

Parish Happenings

June 2022

FROM PASTOR CHAD

Again We Cry Out in Lament...

Four years ago (March 2018) in this same newsletter I shared a lament and wrote about lament. I did my best to express the anger and frustration of living in a nation where innocent children and adults are regularly slaughtered because we refuse to take guns out of the hands and homes of our citizens. I wanted to speak to our collective sadness, but also to address our national moral failure to take action.



Responding to the terror of the another school shooting feels exhausting. It is even more exhausting for parents who continue to drop their children off at school each day and for children who are re-traumatized by a society that would rather see its children practice active shooter drills than address the lies we tell ourselves about guns and safety.

The other day Mark Stone, a reporter working for the British media outlet Sky News, asked Senator Ted Cruz, "Why is this aspect [referring to the recent mass shooting in Uvalde, Texas] of American exceptionalism so awful?" The feckless politician, who responded like so many others in past days, had no response other than to lash out at the reporter and drone on about American exceptionalism. The exchange was a telling microcosm of how politics and politicians will continue to fail our children. So many tragedies and yet the only thing that has changed in the time between Newtown and Uvalde is that some states (Texas being one) have made it easier for ordinary untrained citizens to purchase and carry guns designed for killing their fellow human beings.

O LORD God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with your
people's prayers?

You have fed them with the bread of tears,
and given them tears to drink in full measure.

You make us the scorn of our neighbors;
our enemies laugh among themselves.

Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; let your
face shine, that we may be saved.

— Psalm 80:4-7, 19

I find the idea of American exceptionalism generally absurd especially because it smacks of the kind of pride that biblical texts warn against. But, one way we are certainly exceptional is in both the number of guns we own (over 400 million) and the number of gun deaths we tolerate. No other peer nation comes even close. The American obsession with guns is most certainly an exception to world norms. We are not outliers around the world in incidence of mental illness among the general population nor are we a particularly more violent society, but we are massive outliers among our peers in gun deaths. In recent history other nations, after experiencing a mass shooting tragedy, have responded with measures to remove guns and restrict access.

Most famously Australia in 1996.

The book of James reminds us that faith without action is no faith (you can look it up). We are called to be a people of action who extend God's love to the world around us. I find myself lamenting and wondering just how long until God hears us again. Our prayers for the wrecked families and lives ruined by gun violence will continue to fall far from God's ears as long as we fail to take meaningful action to end gun violence. There are many steps we can take, but until we remove unnecessary firearms from our homes, let go of the lie that guns are a means of protection, and sacrifice the guns we idolize God will be 'angry with the people's prayers.'

Christian people are a people called to action and sacrificial love. Before we are members of a church or even members of a family we are called to be disciples and members of the people of God. Our discipleship demands that we make sacrifices. Everyone who would call themselves a Christian who owns a weapon designed to take the life of another human being (handguns and assault style long guns) should immediately have it destroyed. Our politicians have proved they do not have the moral courage to make meaningful change on this issue so it must come from us.

These few thoughts hardly scratch the surface of what I'm thinking and feeling at this time. Long ago I decided I would not be a gun owner, yet, I too am called to action in my spaces of influence, teaching, and preaching. I hope together we can do more than send empty prayers. I want to be a partner for any and all who are exhausted by the absurd and unnecessary reality of gun violence in our nation.

May the face of the Lord God of hosts shine on us so we may be saved from the idolatry and lies that are literally killing our children.

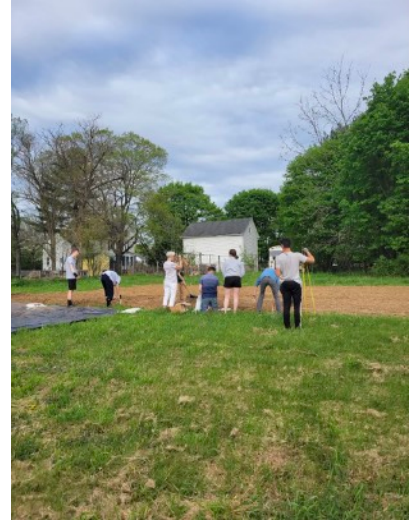


WORSHIP IN THE PARK/CHURCH PICNIC — JUNE 5

Please join us on June 5th, Pentecost Sunday, at Califon Park for our annual "Worship in the Park" and church picnic. After worship, we'll enjoy a meal, so bring a salad or dessert to share. **And, this is an old-fashioned earth-friendly picnic, so bring a basket with dishes, utensils, cloth napkins and pack 'em up to take home for washing.**

NATIVE MEADOW PROJECT UPDATE

You may have noticed some activity in our field alongside the Sliker Road entrance to the church parking lot. In partnership with local, soon to be Eagle Scout, Matthew DiGiovanni we are attempting to turn our fallow field into a meadow of native plants. The goal is a more attractive, sustainable, and pollinator friendly meadow. Matthew worked with our new member and local CSA owner Jeb Edwards to get the field prepared and sow the seeds at an optimal time for germination and success.



