

The Disciple



The Good News of St. John soars like an eagle!

*St. John's United Church of Christ
Allentown, Pennsylvania*

Volume 23 Issue 29

February 2023

Howdy St. John's Family,

It was such a blessing to have a few days off last month to welcome in the new year! Christina and I spent time with family and had a few small excursions to see friends and run errands. The start of the year is a time for many to set goals and resolutions to improve their lives. In fact, gyms experience a phenomenon called "January Gym Rush" when they receive roughly 12% of their annual enrollment at the start of the new year.

I think self-improvement in its many forms can be a wonderful thing! Taking walks, journaling, and meditation are just a few that I've heard people talk about this year. Now that we are in February, I can't help but think that the importance of listening to our bodies should be added to this list. How many of us have heard the unhelpful advice of *walk it off*, or perhaps even *play through the pain*. Pushing ourselves and our bodies to go beyond the scope of comfortability is something that is praised in our modern culture. *No Pain No Gain* was popularized by Jane Fonda in her aerobic tapes from the '80's... and how about her other quip, *Feel the Burn!* After an exhausting week, what I really need to hear is 1 Corinthians 6:19, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?"

When I hear the word *goals*, my mind races to "to-do" lists, events, and other big industrious projects to pour my energy into. If you are like me, I would invite you to take a step back and add "self-care" and "listening to what my body needs" as part of the goals to keep working toward! I'll close with 3 John 1:2, "Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul." Blessings!

-Pastor Becky Sausser

Consistory Report

The consistory meeting was held on January 10 at 7pm. Cassidy Bell opened with devotions. The minutes and Treasurer's report were unanimously approved. In the Minister's report, Pastor Becky shared that we received six membership transfers from Emmanuel, one new member, Dr. Mark Rader had a member service on January 15. Pastor Becky explained that she has a new designation for people who are active members of the church, but who do not wish to have traditional membership. The designation is "Friends of St. John's", please see *The Evolution of our Membership* in this month's issue of *The Disciple* for more information. There will be a write up on our new visitations team coming out in this issue of *The Disciple* seeking people who wish to participate. There will be a special project that the youth and adult forum will work on together in Lent, more details soon. Ash Wednesday is February 22. An intergenerational Bible Study will take place during the last three weeks of Lent, bringing the youth group and adult forum together. Pastor Becky noted that when groups rent the social hall, they will be given a checklist of things that must be cleaned, put away, and completed. The consistory gave feedback on the list and it will be updated. Pastor Becky will also be researching digital evangelism and reporting back soon.

For Benevolence Committee, Bonnie Falla reported that the Bradbury Sullivan LGBT Center sent a thank you letter that will be shared with the congregation. Fellowship worked hard on the Annual Meeting Dinner that took place following the service on January 15. Christian Ed reported that the youth had a pizza and movie night on January 20; they were asked to bring a friend. Finance shared the final budget was presented at the annual meeting. Under Old Business, the updated Child Abuse Prevention Plan document was shared with the consistory; everyone should read it and be prepared to talk about it next month. After a discussion, it was decided that we will return to pew communion in February and continue to offer individually wrapped communion for individuals who wish to have it. The next meeting will be on February 14, and Pastor Becky will provide the devotion. Pastor Becky prayed and the meeting adjourned.

A2A Update

In 2022 St. John's began the important process of working toward becoming an Accessible 2 All congregation! This is the terminology used by the United Church of Christ to identify churches who have, "made the commitment to be physically and attitudinally welcoming of people with disabilities". After research

and discussion, the Consistory approved the purchase and installation of two handrails for the sanctuary! These will be free-standing handrails that go up alongside the lecture stand where the scriptures are read, and alongside the pulpit. This was one of the goals set by the Accessibility 2 All Committee in 2022 after we completed the audit of the building. There are still more improvements we can make as we strive toward our goal to become an accessible building, but this is an important step that should be celebrated!

