

Parish Happenings

January 2017

FROM PASTOR CHAD

Take Jesus' Message Seriously

In just a few weeks I will begin my tenth year serving as pastor to this congregation. Just now, as I was writing that, I had to recount as it hardly seems possible that we've shared in ministry for nine full years. However, it is true, I checked the ages of my children.

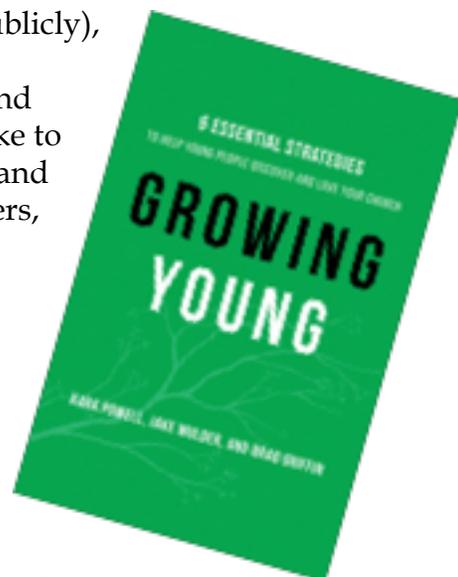
By now most of you know I'm not big on resolutions (or at least not publicly), but I do find that the changing over of the calendar prompts reflection. Particularly reflection on what has transpired over the previous year and where we might be heading in the coming year. In some small way I like to apply the Ignatian practice of *The Examen* to consider the consolations and desolations of the past year. This perspective not only guides my prayers, but gives focus to the future.

I'm very grateful for the blessing of sabbatical in 2016. It gave me the opportunity to accomplish some personal goals, take on new forms of spiritual growth, and enjoy some unforgettable family time exploring the incredible world in which we live. The time away also provided for some really important reflection and preparation for the coming years I will share in ministry with you.

For the past several newsletters I've focused on addressing the six strategies for churches growing young as they are presented in the book *Growing Young*. The third strategy might seem obvious: Take Jesus' Message Seriously. This is after all what we're all about isn't it? Unfortunately research suggests that in past decades leading right up to the present we've not done such a great job of actually taking Jesus' message to heart in our teaching and in our own living.

What we have been good at is teaching and equating faith with being a good moral person (generally being nice), feeling good about ourselves for this, and limiting ourselves to a rather limited view of God's involvement in the world. For many kids growing up in the Church this has led them to view God as a kind of "heavenly butler". When these kids describe the gospel it "is fairly universalistic, focused on an abstract notion of "heaven" off in the distance; it describes grace like some kind of vague magic performed by a mystic fairy godmother figure; and it fails to mention Jesus and his life, suffering, death, and resurrection." (GY, page 132)

You can probably identify several missing elements of Christian faith in the above paragraph. Maybe most notably the lack of language of relationship and any sense of mission now — "on earth as it is in heaven". There is so much in this chapter I can hardly begin to cover it in any detail, but I found a couple remedies/challenges especially helpful.



“Young people don’t just want to be saved *from* something later; they want to be saved *for* something now.”

The first was to engage in “authentic dialogue about faith.” I’ve found it to be quite true that students (or anybody else for that matter) don’t want to be given trite answers. They don’t want to be given a list of rules to follow, but are looking for honest discussion about the challenging questions that they face every day. Helping them understand the whole narrative of scripture that brings us to Jesus and can be for them an invitation to a bold new life.

Our concern for protecting our children often leads us to lists of what not to do and less about what Jesus would have us do. In *Growing Young* the authors suggest that: “Young people don’t just want to be saved *from* something later; they want to be saved *for* something now.” I think this is one of the reasons that growing young as a church can be so potentially powerful. When we focus on Jesus and Jesus’ teaching we are bound to be transformed into people concerned about the things God is concerned about. Faith is less about being good so we can feel good and go to heaven and more about living in relationship to the living God.

