

Parish Happenings

December 2017

FROM PASTOR CHAD

Advent 101

It has become increasingly difficult to celebrate Christmas in the midst of a culture which thrives on consumption and instant gratification. At least one scholar has persuasively argued that the consumer focus of Christmas has turned it into the high holy day of a new sort of Postmodern religion. Or as a friend of mine has said, “we stole many of our Christian traditions from pagan rituals and they’ve stolen them back (and I can’t write that without hearing Bono from the opening of the Rattle and Hum album – you can look it up). As the Church we are called to live and teach a very different Christmas message.



In the 1840s and 1850s Queen Victoria and Prince Albert popularized a new way of celebrating Christmas. This engraving from 1840 shows the two monarchs surrounded by children and gifts around a Christmas tree. Credit: Wikimedia Commons.

For years I’ve struggled to help congregations to reconsider all of their Christmas season practices. The over 600 billion dollar American Christmas season consumer spending orgy has done, and will do, little to tell of the hope the story of Christ’s birth was intended to communicate. So, once again I want to invite you to think differently this year.

One of the ways I believe we can reframe Christmas for ourselves and our families is to reconnect it to the present season of Advent. The word advent comes from the Latin term *adventus*, meaning “coming.” The church year begins with this season four Sundays before Christmas. For nearly 1500 years the Church has used Advent as a time of preparation for the feast days of Christmas. It is also a time for self-examination and preparation for Christ’s coming again.

The Advent Workshop, which produced the banners hanging in our sanctuary, and participation in the Giving Fair were great ways to get started, but, if you missed those, it is never too late to chuck some of the the meaningless traditions we cling to and add meaningful ones. My family truly understands the difficulty of this challenge. We’ve wrestled with time management, the excuse of business, advent readings that are too cumbersome and

prioritizing for years now (some years have worked out better than others) and continue to live with the tension of a consumer culture that would have us totally distracted from the center of the Advent season. But, because of the struggle I believe my children have a better sense of what it means to be remembering Christ's birth, reflecting on how Jesus is a game changer for the world, and anticipating the continued inbreaking of God's kingdom in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

There are plenty of better ways to welcome the Christ child than the most popular method that has really only been part of our tradition for the last 180 years or so. Every family has to find what is helpful to them, but I want to challenge you to have the courage to let go of the layers of build up that distract rather than focus you on worshiping God and telling God's story. Make some small step in this direction.

Start your search for Christmas practices that declare God's love for the world right now! It might mean giving some things up that seem like they are sacred: overspending (many studies show that spending money at Christmas time is a real stress creator), getting to every party that has little to do with worship, racing around (try slowing down and taking 15 minutes to sit quiet with a candle and an advent scripture reading), or frivolously using a years worth of electricity to light up the yard with symbols that distract drivers from the road and attention from God's story.

While my office is a good place to stop if you are looking for ideas, encouragement, and help I'd also suggest you check out the website for [Advent Conspiracy](#). The Advent Conspiracy motto is a great way to start rethinking how we make Christmas a season of real hope again.

Worship Fully: Because Christmas begins and ends with Jesus.

Spend Less: Feel less stress, and free resources for things that matter to Jesus.

Give More: Give relationally to offer one another presence, rather than merely presents.

Love All: Love the forgotten, the poor, marginalized, and sick in the ways Jesus asked us to.

May 2017 be a truly transforming season of Advent and Christmas.



PLEDGING UPDATE **(December 15th** **Deadline)**

Please don't forget to fill out your pledge cards. If you are a member or a regular giver you should have recently received a letter regarding the ongoing financial stewardship of our church. The letter and the accompanying information were an invitation to make a pledge to LVPC for 2018.

Our goal is, of course, for every family to fill out a pledge card no matter the amount pledged. It is a practical help to the session as they look at the upcoming year's budget as well as a means of evaluating the level of engagement of our members and church friends. We would like the increase the number of pledged dollars in hopes of coming closer to closing the gap between giving and expenses.

To date we have received 15 pledges for a total of \$42,225. This is roughly 30% of our goal for the total number of pledges we are hoping to receive and a good start toward income we will need to continue in ministry together in 2018.

We would like to have as many pledge cards returned by December 15 (this is coming very quickly) as possible to be able to complete Session planning for the coming year. If you have lost or misplaced the letter and card please contact the office for another or you may also choose to email your pledge to Rich Ehrlich, our Financial Secretary, at rehlich@embarqmail.com. If you have your bank automatically sending your pledge we ask that you please take a moment to consider your present giving and send Rich an email to inform him of your plans for 2018.

Feel free contact the pastor or stewardship elder (Kyle Garcia: 973-303-1462) with any questions or concerns.

Thank you all for your generosity and thoughtful consideration for giving in the coming year.

MISSION NEWS **Christmas Tree Sale**

The sale is on! Come check out our trees every weekend until Christmas. All proceeds go to local mission needs and support our annual summer mission trip to Appalachia. In addition, please consider



volunteering to sell the trees. Just a few hours will help immensely. Shifts include 9-11am, 11-1pm, 1-3pm and 3-5pm on Saturday's and 11-1pm, 1-3pm and 3-5 pm on Sunday's. Please go to: <https://tinyurl.com/LVPCtreesale2017> or contact Ken Ernst at 973-769-9213.

