

Parish Happenings

December 2016

FROM PASTOR CHAD

Empathize with Today's Young People

The last two months I wrote about the recent book, *Growing Young*, which identifies common strategies that churches growing young have in common. This month I will highlight the second of the six strategies (as the book does, but in no particular order of importance.) This month we'll take a brief look at the authors' challenge to churches that want to grow young to "Empathize with Today's Young People".

The chapter begins by describing how a lack of understanding what is behind many of the questions that young people ask is the thing that drives them away from church rather than deeper into the community of faith. By definition "...empathizing is 'the work you do to understand people... It is your effort to understand the way they do things and why, their physical and emotional needs, how they think about the world, and what is meaningful to them.' In other words, it's sitting on the curb of a young person's life, celebrating their dreams and grieving over their despair." (GY, page 91-92)

As simple as this definition sounds, "sitting on the curb" of someone else's life might be the toughest concept raised in the book. In fact I have a strong suspicion that a lack of *empathy* might just be the thing that is hurting our nation the most at this point in our history (for more on this see my excursus: *Empathy, the Missing Ingredient*.*)

Churches that are *growing young* are churches that make a point of understanding youth and what makes them tick. The book identifies "the three ultimate questions" that teenagers are facing:

Who am I?

Where do I fit?

What difference do I make?

They also point out that these questions may seem familiar because in some way we all have them. However, for most of us beyond adolescence (over 30) they are present on the "back-burner" instead of being "at a constant, churning boil." These are question of identity, belonging, and purpose and while "who am I?" is a self-focused question, the other two are examples of youth looking to find a place as part of a community and very often how they might be part of making the world a better place.

If we can empathize with our youth and seek to understand how their constant texting, social media obsessions, and music we don't understand are simply a means of searching for identity, belonging, and purpose we will have a much better chance of truly connecting. And our church should be uniquely capable of exploring those very questions. In fact, those three questions are at the core of our Wednesday night youth group bible study on Genesis.



This chapter on *Empathizing* with our students and young people is challenging and profound in many ways. I've only scratched at it in this short article, but it is my hope that some of you might be intrigued enough to join the Spiritual Formation Team in reading *Growing Young*. We are at an important crossroads in the life and ministry of our congregation and the larger Church. Through better engaging our young people and sharing our faith journeys together there will be greater hope for all of us now.

**excursus*

Empathy, the Missing Ingredient

I found it a somewhat ironic that as I was reading this chapter in *Growing Young* I was coming to the conclusion that the very thing our nation seems to be lacking at this moment in history is *empathy*.

Warning: if you don't like it when pastors talk politics or you don't want to deal with the intersection between faith and politics than you may want to skip this excursus (though I would argue that that is the very reason you should spend some time with it.) The undeniable fact is that our Christian faith should have consequences for our whole lives: politics included.

If we say we follow Jesus then the lens of discipleship is the lens through which we are called to view the world. The American political landscape and our participation in it is no exception. And if you are still looking for evidence that our faith has political consequences, let me remind you that Jesus was executed on a Roman cross because of political weakness. Yes, Jesus' execution was a political act (in the same way that state-

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(GY, page 91-92)

endorsed capital punishment is very often a political act today: it makes no sense from a financial or ethical standpoint, but it is celebrated by politicians who want to look strong on crime or as authentic bearers of justice.)

But, back to empathy, which I think is the missing ingredient in our relationships with young people and in much of our political dialogue. It is simply too easy for us to dismiss those with we

disagree with, too easy to demonize them, and too easy to ignore their voice when we have not honestly put ourselves in their shoes.

The failure of the Democratic party to empathize with large swaths of our country (which accounted for some really important electoral college votes) helps explain how they managed to lose the recent presidential election while decisively winning the

popular vote. There are many people who, even in a steadily recovering economy are suffering: struggling to make ends meet, living with loss of jobs and livelihoods, coming to terms with and understanding a changing global economy that has left them behind, and the indifference of government to respond to their individual crisis.

It is also clear that a lack of *empathy* is the thing that allowed so many people to vote for Donald Trump despite his almost entirely unChristian platform, speech and personal behavior. We are too often more interested in self-interest and how a particular candidate can help me than taking the time to enter into the fear of those whose civil rights, land rights, and religious freedoms are threatened by the speech and potential policies of our president elect.

Our complete disregard for “sitting sitting on the curb of [another] person’s life, celebrating their dreams and grieving over their despair” has led us to a national dialogue that is not dialogue and a toleration for injustice that is shocking. If there is a quality that sums up Jesus, which there of course is not, *empathy* would come closest. The very idea behind the incarnation, God the Son “emptying himself” (Philippians 2:7) to become human, is empathy. As I mentioned on Christ the King Sunday, when we read the crucifixion narrative in The Gospel of Luke, we worship a God who suffers with us and went to great pains to demonstrate that God understands what it means to be human and that God is present in all that we experience.

May this Advent season be one of increased empathy and an opportunity for us all to reflect on how God’s incarnation calls us to lives of faithful discipleship in everything we say and do.



EVENING CIRCLE

We will be taking the month of December off and will resume our meetings in January. More info to follow in the January newsletter.