The Evolution of our Membership

In the last two years since I have come to St. John's UCC I have been incredibly blessed to get to know so many amazing people! The people of St. John's congregation are incredibly welcoming, and my wife and I experienced that first hand when we were church shopping in the area a number of years ago. In the last two years we have also seen an increase in visitors, new members, and friends!

In the old days, everyone was on a membership roll somewhere! People would ask you what church you belonged to because there was no question that everyone belonged to a church. In fact, in some denominations the minister's pay was dependent upon how many folks were *on the books*. That is no longer the case! In the church of 2023, many prefer not to become a traditional member for an array of reasons, and that is wonderful! These are amazing people who have blessed this church with their beautiful gifts of love, kindness, and friendship! They are more than just visitors, they are family! The question remains, what do we call them for our record keeping?

I choose to call these folks "Friends of St. John's"! For so many of us, our friends are our chosen family, the people that we share our truest selves with, the people that help us to bear our burdens and who know with confidence that we will help them too! The only real difference between a *Friend of St. John's* and a *Member of St. John's*, is that membership gives you the power to vote at congregational meetings. I'm interested to know your thoughts and feelings about this as we continue to grow and evolve and serve in the city of Allentown. Please feel free to email me your thoughts at revsausser@gmail.com, or call the office and set up a time to talk!

A Visitation Team with a Twist!

At the core of Christianity is the idea of unity! We are united in the body of Christ! Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:26 that if one part of the body suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored then all the parts are glad! With this in mind I would like to invite you to consider being a part of our visitations team!

After Zion's Liberty Bell UCC and Emmanuel UCC closed, we adopted their homebound members into our fold. In addition to our own homebound folks that is a total of twenty individuals. How I define a homebound member is any individual who is no longer able to participate in worship with us on a Sunday morning for an array of circumstances, but who still wishes to be an active member of the church family.

What is required of you? (Micah 6:8) Folks on the Visitation team would be asked to attend a 30-minute Zoom training session and then be given the contact information of someone with whom to stay in touch. Send cards or call each other on the phone, because there is no actual "visiting" in person required, since I will continue to visit everyone regularly with communion. My hope for this new ministry is that we would have a more well-connected church family where all members feel welcomed, loved, and cared for! If you are interested in being part of this ministry, please contact the church office or contact Pastor Becky directly. Thank you!

Our Ministry with Central Elementary School

February is "**socks and undies**" month! Please bring in your donations of socks and underwear for the children at Central, most of whom don't have a drawer full of socks, nor one of underwear. If a young child has an accident at school, the teachers and staff know they can send someone to the clothes closet to get a new pair of underwear and pants or shorts and socks, tops and bottoms of their school uniforms, sneakers, and boots for that child. Sometimes a child will come to school without any socks on, even in this winter weather! They strive to keep their clothes closet well stocked with all sizes of underwear, and this time of year, with winter jackets and gloves and hats. Monetary offerings can be given using the pew or weekly offering envelopes (. write "Central" on them) or by using the donate button on our website and look for the Central category.

Central Elementary School was one of the recipients of our Community Grants for the 2021-2022 school year. The following is a reporting of the many

things they were able to do with their grant of \$4,500, by Megan Obleschuck, the Community School Coordinator at Central. It is written with deep gratitude. I hope you will read it to realize all that God does through us. And this is just one of the many recipients of our offerings. We are continuing the legacy of gratitude of our forebears, a gratitude to God that moves us to reach out and give to others.

-Submitted by Wendy Williams

On January 18, Rick Guhl delivered the following items with an estimated value of \$325 to Central Elementary school:

8 children's winter coats

5 hats and 2 pairs of gloves

2 backpacks

8 bars of soap, 2 tubes of toothpaste, and 3 toothbrushes

In addition, we have received numerous new and used children's books that we must temporarily store since there's no space for them at this time at Central. They will be delivered when Megan gives the okay.

February's Special Mission Offering

Our Special Mission for February is **Turning Point of the Lehigh Valley**. For almost 50 years, Turning Point has been offering compassionate care and shelter for victims of Domestic Violence and Partner Abuse. Unfortunately, the need has not significantly decreased over this period.

