

The Disciple



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

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

Volume 23 Issue 28

January 2023

Howdy St. John's Family,

Happy New Year! Welcome to 2023 Volume 23 of *The Disciple*! It feels like an historic undertaking, moving from one volume of something to the next. At this historic junction when we are uniting and reuniting with new members and old, I was thinking about the last major building project at the church in the '60s. Around this time there were cosmetic improvements, updates to help accommodate folks of different abilities, and in 1962 the Dossal Cloth was installed in the back of our Swedish Modern sanctuary.

One day while I was rummaging around looking for candles in the back, I found a little picture frame with the following description inside:

Extending upward and disappearing above the arch of the chancel, the Dossal Cloth graces the west wall somewhat as a stained-glass window might terminate a cathedral but with a softness and subtlety of color and detail that can only be achieved by the loom of artist Ted Hallman, whose unique talents have captured inspiration from such ancient mediums as hemp and such modern materials as plastic. The Dossal design suggests the rhythmic flow of life as tomorrow transcends today and for the Christians, ever closer to God. Flanking the flowing fabric of life is the vine, symbolic of the Church and its union with the Lord.

It might be a little on the nose, but this reminds me of Exodus 35:30-35 when Moses is talking to Bezalel and Oholiab, the craftsmen in the tribe. The people have escaped from Egypt and are making the Tabernacle, the place where the Lord's spirit was thought to dwell. Moses tells the craftsmen that God has called them by name and blessed them with the skills and craftsmanship to make this place for God. "God has filled them with skill to do every kind of work done by artisans," from woodcarving to weaving. God has woven us together; St. John's folks, both the seasoned and new, people from Trinity UCC, Zion's UCC, and Emmanuel UCC. We have been brought together and blessed with the skills to

make something beautiful together, and my heart is filled with joy at the endless possibilities of how we can shine God's light into the city of Allentown! Let's get started!

-Pastor Becky Sausser

Consistory Summary

The Consistory meeting was held on December 13 at 7pm. Trudi opened with a devotional, and the minutes from the last meeting were approved. The Treasurer's report for October was approved. November's report will be ready in 1 to 2 weeks; it is waiting for some information. Pastor Becky reported that our Child Abuse Prevention Plan is being sent to our lawyer before it comes to the Consistory for final approval. She declared her 2023 housing. Covenant card thank-you notes were sent out and they "contain a surprise" this year. We mailed letters of invitation to Zion's directory and received roughly 30 letters back with no forwarding addresses. Pastor Becky and Alan Kramer-Moyer will be calling folks in the new year. Pastor Becky S. and Pastor Becky Thomas have been visiting Emmanuel homebound people the last two weeks; there are seven people on the list including one couple. Five people have requested their membership be transferred to St. John's UCC. Pastor Becky also announced that she hopes to start a "Visitations Team" in the new year. This team would consist of volunteers making phone calls to people to help them feel more connected to the church.

The WISE covenant found in this issue was reviewed and approved to send to the congregation. Making this commitment is the next step in becoming a WISE congregation. Pastor Becky closed her report by adding that there is a video up on our YouTube page with photos from around the church at Christmas time. The Fellowship Committee reported a very successful Advent breakfast with great food and 39 people in attendance. On November 28 a group of people came together to decorate the Trinity room. Fellowship is in the process of planning Christmas eve fellowship time and the Annual Meeting luncheon. Property Committee is still waiting for more estimates, but reported that we will most likely need to run a capital campaign in the near future. Christian Education had the Christmas Pageant on December 18, and there will be a "Make your own" pizza party on January 20 for youth Sixth grade and older.

Finance reported the proposed budget. Receipts were based only on current St. John's members. A motion was made and the proposal unanimously

passed. Under Old Business, Pastor Becky presented a slideshow of possible railings to use in the sanctuary. The Consistory walked over to visualize the railing and decided to work toward installing the chosen railings in 2023. Pastor Becky is also researching removable ramps. Under New Business, the Annual Meeting will be held on Sunday, January 15, with the snow date the following Sunday on January 22. Nancy Rissell found people willing to replace those going off the consistory (Nancy Rissell, Judy Garrigan, Bonnie Falla). Thank you to Jim Bronfenbrenner and Lynn Cloak who will be Elders, and thank you, Nancy Kramer-Moyer, who will serve as Deacon. Trudi Egan sent information to members about becoming a “Willing to Respond Church”, meaning that we would be willing to help during a disaster. We’ve been on the Red Cross emergency list for a number of years. A motion was made and unanimously accepted to become a “Willing to Respond Church.” The next meeting will be January 10 at 7pm in the Trinity room with a hybrid option for those who cannot join in person.

