

Parish Happenings

March 2021

FROM PASTOR CHAD

Some Thoughts On What Has Been a Long Year



Photo by Martin Sanchez on Unsplash

It all got started with a shortage of toilet paper. Remember when, “what are we gonna do we’re down to our last roll?” was part of our pandemic worry list. That certainly seems like ages ago. Interestingly enough the toilet paper problem was and wasn’t a pandemic problem though it was most certainly related. The stores that sold the product never completely closed and the factories didn’t either, but human nature being what it is, demand spiked because our fear of running out led to everyone buying two or three packs when they would have ordinarily bought one. What happened? We didn’t suddenly start wiping more often or requiring more sheets, or making more trips to the bathroom, yet, we suddenly were scrambling from store to store only to find empty shelves where the bathroom tissue used to be. The answer to the riddle is interesting (modern supply chains) and complicated (balancing supply and demand and profit) and also simple – hoarding (buying three when we’d normally buy one).

As I reflect on the last year of quarantine, social distancing, and mask wearing, I’m certain there are many lessons we can and should be learning. Some of those lessons are for business (strategic planning for surprises, speedy adaptation, innovation etc.), for government (strategic risk assessment and planning, good leadership, organization, and equity), for schools, and for community service organizations, but I’m of course interested in the lessons for church. What are we

who wrestle, week in and week out in worship, with what it means to “pick up our cross and follow Jesus,” supposed to learn from this time of extended reflection.

For many, this has been a year of profound loss, suffering, and grief. The Christian story is a story that has always spoken to such things. We worship God who does not abandon us, but who walks with us in the midst of our struggle. We are a community given the task of bearing one another’s burdens (as the Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians). Jesus simply summed up The Law by saying, “Love God and Love your neighbor as yourself.” So, in the midst of grief and loss (be it a loved one or the pomp and circumstance of a graduation) we are called to be priests. We are called to be the presence of God for others and by this we “fulfill the law of Christ.”

Live creatively, friends. If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. You might be needing forgiveness before the day’s out. Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ’s law. If you think you are too good for that, you are badly deceived.

Galatians 6:1-3 (*The Message*)

The pandemic has also exposed many tensions in our communities and in ourselves as well. We are prone to go for three cases of toilet paper when we only need one. It is harder than we previously thought to put our own needs and desires aside for others. I’ve seen too often, Christian brothers and sisters, in our quest to return to normalcy, a kind of amnesia around the very stories we claim are at the center of our faith. Even when a simple sacrifice would protect a neighbor at greater risk than ourselves.

We seem to have forgotten the conversation God had with Cain in the field where Abel's blood was spilled:

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel? Cain said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the Lord said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!"

There is more to this conversation than just a murder and a lie. It gets to the heart of what God asks of human beings — we are indeed our brother's and sister's keeper! We are responsible for the safety, wellbeing, empowerment, economic security, and equality of all of God's children. We are called to march against injustice, to call our government (local, state, and national) to account for injustice, to shout that black lives matter (when faced with overwhelming evidence to the contrary), to reach out to refugees and aliens in our land and to love the neighbor we have too often ignored. We are not simply individuals pursuing freedoms, but keepers of one another's dignity, humanity, and wellbeing.

I'm not in the toilet paper supply business and I can't say what those folks did or didn't learn about their supply chains, but I do know a little something about the Church. I know it is a place of grace in the midst of failure and a place for ongoing reflection. As we look back and move forward it is my prayer that we can have ears and eyes open to how God is calling us to "pick up our cross", in this moment, and follow Jesus as faithful disciples.



Photo by Lucia Macedo on Unsplash

Chad

BIBLE STUDIES

Women's Bible study meets the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month (March 3 and 17), from 7:00-8:30 in the Parish Hall. We are using Rachel Held Evans' "Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again". Please join us!

Men's Fellowship: There's plenty of bible study, but that's not all. Join us on Saturdays at 8 a.m. on Zoom. We share life and wrestle with scripture together. At the present we're spending time in the 1 Kings. Contact Chad to join.

YOUTH ACTIVITIES

Middle School Youth Group

Wednesdays from 7-8:30 in the Parish Hall we're getting back in our groove so don't miss it.