St. John's has supported Turning Point over the past years by donating money and items to support their Services and Shelter. This month we are asking you to continue this support by donating items on their Wish List (found on the Mission Bulletin Board in the Great Hall) and/or making a monetary contribution. The monetary contribution may be made either by using the blue pew or weekly offering envelope (be sure to designate *Turning Point*) or the donate button on the Church website. Thank you for considering helping in continuing St. John's support of this vital ministry.

Important Dates:

Worship Information – February Sermons

February Sermons

- February 5- Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
 - Reading 1: Isaiah 58:1-12
 - Reading 2: Matthew 5:13-20
 - Call to worship: Psalm 112
 - Title: Salt & Light
 - Isaiah cries out for justice, and in our gospel lesson Christ calls us to be the salt and the light in the world!
- February 12
 - Reading 1: Matthew 5:21-37
 - Reading 2: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9
 - Call to worship: 119:1-8
 - Title: Fight Me Bro! A sermon on conflict.
 - In our gospel Christ explains the high standard of living to which we are called as disciples; in our epistle lesson we hear about conflict in the church in Corinth and what Paul recommends they do about it!
- February 19
 - Reading 1: Leviticus 19: 1-2, 9-18
 - Reading 2: Matthew 5:38-48
 - Call to worship: Psalm 119
 - Title: Read It and Weep.
 - In our Hebrew Bible reading we look at some of the laws passed down to the Israelites by the prophets, and in our gospel, Jesus rewrites the rules on how to deal with retaliation.
- February 26
 - Reading 1: Psalm 131
 - Reading 2: Matthew 6:24-34
 - Call to worship: Resources
 - Title: Do Not Worry.
 - Our first reading is a brief Psalm of quiet trust in the Lord, our gospel lesson reminds us that even though it is difficult, we do not have to worry.
 -

Announcements:

ADULT FORUM

Adult Forum looks forward to continuing our fun in February! Please join us Sunday mornings before worship for a variety of studies and programs. We begin to gather in the Trinity Room at 9:30 and start our program at 9:45 with a sharing of joys and concerns.

February 5-John Kunitz from Vet 2 Vet Service Dogs, who works with Battle Borne, will share with us the work they do providing this important service to our veterans. And we might have a furry, four-legged visitor!

February 12-TBD

February 19-The Kellyn Foundation is a community-based collaborative initiative that works with schools and other community organizations to expand access to healthy foods. Eric Ruth, co-founder and CEO will join us to explain this program.

February 26-Lenten Breakfast in the Social Hall. Another time of fun, fellowship, and wonderful food!

March 5-We will get an update from our friends at Central Elementary School. Megan Obleschuk, Community School Coordinator, always has great stories and an energetic presentation and we are excited to have her with us again.

March 12- St. John's has been a supporter of the Amigos de Guatemala since the beginning, and we look forward to our yearly Lenten visit with them. Roger Heim will share the latest news. This is a wonderful opportunity to see our financial gifts at work in the world.

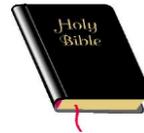
Hope to see you all at Adult Forum!

Live-Streaming

We believe the technical problem with the streaming sound has been resolved. If anyone still has a problem, please call the church office, and let them know.



Lectionary Readings for February 2023



February 5 – Fifth Sunday after Epiphany –
Isaiah 58:1-9a (9b-12); Psalm 112:1-9 (10);
1 Corinthians 2:1-12 (13-16); Matt 5:13-20

February 12 – Sixth Sunday after Epiphany–
Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 119:1-8;
1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Matthew 5:21-37

February 19 – Transfiguration Sunday –
Exodus 24:12-48; Psalm 2; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9

February 26 – First Sunday in Lent –
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19;
Matthew 4:1-11

During the 21/22 SY at Central Elementary, St. John's UCC generously awarded Communities in Schools of Eastern PA a Benevolence Grant that totaled \$4500. The grant funds were to be used for parent engagement events, which is a goal that directly aligns with Central's school support plan. Throughout the duration of the 21/22 SY, we used the funds for the following:

-March and May Soaring Eagle breakfast- Total spent (\$305)

-This is a monthly ceremony where we honor one student from every classroom, and invite their families in for a breakfast prior to the start of school. The funds were used for the breakfast for the families.

