

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.



September 2022

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editor: Lee Ann Kurash

from the Pastor.. "Who's (or, What's) Our Competition?"

"We have a lot of competition!" a faithful member told me. "There are a lot of churches around here!" How many churches are there? Look at these numbers! There are 150 churches within a 7-mile radius of our church; 70 within a 5-mile radius; and 40 churches within a 3-mile radius. That's a lot of churches!!

(**Data from The Association of Religion Data Archives; www.thearda.com).

They represent everything from Anabaptist to Catholic to Evangelical to Pentecostal to "Mainline Protestant" (e.g., Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, UCC). Why so many? Because they started in horse and buggy days, a short distance from the people they served. With automobiles and improved roads, plus farm to factory migration, city and town churches grew while many country churches stagnated.

As Northeast/Midwest industries thrived, "brand name" corporate-like denominations predominated, producing Presidents, industrialists, and cultural elites from the 1860s to the 1960s, such as John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who funded the Interchurch Center in New York City, the ultimate symbol of mainline Protestant power. As factories closed and communities changed, these Northeast/Midwest-oriented denominations lost members and churches for 40 years. We are now the faithful remnant.

Though some churches in our area represent sects (e.g., Mennonites), and others are more recent start-ups, many hang on as small "kith and kin" churches, like extended families with part-time pastors. Once mainstays in towns and cities, "tall steeple" churches like ours, with full-time seminary-trained pastors and staff, declined when industries closed, jobs left, and young people moved away. Now, we have too many churches with too few people, and downsized, underfunded denominational support systems.

Also, yours is not the only church to brood in the shadows of a megachurch. Yes, they're intimidating. Yes, they're growing. Yes, they have programs. Yet, I rarely encounter a church like yours that asks the right questions about them. I hear criticism more than curiosity. Let me ask you this: Which is worse, a megachurch where it's easy to be "entertained" and remain anonymous, or an emptied-out church that "needs members" to pay bills and fill committee "slots"? *Please be honest!*

The scores of "kith and kin" churches around us are not our competition. Neither are the "plain people" congregations (e.g., Mennonites) or the small start-ups forming to serve specific groups, such as immigrants. Our UCC sibling churches and cousins in other mainline Protestant denominations are not our competition; they are our partners in mission and ministry! Could collaborative ministry be our future?

The competition is our changing culture. When your church peaked after WWII, church attendance was at an all-time high in U.S. history. Most Americans claimed a church affiliation. Most women with children were at home. Three-day holiday weekends didn't exist and our culture supported Sunday closures and religious activities. That has changed and we're not going back.... ever. It's time to move on.

Megachurches notwithstanding, U.S. church participation has fallen for decades. My hunch is that megachurches "circulate the saints" from other churches to theirs, perhaps claiming some inactive folks along the way. (I need more data to support my claim!) Our local megachurch, "LCBC" (Lancaster County Bible Church d.b.a. "Lives Changed By Christ"), averages 19,000 per weekend in 19 locations, after humble beginnings. Could we learn something from them? They also are not our competition.

When our culture's competition is so great, and our hope falters, we are tempted to give in and give up. When the prophet Elijah lost all hope he walked into the wilderness, sat down under a broom tree, and prayed for death (1 Kings 19:4). But God still had plans for Elijah; namely, to anoint his prophetic successor and also two kings. Likewise, God is not done with us yet! So, rest and renew yourselves for a bit in the shade; then, get up and get going! The time has come!

+ Blessings, Bruce Greer, Interim Pastor.

Mission Moments

Julius Muthengi

Dear Ministry Partners, (rec'd 7/27/22)

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I trust this e-mail finds you being sheltered by God's amazing grace. Agnes and I are thankful to God for his goodness and faithfulness as we engage in the ministry he has graciously entrusted to us. Our family is fine in the Lord in spite of challenges of life. The ministry at International Leadership University is moving along well in the midst of challenges brought about by coronavirus. As I mentioned earlier, our village ministry in person meetings are restricted to small women's groups. As the subject above indicates, let me share with you some key prayer needs.

1. Pray for our country's general elections scheduled for Tuesday August 9th, 2022. Entreat God to grant Kenya a free, fair and peaceful election.
2. Pray for the 2022/2023 academic year which will start on August 15th, 2022. Pray especially for new students intake which is ongoing, that the university will get those chosen by God.
3. Pray for faculty as we prepare ourselves for the August-December semester.
4. Pray for Agnes as she shares the word of God to women at our village home on Friday July 29th, 2022 that God will grant her his favor. She will also share some foodstuff to the families, who are hunger stricken.
5. Finally, as we shared before, please continue praying for our son and daughter who are still jobless.

May God bless you and the work of your hands.

Your friends in Christ,

Julius and Agnes

Julius Muthengi, Ph.D.