High School Youth Group

We're restarted on Saturday February 27, in the Parish Hall, from 7 - 8:30. We are still working on determining the best future times and dates, so if you can make it be sure to give Chad your two cents on the matter.

Children's Worship

We're trying something new. At least while we are still worshipping virtually we will send a special Zoom each week (along with the worship email) for a children's interactive worship time. We'll start at 10:45 each Sunday and share some scripture, conversation, and maybe even music. Parents are of course welcome to join too.

COMMUNITY GARDEN

Our garden is growing ... come grow with us! Do you love to garden? Would you like to have a sunny spot with a nice, tall fence and all the tools you need to grow fresh, healthy food for your family during the spring, summer and fall? Would you love to also help feed those less fortunate right here in our community? If you answered "yes" to these questions, then our community garden is the place for you.

Garden beds are available for rent for \$25 each (you can rent 1, 2 or 3 beds) and the garden is open from March through October. We supply soil, compost,



water, wheelbarrows, and a shed full of a variety of tools. You provide the seeds, plants and labor. In addition to the personal garden beds, we also have a number of beds dedicated to growing food for the Open Cupboard Food Pantry. We ask that each garden member spend a few hours, one or two weeks of the season helping with the pantry beds and doing general garden maintenance. We harvest all summer long and into the fall for the Food Pantry. Each year we donate hundreds of pounds of onions, potatoes, green beans, tomatoes, cucumbers,



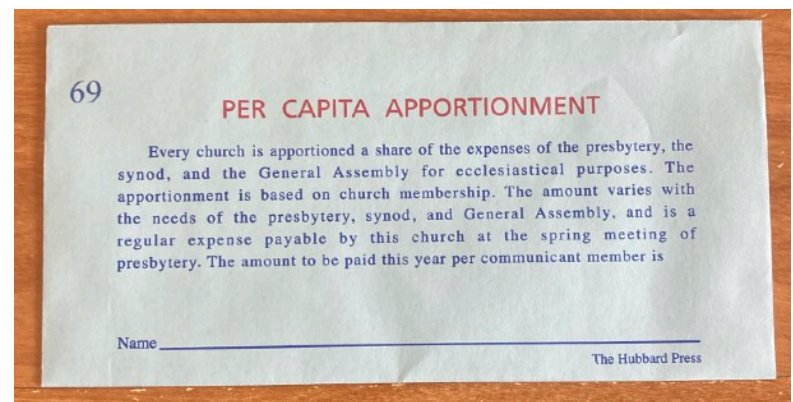
lettuce, spinach and more.

The garden is a great way to meet other members of the church and community and is an important mission project. If you would like more information, please speak with Karen Newman at 908-763-9483 or visit our website at www.lowervalley.org/mission/mission.aspx. If you're ready to sign up, contact Claudia in the church office at 908-832-2933 or email lowervalleychurch@gmail.com. Don't delay! All of our beds were filled last year and we expect they will all fill up again this year.

PER CAPITA – What's that?

One item in our budget which never receives much attention is our Per Capita expense. This is a fixed dollar amount, \$40.00 per member in 2021, which we pay to our Presbytery each year. But what is Per Capita and what is this money used for? Newton Presbytery describes it as follows: "In general, it is one of the main ways we live out who we are as Presbyterians. We are a connectional church, and the Per Capita allows us to pool our resources to do many more ministries, missions and programs than any church could possibly do on its own. These dollars are part of the glue that holds Presbyterians together, and allows us to work not only with other Presbyterian churches in our presbytery, but also in our Synod region (the northeast), across the country, and in partnership with other Christian churches around the world. It is how we covenant together to be the larger presence of the church."

Each year we ask our members to pay their portion of Per Capita, but we usually fall short. Our church's Per Capita this year is \$5,080. If you are able, we would appreciate it if you would forward your Per Capita payment to the church office. Just mark the payment "Per Capita" and we will make sure it is included on your Giving Receipt. You may also pay your Per Capita through our Online Giving program by submitting it to the General Fund and including a note indicating it is your Per Capita payment. If you have any questions, feel free to contact Claudia in the church office. Thank you!



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