

Parish Happenings

December 2015

FROM PASTOR CHAD



Bronze plaque inside the Statue of Liberty:
The New Colossus, by Emma Lazarus*

Advent and Hebrews 13, Do Belong Together

You may remember back, a couple Sundays ago, that when we completed our sermon series on the book of Hebrews we really never made it to the end. Advent got here just a bit too quickly and we didn't read through to the end.

In hindsight I think it was a mistake to move on without reading the thirteenth and final chapter. "Here, in the closing chapter of one of the great documents of early Christianity, we find sex, power, money, suffering and Jesus. What's more, he's the one who makes sense of all the rest. He is the same 'yesterday, today and for ever'."**

By reading through to the end we discover that the struggles of the early Christians remain the great challenges to the Church today. Hebrews continues, to this day, to proclaim that Jesus is a powerful antidote to the headlines we read every morning. I can't read Hebrews 13:2 without thinking about the millions of Syrian (and other) refugees seeking asylum and escape from their war torn county. This is a group of people longing for restoration, renewal, rescue, and hope. And for some reason our national debate has turned bitter toward the very few refugees from Syria that our nation had planned to welcome in the next year.

I am not under the illusion that we live in a "Christian nation," however, a majority of our congress and voters alike continue to identify themselves as Christians, and yet I have found too much of the rhetoric, regarding refugees, to be disturbing and terribly unchristian.

Radical hospitality, not fear, was the way of Jesus our "great high priest." It has always been God's intention for God's people,** and remains our call and Christian duty.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Hebrews 13:2(NRSV)

As Christians living in a democracy it is our responsibility to advocate, just as the prophets of the Hebrew scriptures exhorted Israel, for the homeless, the weak, and the economically disadvantaged (this is the meaning of the Hebrew word for alien found throughout the Old Testament). I believe it is not only theologically correct to include refugees in this category, but a biblical/theological imperative.

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Advent is a season of hope and the expectation of God's Kingdom. It is a time in the church year when we not only celebrate God's coming, but we remind ourselves what it looks like when God's people live as those with the hope of a restored world. It is a season of challenge as much as it is a season of expectation because we are prodded by the scriptures, the themes, and the story to explore what it means to *be* an Advent people.

As Christ's Church we are not a people who live in fear, act in fear, speak from fear, or ignore our call to radical hospitality because of fear. I was struck on Sunday, in worship by the song by Rend Collective that was sung (*Build Your Kingdom Here*). The lyrics, like many a psalm and Advent reading, are a prayer for God to come and

build God's Kingdom in and through us. The final verse says, "Awake the Kingdom seed in us. Fill us with the strength and love of Christ. We are your church, we are the hope on earth"

Are we or are we not building God's Kingdom?

May this Advent be for each of us a time of reflection, renewal, and hope, but may it also be a time to hear again the words of the prophets, remember the radical hospitality of Jesus, and an opportunity to speak and act without fear and with the love of Christ.



STEWARDSHIP CAMPAIGN

There are a million reasons and ways to give to our LVPC community, but as the Christmas season arrives, please remember your pledges as a sign of gratitude for all that LVPC means to you. By now, you have received our 2016 pledge drive letter from the finance team – please take the time in the coming weeks to reflect on what LVPC represents to you and your family, and consider how you can share your gifts of time, talent, and money with our vibrant (and growing!) community.

EVENING CIRCLE

The next meeting of the Evening Circle will be December 16th at 7 p.m.

WESTMINSTER COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP AVAILABLE

Westminster College in New Wilmington, PA is offering a \$68,000 four-year scholarship available for two rising high school seniors. This "Young Presbyterian Scholars Program" is available to student who possess at least a 3.5 (cumulative) high school GPA, are members of the PC(USA) and are formally nominated by a pastor/ congregation. Please see Pastor Chad for more information.