Professor of Biblical & Theological Studies/Intercultural Studies
International Leadership University, Kenya

"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-

Dear Friends at Myerstown UCC, (rec'd 8/20/22)

Greetings in the wonderful name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I trust this e-mail finds you doing well. All is well with Agnes and I together with our family. We praise God for his grace, faithfulness and goodness as we labor in his ministry of training men and women at International Leadership University. We also thank him for the ministry at our village, which is impacting the community in a big way. We take it as an honor to be entrusted with this ministry which God has given to us.

As we shared with you earlier, our new academic year was scheduled to start this week. However, following last week's elections in our country, the new semester/academic year was moved to next week. After the presidential results were announced on Monday this week, it seems like the closest candidate to the president-elect is moving to the supreme court to challenge the results. Pray that God will guide the whole process, and that after the court ruling there will be no violence in the country as it has been in the previous elections. There are already minor tensions across the country, although no violence at the moment.

We are thankful to God for giving us friends like you who have stood with us in God's ministry. Indeed, your prayer and financial support has made a great difference in our lives and God's service. Our gratefulness to you cannot be expressed in human language, we believe God alone understands it all. Our prayer is that God will always bless you in a manner only he knows how to do. . . Thank you so much for your support contribution of \$290, which you sent through Grace Community Church in August.,2022. Be assured of our continued prayers.

Your brother and sister,

Julius and Agnes





Special Outreach for September

During September our special mission offering will be Neighbors in Need (NIN), a program of the United Church of Christ that supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. One-third of NIN funds support the Council for American Indian Ministry. Two-thirds of this offering is used by the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries to support a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects through grants. Neighbors in Need grants are awarded to UCC churches and organizations doing justice work in their communities. These grants fund projects whose work ranges from direct service to community organizing and advocacy to address systemic injustice. This year, special consideration will be given to projects focusing on serving our immigrant neighbors and communities. Many UCC congregations will receive the NIN offering on October 2, 2022 as part of their World Communion Sunday observance but we will accept contributions throughout September.

ALL-CHURCH "TOWN HALL" MEETING **"Pondering Our Past; Planning for Our Future"** Sunday, September 25th, 10:00 AM (following worship)

After enjoying refreshments following worship, Rev. Greer will start sharing his findings with the congregation. After interviewing about 40 people, reviewing our church's archives, and researching denominational statistics going back to the 1960s, he has some hard facts to share with us. Going forward, in collaboration with church leaders and members, the UCC conference, and other helpful resources, Bruce's ultimate aim is to help us identify the best options for our church going forward. He will share a lot of information with us on handouts. Please plan to attend!

New Horizons September 24, 2022 @ 1:00 pm
Amish Dinner \$20 all inclusive. Address is:
5799 Elizabethtown Road, Manheim. Dinner includes Roast beef, baked chicken, mashed potatoes, buttered noodles, corn, lettuce salad, red beets, homemade bread, peanut butter spread, ice cream, shoofly pie, apple pie, coffee,

tea, and water. Payment due by September 10th. If you need directions or want to follow Donna, call 717/865-0163.

FROM THE PULPIT IN SEPTEMBER

September 4 (Pentecost+13)
Rev. Keith Tussing

September 11 (Pentecost+14)
Rev. Keith Tussing

September 18 (Pentecost+15)
Rev. Greer
A Good Lesson from a Bad Example
Luke 16:1-13 and 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

September 25 (Pentecost+16)
Rev. Greer
Your Money or Your Life
Luke 16:19-31 and 1 Timothy 6:6-12, 17-19

REV. GREER'S SCHEDULE

**** Please note: Bruce will be on vacation Sept. 1-14 ****

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)

ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL DISCUSSION CLASS

We will meet for our first class on Sunday, September 18, 2022. We will meet from 10:00am until 10:45 am.

Discussions will focus on the lectionary passages for that Sunday. We will also discuss any thoughts or ideas concerning the pastor's message.

Our room is located at the top of the stairs in the rear of our building. Consider this as your personal invitation to attend.

Marie Hibshman and Jim Diehm



Lebanon County Christian Ministries September Wish List

- ~ Canned pineapple ~
- ~ 24 oz jars/cans of tomato sauce
- ~ soup—tomato, cream of chicken, cream of mushroom (low-sodium preferred)
- ~ Broth
- ~ Gravy
- ~ Instant au gratin potato mix
- ~ Instant brown rice
- ~ Instant oatmeal

We are in dire need of the following personal care items

- ~ toothpaste
- ~ deodorant
- ~ body wash
- ~ paper towels
- ~ alcohol-free mouthwash
- ~ face bar soap
- ~ shaving cream
- ~ feminine hygiene products
- ~ laundry detergent
- ~ shampoo
- ~ conditioner
- ~ toilet paper
- ~ tissues
- ~ bar soap
- ~ disposable razors

Lebanon County Christian Ministries continues to operate as a help agency for Lebanon County. **Thank you for your ongoing support. Remember that besides food and clothing, other services are available at LCCM.** If you have a need, please call LCCM at 717/272-4400.

Dear Myerstown United Church of Christ,

The cost of groceries is getting more expensive for everyone but is creating a financial strain for many low-income families.