As we continue to be challenged by having a living faith in a confusing time I can say that there are many things I’m looking forward to in 2017. Here are a few:

- The continuation of exploring the whole story of scripture with middle school students
- Ongoing *authentic* conversations about faith with high school students
- Continuing to work with our mission team to develop and implement a focussed strategy that will engage our whole congregation in “taking Jesus’ message seriously”
- Exploring how our worship can be more engaging and immerse us deeper in the life and teachings of Jesus
- The ongoing work of the REFORMation Team as it assesses our building, how it might better serve our mission, and how we might make changes that serve those ends

May the new year bring for all of us a renewed vigor for authentic explorations of our faith and to discover just what it is that Jesus has saved us for *now*.



EVENING CIRCLE

The Women's Bible Study will meet on Wednesday, January 21st at 7:00 p.m. in Getz Library. We will be continuing the Horizon's Bible Study "Reconciling Paul, A Contemporary Study of 2 Corinthians", lesson #8 Power, Authority, and Honor Are Not Always What We Might Expect. The focus text is 2 Corinthians 11:1-32. Everyone is welcome. Any questions please call Nancy Knight 537-4347 or Joni Nodes 391-6263.

CHRISTMAS TREE SALE

Our annual Christmas tree sale was again successful this year. Please check the next newsletter for an update on how the proceeds were distributed to local mission needs. Thank you to all who helped sell!

MISSION NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

The Little Free Library has been placed in front of the church and has a lot of traffic. A second additional library has been placed near the back entrance to the church, by the sidewalk and light. Please enjoy! Take a book, return a book!

The Local Action Team is planning a mission trip to help victims of SuperStorm Sandy to restore their homes. They will be working with A Future with Hope in southern

New Jersey. The date for the first trip is **Saturday, January 14th**. Adults and children (14 and older) and all abilities are welcome to participate. Please "RSVP" to Lora Harris at 908-763-1946 or loratod@comcast.net if you would like to join us!

The Giving Fair was a wonderful success, with a total of **\$12,594** donated to all the organizations. Thank you to all that participated and gave!

A Mission Team Retreat is being held on **Saturday, January 21, 2017** with a snow date of Saturday, January 28, 2017. We will discuss the vision of the Mission Team and ideas for the future. **ALL church members are welcome to attend.** We would love new and fresh ideas and perspectives. (If you come to the retreat, you do not necessarily need to be part of the Mission Team.) Please contact Abby Ernst at abigailernst@gmail.com if you would like to join us.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Spiritual Formation of Children

Our wonderful Christmas Play was held on December 18th. Thank you to all the children (and adults) who participated. Special thanks to Hope Atkinson, Susan Freed, Kristin Petrik, Linda Stetler for this wonderful celebration. See pages 4 and 5 for photos!!

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!





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

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

Stephanie Donlon: 537-2604/stephaniedonlon@yahoo.com

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

Terry Hoffman: 689-7646/tbeehoffman@aol.com

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

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

Hunter Wilson: (703) 304-1445/hunter22wilson@gmail.com

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

Upcoming Servers

Date	Liturgist	Ushers	Communion Servers
January 1 — Family Worship	Christina Wilson	Janet and Gary Kipp	Judy Eckwielen Terry Hoffman Renee Ollerenshaw Kim Rodgers
January 8	Dick Kline	Nancy and David Knight	
January 15	Warren Newman	Judy Eckwielen Rich Ehrlich	
January 22	OPEN	Lisa Coffaro Isabel Roppolo	
January 29	Stephanie Donlon	Daryl Minch Ed Getz	
February 5	Nancy Knight	The El-Zahr Family	Terry Hoffman Stephanie Donlon OPEN OPEN
February 12	Terry Hoffman	Cindy and Tim O'Keefe	
February 19 — Family Worship	OPEN	Sophie Gast Madeleine Argue	
February 26	Christina Wilson	Renee and Jeff Ollerenshaw	

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

Lower Valley Presbyterian Church
445 County Road 513
Califon, NJ 07830
January 2017

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.