* *The New Colossus*

*Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glowes world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"
Emma Lazarus, 1883 placed in the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty in 1903*

** Tom Wright, *Hebrews for Everyone*, p. 168.

*** Malachi 3:5, "Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against... those who thrust aside the alien)..."

MISSION NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

Appalachia Toy Drive: Each year, teens from a local high school head up a "toy mission" and travel down to southwest West Virginia at the base of the Appalachian Mountains. There, they host a holiday party for 80-100 impoverished children, age 10 and under, and their families. **We are collecting new, unwrapped toys for children ages 4-10.** All gifts need to be brought in **by December 13th**. There is a box in the Narthex for drop off. Thank you!

Newark Christian School Christmas Program: We have been invited to visit the school to watch its Christmas program on **December 18th at 7:00 p.m.** We sponsor Genesis at this school.

Soup Kitchen Volunteers Needed: We are planning another day of service at Elijah's Promise in New Brunswick on **Saturday, January 9th from 10:30-1:30.** We need two more adult volunteers. If you would like to participate, please contact Abby Ernst.

Giving Fair: The Giving Fair was on Saturday, November 14th. It was a very successful, joyful and engaging event! So far we have raised \$9,789. There is still time to donate and buy symbolic gifts from all the wonderful

organizations represented at the Giving Fair. Check out their information on our website at lowervalley.org and/or pick up a gift booklet located in the Narthex. Merry Christmas!

Local Action Team: *A Day Spent Helping the Local Action Team submitted by Nicole Dahl*

"Part of the ongoing conversation about mission at LVPC has left many pointing out the needs in our local community. Because of these local needs, our church has created the Local Action Team. We are basically looking to help members of our community with household chores, repairs or other similar types of service the Lord calls us to perform. The Local Action Team recently performed yard clean-ups for two different families with needs, but the results were both the same. Not only did we clear the yards but

we had a blast while doing it! It felt amazing doing something for our local community, but honestly, it was a lot of fun simply bonding with the church family. We enjoyed conversations and laughing while working alongside one another. It was wonderful watching the middle school and high school aged children step up to keep an eye on the younger children. They really led them, cared for them, and had fun with



them. For me there wasn't a single point during that day that felt at all like work. It felt good, it felt right and it felt like so much more than just raking leaves. I was so touched by this experience and I hope you will consider joining us on our next adventure."



UNICEF Sewing Project: We teamed up with UNICEF and Delilah from 106.7 Lite FM to sew hats for premature babies in Haiti. We made 20 hats! Some people also donated beautiful knitted hats, so we sent a total of 25 hats to this worthy cause. Great job!

As always, if you have an idea for Mission or would like to join the team, please contact Abby Ernst.



HOMEMADE SOUPS!!

Please support our ASP Mission Trip this summer by purchasing delicious homemade soups made by our church families. Our group that travels with ASP is helping to keep those families less fortunate warmer, safer and drier! Look for members of our ASP team during Fellowship in the Parish Hall!

PRAYER CHAIN

The Prayer Chain is an email distribution group of people from our LVPC family. Prayer requests are forwarded to Wendy Garcia and then Wendy forwards the prayer to the entire group. If you would like your email address

added to the Prayer Chain, please send Wendy an email at kwgarcia@msn.com.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Sometimes we make the mistake of associating Sunday School with art projects and crafts. While using our children's creativity is an absolute form of worshiping and praising our lord, undoubtedly our children are well aware of the world and the church around them. With the youngest children, we have been working on fun ways to share our joys and concerns. The things that these children have been sharing have been nothing short of hysterical, but often extremely powerful. In the same way, the 4/5 grade kids have been learning about reaching out to others in need. They have written and illustrated 13 cards to church members who are in poor health and in need of support. They also prepared 11 Christmas cards to send to those who are unable to get out easily. Our kids know the needs of our church community, dare I say, better than some of our adults. As we enter into the Advent season, and our kids get to work on the Christmas play, we look forward to our children learning, serving faithfully, and having fun with our church family.

MEMBERS NEEDED: SANCTUARY REMODEL PROJECT

Session has been discussing the desire to revamp the Sanctuary. New carpet? New paint? Remodeled and/or a new bathroom? Decor? If you have ideas and want to give input, we are looking for members to be part of the remodeling team. Responsibilities include meeting with the team on a regular basis, helping to design the plan and helping to raise the funds needed. If you are interested, please contact Stephanie Donlon, Abby Ernst or Warren Newman.