CHRISTMAS TREE SALE

Our sale is off to a great start! We could still use plenty of help selling trees on Saturdays from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. and Sundays from 11 a.m. - 5 p.m. leading up to Christmas. Look for a sign-up sheet in the Parish Hall. All proceeds will be split between local mission needs and the Youth Mission trip this summer to Appalachia.

STEWARDSHIP CAMPAIGN

Please remember to return your pledge card in the envelope that was provided (either mail or place in offering plate) or e-mail Rich Ehrlich, our Financial Secretary at rehlich@embarqmail.com. We would appreciate your response by December 20th so that Session can plan for next year’s budget. Thank you!

COMMUNITY GARDEN

This past spring, summer and fall, we harvested 334 pounds of potatoes, onions, lettuce, cucumbers, tomatoes, spinach, radishes, peas, string beans, carrots, beets, scallions, turnips, green peppers, cantaloupe, and watermelon



from the food pantry beds in our Community Garden. All produce was donated to the Open Cupboard Food Pantry. This year, in an effort to make our produce more appealing, we purchased a utility sink for the garden, allowing us to easily wash everything we harvested, and experimented with some new packaging. Our efforts were well received by the Food Pantry and their clients. Thanks to everyone who planted, weeded, watered, harvested, and delivered to the Food Pantry; this is truly a “community” project.

MISSION NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

The 14th Annual Giving Fair

The Giving Fair was held on Saturday, November 12th. There was a lot of energy and spirit in the air. The Giving Fair Passports were a hit with both children and adults and many new faces joined us. So far we have given **over \$10,000** to nineteen local, national and international organizations. Thank you to all that made this event a success. We hope to make this event even bigger and better next year! (see page 5 for photos)

Our Little Free Library

Thanks to Terry Hoffman and the Mission Team there is a Little Free Library located outside the front of the church along Route 513. Please take a

look! There is a selection of books available for anyone to take and read. Feel free to bring books to the Little Library for others to borrow. The Little Free Library motto is "Take a Book. Return a Book". It has already been well received by the surrounding community. A *second* Little Free Library will be located at the back entrance near the parking lot soon. Happy reading!



Local Action Team News

The Local Action Team is looking for volunteers interested in a local action mission trip. We are organizing a two-day, overnight stay in Southern New Jersey to help victims that are still in need of help repairing their primary residence/homes that were damaged or destroyed by Superstorm Sandy. Together with A Future with Hope (www.afuturewithhope.org), we will provide assistance; building, constructing and repairing homes damaged by the storm. All skill levels are welcome, however, you must be a minimum of 14 years old. Please contact Lora Harris at 908-763-1946 or loratod@comcast.net, if you are interested and would like more information.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Spiritual Formation of Children

A group of thirty adults and children joined together for the Advent workshop on November 26. Pastor Chad shared ideas for observation of Advent in our homes with our families. Then everyone worked on the banners which will hang in the sanctuary during the Christmas season. It was great fun and everyone enjoyed the wonderful desserts. If you missed it, plan on joining us next year.

Our children are busy preparing for the annual Christmas play. This year Hope Atkinson, Susan Freed and Kristin Petrik are teaming together to work with our LVPC kids. Please join us on December 18, as the children lead us in worship. A luncheon will follow in the parish hall.

During Family Worship, the children decorated stars at the art table. The stars will be placed on the banner of Bethlehem. The kids did a great job, focused on their work and made some lovely stars for us to enjoy.

Have you listened to Pastor Chad giving the Children's Message in church on Sunday mornings? The Spiritual Formation Team would love for our children to meet YOU. If you would like to give a Children's Message, please contact Linda Stetler or Kim Rodgers. Also, if you would like to become a substitute teacher for Sunday School, please contact Natalie Gast.

Middle and High School students, please keep in mind the groups available to you. The Channel (grades 6-12) meets on Wednesday evening in the parish hall from 7 to 8:30. The high school group

will be meeting on Friday, Dec 16th at 6:00 at the Snellen's house 8 Farrell Drive, Glen Gardner.

If your child is attending Sunday School and you have not filled out a registration form and a photo release form, please see the teacher or Linda Stetler to get the forms. It is important for our records and your child's protection for us to have this information. Thanks so much.

APPALACHIA SERVICE PROJECT (ASP) HAPPENINGS

Homemade Soups!!

Please support our upcoming summer ASP Mission Trip 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!

Scenes from the Giving Fair



Get the newsletter via e-mail so you can enjoy the full color version and help us cut down on paper and postage costs! Call or e-mail Claudia in the office — 832-2933 or lowervalleyipc@embarqmail.com

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Upcoming Servers

Date	Liturgist	Ushers	Communion Servers
December 4	Stephanie Donlon	Nancy and David Knight	Lisamarie Boehm Stephanie Donlon Warren Newman Judy Eckwielen
December 11	Christina Wilson	OPEN Richard Fincher	
December 18	Rachel Gast	Judy Eckwielen Stuart Solewater	
December 24 4:30 p.m.	N/A	OPEN	
December 24 7:30 p.m.	Marilyn El-Zahr	Karen and Warren Newman	
December 25 Family Worship	Dick Kline	Lisa Coffaro Isabel Roppolo	

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

**The schedule for 2017 is almost completed.
It will be emailed shortly to everyone that signed up.**

December 2016
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.