Toy Drive

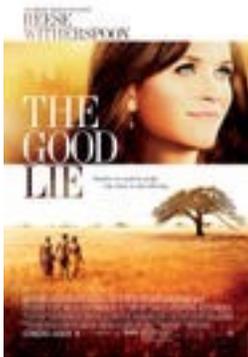
We are collecting toys for impoverished children in Appalachia. Please donate new, unwrapped toys for children ages 3-10. There is a box in the Narthex. **Gifts are due by Sunday, December 10th.**



Film Series: Save the Date

We are hosting our next film, "The Good Lie" starring Reese Witherspoon on **Friday, January 19th at 6:30 p.m.** in the Parish Hall. The film highlights four Sudanese children who become refugees and eventually resettle in America. It is rated PG-13 for "some violence, brief strong language and drug use."

Please join us for fellowship, education, discussion and snacks!



Giving Fair

Once again, the Giving Fair was a wonderful success. Thank you to all who helped make the event a fun-filled day of giving. Currently, we raised **\$10,256!** If you would like to buy "spiritual gifts" and support the many organizations that were part of our Giving Fair, please check out the gift booklet on our website (www.lowervalley.org) or call the office to request one. Kindly fill it out and return with a check to Claudia as soon as possible.

All gift orders are due by **December 24th.**

COFFEE AND CONVERSATION

Parish Life is looking for some more people to sign up to help with Coffee and Conversation particularly for the 1st Sunday of the month, but help on any Sunday is most appreciated. Please see Renee Ollerenshaw, Lisa Coffaro or Lisamarie Boehm.

APPALACHIA SERVICE PROJECT (ASP) HAPPENINGS

Important Dates

Attention All BYG families! We have set dates for this year's mandatory meetings! We will be doing things a little bit differently this year. There will be multiple meetings held in separate locations. **YOU ARE ONLY REQUIRED TO ATTEND 1 MEETING!** Spots fill up quickly, make sure you attend the meeting earliest to your convenience. If you are under the age of 18, a parent or guardian must be present to sign paperwork.

Dates:

- Saturday, December 9th at 4 p.m. at CPC in Chester
- Saturday, January 6th at 3 p.m. at CPC in Chester

A meeting will also be held at St. Paul's Lutheran in Flemington to be determined at a later date.

**A deposit of \$150 is required to hold spot for the 2018 trip*

ASP Soup Sales

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 starting next Sunday, November 5th. Please contact Isabel Roppolo at isabelroppolo@yahoo.com or 908.319.0249 (call or text) with questions.



SERVERS NEEDED

If you are able to fill in any of the below open spots please let Claudia know. Thanks!!

- December 24 (4:30 p.m. service) – 2 ushers
- December 24 (7:30 p.m. service) – liturgist

2018 Ushers and Liturgist Sign-up

The office is currently working on a schedule of 2018 ushers and liturgists. The goal is to create a year-long schedule giving us the assurance that someone will be there to help and giving you the flexibility of arranging for your own substitute when your schedule demands it. Help us by filling out this form and dropping it in the offering plate or sending it to the office. Thanks!

Name: _____

E-mail: _____

Phone Number: _____

I'm willing to serve as:

- Liturgist once a month
- Liturgist once every 8 weeks
- Liturgist once a quarter

- Usher once a month
- Usher once every 8 weeks
- Usher once a quarter
- Other _____

Restrictions (i.e., can't serve in winter months, only available 2nd Sunday of month, etc.)

We are looking for church members
(of any age) who would like to
contribute something to our
newsletter. Share your experiences,
your memories and your hopes for
LVPC. We want to hear from you.
E-mail Claudia at
lowervalleyipc@embarqmail.com.

Pastor Chad's Contact info:

Cell phone: 908.892.0044
E-mail: revchadrodgers@gmail.com

Church Info:

Claudia Gilbert: Church Administrator
Phone: 908-832-2933
E-mail: lowervalleyipc@embarqmail.com
Website: www.lowervalley.org

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

Session Members

Lisamarie Boehm: 432-3414/lisamarie_boehm@yahoo.com

Abby Ernst: 439-3549/abigailernst@gmail.com

Kyle Garcia: 867-7186/ kylesgarcia@yahoo.com

Sue Hostler: 574-5337/JSHostler@gmail.com

Warren Newman: 638-4332/newmanwj@cdmsmith.com

Renee Ollerenshaw: 832-7250/Jems101992@gmail.com

Kim Rodgers: 892-0141/chadandkimrodgers@gmail.com

Karen Newman (clerk): 638-4332/karennewman@embarqmail.com

Upcoming Servers

Date	Liturgist	Ushers	Communion Servers
December 3	Judy Eckwielen	Daryl Minch Lisamarie Boehm	Renee Ollershaw Warren Newman Judy Eckwielen OPEN
December 10	Warren Newman	Ed Getz Jeff Donlon	
December 17	Judy Eckwielen	Rich Ehrlich 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 31 — Family Worship	Dick Kline	The El-Zahr Family	

Please let the office know if you are able to serve in one of the OPEN spots

December 2017
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.