This project started last fall when we worked with a local botanist and wild plant consultant and troop 92 (Lebanon Township) did some site clean up and preparation. In the pictures you can see an area of the field under tarps. That section has been taken over by a particularly invasive plant called Mugwort. We expect that portion to remain trapped for a couple years to have a hope of getting rid of this aggressive weed. We hope that our native meadow will be a beautiful statement of our commitment to tending to biodiversity, encouraging native pollinators, and tending the land God created and entrusted to our care.



FROM THE RENOVATION TEAM ...

We've been busy over the past many months meeting with each other and our architect to develop a plan to upgrade our facility. We have identified several areas which we are focusing on and would like to take this time to update everyone on the progress we have made. The entire project will be completed in several phases.

Phase 1

- Replace the windows in the library, the four Happy Face classrooms and the kitchen. All of these windows are in very poor condition.
- Remove the exterior doors in the library and four Happy Face classrooms. The framing on these doors are in very poor condition, they are expensive to replace and are an added security risk.
- Replace the exterior office door, exterior door by the kitchen and exterior door in the Happy Face hallway. These doors are in poor condition.
- Repair the cracks and damage to the stucco on the entire building, power wash and paint.

We have received construction documents from the architect for Phase 1 work and have submitted them to three contractors for bids. We are currently waiting to hear back from them. We're hoping to be able to have this work completed this summer.

Phase 2

- Redesign the chancel of the sanctuary to improve access to/from the sanctuary and the rear of the building.
- Replace the two non-code compliant staircases in the chancel with a new staircase which will be built to code.
- Open up the chancel to improve its appearance and permit more flexible music arrangements.
- Upgrade the interior of the sanctuary and narthex with paint, flooring repair, carpet, pew improvements, and lighting and sound improvements.
- Repair/replace the exterior front door.

The architect is currently working on plans for the chancel and staircase modifications. We have had some preliminary meetings with a church design firm and obtained some preliminary cost estimates on the sanctuary and narthex upgrades. Once we receive the final plans from the architect we will be able to get more concrete cost estimates on this work and make some final decisions.

Phase 3

- Paint/resurface the exterior of the sanctuary. The paint is currently in very poor condition and requires constant maintenance, which is very costly. Before making a final decision on this, we are going to investigate the cost of replacing some/all of the wood siding with a more durable material which will not require constant painting. We have no idea at this point if this will fit in our budget or is even feasible to consider, so ... stay tuned.

We know everyone is eager to see this work get started, as are we. Unfortunately, contractors are dealing with labor and supply shortages and everyone is struggling to keep things moving along. We appreciate your patience as we work through what has become a very slow process. We are excited and confident the final results will be worth the wait.

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, please contact Karen Newman, Abby Ernst, Mike Reaves or Pastor Chad.

ADULT SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Women's Bible study: For more information, please contact Kim Rodgers.

Men's Fellowship: There's plenty of bible study, but that's not all. Join us virtually on Saturdays at 8 a.m. We share life and wrestle with scripture together. At the present we're spending time in Genesis. Contact Chad with any questions to get the zoom link.

PRAYER CHAIN

Reminder! The church maintains a virtual prayer chain. If you would like to be informed about those in need of prayers, and are willing to commit to prayerfully participate, please contact Krista Jenkins at kjenkins1970@gmail.com. Prayer requests can also go to Krista.

Upcoming Servers

Date	Liturgist	Ushers	Fellowship
June 5 — Worship in the Park	Warren Newman	Karen Newman	Pot Luck lunch
June 12	Mike Reaves	Judy Eckwielen and Marilyn El-Zahr	Mike Reaves and Krista Jenkins
June 19	Karen Newman	Ken Ernst and Peggy Macaoay	Karen Newman
June 26	Jeb Edwards	Linda Stetler and Anne Cooley	The Ernst Family
July 3	Judy Eckwielen	Mike Reaves and Jeb Edwards	Marilyn El-Zahr and Erin Edwards
July 10	Karen Newman	Bobbie Sliker and Carl Weisman	Mike Reaves and Krista Jenkins
July 17	Laurie Granieri	Karen and Warren Newman	Karen Newman
July 24	Warren Newman	Marilyn and Al El-Zahr	The Ernst Family
July 31	Marilyn El-Zahr	Jeb and Erin Edwards	Madeleine Argue, Judy Eckwielen, Diane Staph and Cindy O'Keffe