focus on those who made the ultimate sacrifice sets it apart from Veterans' Day, which honors all military veterans, living and dead.

In 1966 the federal government declared Waterloo, New York, the official birthplace of Memorial Day.

Waterloo—which first celebrated the day on May 5, 1866—was chosen because it hosted an annual, community-wide event, during which businesses closed and residents decorated the graves of soldiers with flowers and flags.



Poppies are associated with those who died during wartime since World War I. In the U.S., people wear the red poppy on Memorial Day to honor those who died protecting the country.

The red color is not a symbol of blood, death, or support for war. Instead, poppies were the only flowers that grew in war-torn battlefields. When the countrysides were nothing but mud and devastation, poppy flowers sprouted up and flourished. The sight of the red poppies inspired one Canadian soldier, Colonel John McCrae, to pen a poem in May 1915:

In Flanders Fields

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly.
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.*

Colonel John McCrae

'When Is Memorial Day: Facts and Traditions'
www.farmersalmanac.com



WE ARE WHERE YOU ARE!

PLEASE LOOK FOR US!



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