-Math and Science Night- Total spent (\$585)

-In April we hosted Math and Science Night for our families to come and enjoy some fun activities. Partnering with our Math Specialist, we informed families how they can practice math skills with their children by playing math themed board games with them. We set up different stations around our cafeteria that had games such as Uno, Yahtzee, Trouble, Sorry, etc. that our families were able to engage in. In addition to the stations, every family that attended that night got five raffle tickets to put in to win some of the games that were being played. We also provided pizza for dinner to the families that were in attendance. In total, we had about 45 participants.

-Wizard of Oz School Play- Total spent (\$700)

-This past May, Central hosted their first school play! The students decided that they wanted to put on the Wizard of Oz, which was filled with a full house the night of the show. Funds were used to purchase the script, props, costumes, and host a cast gathering afterwards to congratulate them on all of their hard work!

-End of Year Block Party- Total spent (\$1200)

-We were able to bring back our annual Block Party this past June, which was a HIT with our families! Funds were used to secure food, games, activities, and outdoor restrooms to give our families a wonderful end of year celebration.

-Student Appreciation event- Total spent (\$100)

-At the completion of the 21/22 SY, the teachers put on a small Student Appreciation event that was for each grade level. They enjoyed different activities outside and got to stop by an snow cone station, popcorn station, lollipop stand, and pick from various prizes!

-Volunteer Breakfast (\$250)

-We would be nowhere without our partners and volunteers that come into the school to help our Littles out each and every year. We wanted to give back a great, big THANK YOU to them for all of their dedication to Central. We invited them in to enjoy a breakfast with us and

-Moving Up Ceremony (\$530)

-Our moving up ceremony is for our Kindergarten and 5th grade students at the end of the year. We invite the parents in to celebrate their kids and award them with awards, prizes, and snacks.

-Uniforms (\$430)

-Anti-Bullying Bookblast- Total spent (\$175)

-This past October we held our Anti-Bullying Bookblast. We purchased books that centered around sticking up for others and what a healthy friendship looks like. We also purchased a craft activity that the parents and students could engage in as well. Dinner was provided to the families.

-Cookies, Cocoa, and Craft Event (\$200)

-In December we hosted a holiday event that had about 300 in attendance! Families engaged in decorating cookies, making holiday themed crafts, a hot cocoa bar, and pictures with Santa! We received such positive feedback from this event, and the kids are already asking to do it again next year! With the funds that were provided, it allowed us to work towards our school goals of increasing parent engagement numbers, improve overall school climate, and help promoting increased attendance throughout the school. Navigating the past year during the pandemic with modifying and adapting what is best for our students and families at Central, this has been a big help to achieve those goals. We had a big push the second half of the year when we were able to get back to a somewhat “normal” school year, so we did our best to apply ourselves and I’m proud to say we did surpass each goal we had set in the 21/22 school year. As always, we are so very gracious for all of the support we receive from St. Johns. Without your partnership, we would be unable to provide such fun, educational, and engaging events to our students and families. If you have any questions about

anything listed above, please do not hesitate to contact me at the information below!

Megan Obleschuk

Community School Coordinator-Central Elementary

obleschukm@allentownsd.org

484-765-4815



BRADBURY-SULLIVAN
LGBT COMMUNITY CENTER

*Serving the LGBT Community
of the Greater Lehigh Valley*

522 West Maple Street
at Bayard Rustin Way
Allentown, PA 18101
(610) 347-9988
bradbursullivancenter.org

Final Grant Report to St. John's UCC

*2020
Annual Report*

Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center greatly appreciates the support of St. John's UCC. The \$500 grant awarded this year supported personnel costs for our Associate Director of Community Programs, who has led the delivery of on-site supportive services.