LCCM served 192 households in March in our food pantry – the highest monthly number since March 2020. That number however decreased to 111 households in April. We thank you for your gift of \$975 and are so appreciative of your generous support to help ensure our community doesn't go without food in these trying times.

Sincerely, Bryan Smith
Executive Director /LCCM

A Back to School Prayer

Dear God, we pray for your blessing and favor today over our teachers, our kids, and our schools. Please allow your face to shine on them today, be gracious to them Lord. Fill them with your Spirit and light; and give them peace in every circumstance. We know that every gift and blessing come straight from your hand. We will not take it for granted. Remind us today of your great love and care over all those we love. We thank you Lord that you work powerfully on our behalf, and we commit our ways to you. May each purpose and plan you have for our teachers, succeed, flourish, and prosper in every way. In Jesus' Name, Amen. (by [Debbie McDaniel](#) via crosswalk.com)



Thank you -

To Sara Zeller for faithfully sending cards to our Members in Care

To Kathy Grose for designing cards for Sara to send
Greg Beamesderfer for cleaning up the trash that someone dumped in the cemetery

Jim Miller for the extra effort mowing and picking up the grass clippings in preparation for our Community Event

Emily Frantz for planning that event—scheduling the Perseverance Band, finding available food trucks and renting the inflatable obstacle course

Melanie Bennetch for providing the lawn games

Marie Hibshman and Candy Hibshman for making the phone calls to obtain needed help and all the volunteers who said 'yes' to the call

Thanks to Travis Bicher for entertaining everyone while they enjoyed their sandwiches and ice cream

Ed Hibshman, Travis Bicher, Fritz Firestine for removing cabinets from the Parish House and installing them in the new office spaces, as well as moving lots of furniture, boxes full of office supplies, and drawers full of files

Myerstown UCC Community Event: A Success!

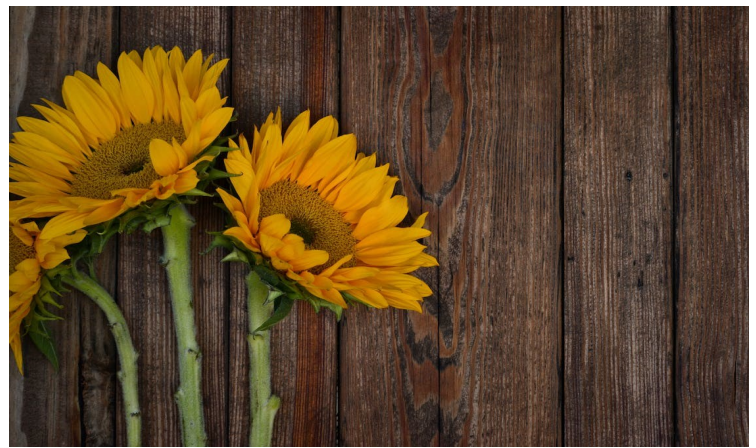
Thank you to everyone who organized, attended, supported, and volunteered for our July 31st community Event. Food and ice cream trucks, an inflatable obstacle course, lawn games, and outstanding music by Travis Bicher and the Perseverance Band of Lebanon brought smiling faces, full bellies, and music-warmed hearts. We look forward to continuing efforts to welcome and get to know our community. If you would be interested in being part of a planning group or have ideas to share, please contact a member of church council.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY

September

- 1—Shirley Krall, Judith Stohler
- 5—Stella Driscoll
- 8—Kathy Kale
- 9—Karen Line
- 11—Greg Beamesderfer, Ryan Leppo
- 12—Marlene Bowman
- 15—Mark Herr
- 17—Bonita Beamesderfer,
Loretta Weaver
- 18—Joanne Ondrusek
- 19—Larry Rabold
- 21—Jessica Behm
- 23—Mim Loose, Patrick Yeager
- 26—Ronald Houtz
- 27—Jane Fuhrman, Jacqueline Kulp
- 28—Derek Behm



Important!

The office will be closed Monday, September 5 in observance of Labor Day. It will then be open Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday (September 6, 7 & 8) from 9:00 am—1:00 pm.

Myerstown Women's Club will meet Tuesday, September 6th at 7:00 pm in the social hall.

Troop 20 Scouts Spaghetti Dinner will be held on Saturday, September 10 from 4:00 pm—7:00 pm in the social hall. This is a take-out event only. Tickets are \$9.00 and must be purchased in advance. They will provide take-out containers. Please contact Scott Hentz, Scout Master, to purchase tickets at 717/507-8804.

**September's Council meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 20th at 6:30 pm.



Monday, September 5, 2022 is

Labor Day

What Labor Day Means

For most people, Labor Day means two things: a day off and a chance to say goodbye to the summer. But why is it called **Labor Day**? Labor Day is a day set aside to pay tribute to working men and women. It has been celebrated as a national holiday in the United States and Canada since 1894. So enjoy your Long weekend!