GOLD'S GYM OPPORTUNITY

Gold's Gym in Hackettstown is holding its 2nd Annual Places of Worship promotion. For each member of our church who joins Gold's Gym by December 31, 2015, 50% of the enrollment fee will be donated back to LVPC. This is a wonderful gift you can give yourself to nourish your body, mind and spirit. What a great way to begin the New Year! Call Kim at Gold's Gym at 852-4141 for more information.

NOMINATING TEAM

LVPC has the same need for solid leadership required by any organization, community, or country. Each fall our nominating team is tasked with listening for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and through careful discernment, nominating (for election by the congregation) Elders who will guide us well.

I believe church Elders have a very challenging task because they are called to be spiritual leaders of the church and not simply political leaders. They “are chosen by the congregation to discern and measure its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life.” (*Book of Order*, G-2.0301) While our session manages our budget, building, and activities, they are also responsible for paying attention to how God is moving and how God is calling us to be the Church. Serving our church in this way is, for many, a very

fulfilling and rewarding experience.

We have enjoyed very strong Elders over the past 8 years and I’m grateful for the good leadership that has brought us to this point in our history. However, we continue to need solid leadership. Our Elders can serve no more than 2 consecutive 3-year terms and in the next few years some of our strong, committed leadership will be cycling off of the Session. They will no doubt be called to other forms of service within the life of our congregation.

The nominating team has met and begun asking some members to prayerfully consider whether God is calling them to leadership in our congregation. The nominating team is not on a quest to fill quotas, but instead to approach faithful, committed, and talented members and help them discern how God is calling them to use their gifts. If you

are interested in knowing more or in serving as an Elder please don’t hesitate to contact anyone on the the nominating committee or Pastor Chad or any of the current or past members of our session.

Nominating Team

John Leddie – moderator

Christina Wilson

Jeff Dahl

Marilyn El-Zahr

As the Church, our place in the community and in the culture is always shifting and changing and our leaders are called to help us adapt and change. I pray that our congregation will continue to be lead by Elders who understand their transformational role and are willing to carefully listen for God’s guidance.

– *Pastor Chad*

CHRISTMAS TREE SALE

It’s not too late to help sell trees. There are still time slots available. Sign up sheets are in the parish hall. Also, thanks to everyone who helped with the pick-up of the trees!! All proceeds from this year’s sale will benefit the ASP trip this summer as well as our Local Action Team!



Get the newsletter via e-mail so you can enjoy the full color version! Call or e-mail Claudia in the office — 832-2933 or lowervalleypc@embarqmail.com

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Church Info:

Claudia Gilbert: Church Administrator

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Website: www.lowervalley.org

Office hours: W-F, 8:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Session Members

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Upcoming Servers

Date	Liturgist	Ushers	Communion Servers
December 6	Dick Kline	Janet and Gary Kipp	Stephanie Donlon Judy Eckwielen Lisamarie Boehm OPEN
December 13	Nancy Knight	Kirk Petrik OPEN	
December 20	Judy Eckwielen	Terry Hoffman OPEN	
December 24 4:30 p.m.	N/A	OPEN OPEN	
December 24 7:30 p.m.	Marilyn El-Zahr	Karen and Warren Newman	
December 27 — Family Worship	OPEN	Anthony and Carole Casale	
January 3	Warren Newman	Cindy and Tim O'Keefe	OPEN OPEN OPEN OPEN
January 10	Christina Wilson	Janet and Gary Kipp	
January 17	Judy Eckwielen	Madeleine Argue Terry Hoffman	
January 24	Dick Kline	Lisa Coffaro Isabel Roppolo	
January 31	Terry Hoffman	Judy Eckwielen OPEN	

**If you are able to serve in an OPEN spot,
please let Claudia know. Thanks!!**

December 2015
Lower Valley Presbyterian Church
445 County Road 513
Califon, NJ 07830

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.