These services have been promoted via our website, emails, social media platforms, distributed print materials, and in-person outreach. Our website received approximately 117,000 unique pageviews this year. Our email newsletters are read by more than 800 users per week. Across all platforms, we have more than 15,000 followers on social media. Through our in-person outreach at community events, we reached more than 25,000 individuals.

The project team was successful in engaging more and new community members in these services, as evidenced by a 15% increase in unique participants engaged in community groups and a 400% increase in unique participants served through HIV/STI testing, as compared to 2021. The table below illustrates the total number of sessions, total unique participants, and average number of participants per session for each supportive service offered this year.

Group or Service	Total Sessions YTD	Total Unique Participants	Average Participants per Session
Asexual/Aromantic Group	10	36	8
Bereavement Group	10	20	6
Bisexual/Pansexual Group	12	61	14
Queer Spirituality Group	11	46	12
Gayme Night Group	8	66	18
Lehigh Valley Lesbians	11	39	8

Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center is registered as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization as defined by IRS regulations. A copy of official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

Parents of Trans Kids	22	71	10
Neurodivergent Community Group	10	70	17
Queer Memoir Reading Group	8	18	5
Queer Novel Reading Group	3	9	5
Queer Poetry Reading Group	10	25	7
Crafting Group	11	31	10
BIPOC Community Group	9	26	8
Transfeminine Group	11	42	12
Transmasculine Group	10	29	6
HIV/STI Testing	24	51	3
COVID-19 Testing	24	42	4
COVID-19 Vaccines	8	66	9
Flu Vaccines	3	34	12
Legal Clinic	23	41	2
Medical Marijuana Enrollment Assistance	10	9	1

The critical impact of these programs is evident in the stories shared by community members. A parent in our Parents of Trans Kids group told staff, "I'm so grateful this group exists. I didn't know where to go to find support for my trans son, and now I have so much more direction."

A participant in the queer spirituality group shared, "This group has helped me reconnect to my spiritual self."

"This is my favorite group, and it's like the only place I feel like I can be myself," reported a member of the group for neurodivergent community members.

Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center is registered as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization as defined by IRS regulations. A copy of official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.



Last month, a participant in the bereavement group told our Associate Director of Community Programs, "This time of year I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have a space to talk about this loss."

We are pleased to offer these connections and support for LGBTQ community members in the Greater Lehigh Valley, and we are deeply thankful for the continued support of your faith community.

Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center is registered as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization as defined by IRS regulations. A copy of official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

February 2023



- 2 – Susan Hoffert
- 3 – Robert Fegley
Jasmine Ferrol
- 4 – Joshua Pyle
- 5 – Richard Guhl
Susan Cook
- 6 – Bryon Cook
- 7 – Robert Zeky
- 8 – Todd Saylor
- 9 – Henry Dopera
- 13 – Linda Ferrol
Rebecca Sausser
- 14 – Jennifer Hinkle
- 15 – Zackiryah Schuler
- 20 – Rebecca
Bronfenbrenner
- 24 – Donovan
Hausman



2/13 Cheryl & John Phillips
2/14 Glenn & Gretchen Kent
2/22 Allan & Nancy Kramer-Moyer

			1 9am Prayer Call	2 Food Bank	3	4
5 11am Worship	6	7 Elders Meeting 1pm	8 9am Prayer Call	9	10	11
12 11am Worship	13	14 Consistory Meeting 7pm	15 9am Prayer Call	16	17	18
19 11am Worship	20 President's Day (Office Closed)	21	22 9am Prayer Call Ash Wednesday 7:30pm	23	24 Food Bank	25
26 11am Worship	27	28				

S

M

T

W

T

F

S

February – Comes from the Latin word februa, which means “to cleanse”. The month was named after the Roman Februalia, which was a monthlong festival of purification and atonement.

To whoever installed the railing by the steps to the side of the altar, please contact Pastor Becky at 570-581-0594 or revsausser@gmail.com. She needs to ask some questions.

Visit us at www.stjohnsuccallentown.org

Like us on Facebook at St. John's UCC Allentown