-Pastor Becky Sausser

WISE Update

In 2022 St. John's started taking steps to become a WISE congregation; that is Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged. This called us to learn more about mental health issues and how to better support folks struggling with mental illness and their families. We had a book study, speakers, training opportunities, and sermons on how to live out being a WISE congregation; now we are at the point in the journey where we are called to make a commitment!

Just like our Open and Affirming covenant shows our love and support for the LGBT+ community, this WISE standing is a designation from the Mental Health Network of the United Church of Christ that would set us apart as a church committed to supporting our siblings in Christ that struggle with mental health. Please read the covenant below. Email questions and suggestions that you have to Pastor Becky (revsausser@gmail.com) and be ready to talk about and hopefully vote on this covenant at our Congregational Meeting!

A WISE Congregation for Mental Health For all with mental health challenges and their loved ones

We, the people of St John's United Church of Christ in Allentown, PA, know we are graced by the gifts, stories, and experiences of all our members and guests, including those living with mental health challenges such as, but not limited to, mental illnesses, brain disorders, addictions, and trauma. We know these challenges can profoundly affect people's feelings, thoughts, and behavior. We care about the whole person: body, heart, mind, and soul. We affirm the deep and constant movement of God's Holy Spirit, seeking to bring us to the fullness of life. We believe that all people are beloved by God, and if a person has a mental health challenge, that person has a right to be seen as a person first and foremost, because that person is not defined by the challenges they face, but by the love they have received from God. Jesus said the greatest commandment is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself". He made no distinction between various members of society; he did not show any partiality. He included all people in this commandment and in the example set by his lived ministry.

Sometimes individuals with mental health challenges such as brain disorders, mental illnesses, addictions, and trauma feel cut off from God and do not feel included. It is our calling to communicate to all individuals that God loves all of us equally, even when we do not feel the love of the Holy Spirit in our lives. People with mental health challenges have gifts to be offered in our faith community, and we want everyone to feel fully welcomed, included, supported, and engaged in the life, work, and leadership of this church. We, St. John's United Church of Christ in Allentown, PA, vote to continue to be a welcoming, inclusive, supportive, and engaged (WISE) congregation for mental health substance abuse and brain disorders.

Call to action:

We pledge to create a *welcoming* environment for people with mental health challenges and their families:

- We pledge to educate ourselves and offer educational opportunities to help our whole congregation understand the issues surrounding the mental health

challenges such as mental illnesses, brain disorders, addictions, and trauma and grasp the implications of this covenant.

- In an effort to reduce social stigma, we pledge to examine our own attitudes and preconceived notions about mental health challenges and mental health and to confront our own ingrained stigma.
- We pledge actively to welcome those with mental health challenges into our faith community and provide a safe environment in which people can tell their stories and share their journeys.

We pledge to *include* people with mental health challenges in the life, work, and leadership of the congregation:

- We commit to recruiting, nominating, and supporting persons with mental health challenges to serve on teams and in leadership positions within the congregation.
- When calling clergy and other staff, we pledge to be open to hiring persons with mental health challenges.

We pledge to *support* people in our congregation who have mental health challenges and to support their families:

- We pledge to reach out to those living with brain disorders/mental illnesses, addictions, and trauma.
- We pledge to offer companionship and compassion for individuals and families living with mental health challenges.

We pledge to engage with other organizations that work at the intersection of mental health and faith, spirituality, and religion:

- We pledge to welcome and encourage outside groups that deal with mental health challenges, brain disorders, mental illnesses, addictions, and trauma to use our church facilities.
- We pledge to engage with other organizations to find opportunities to be in shared mission, ministry, and advocacy together. This includes working with our church's Mental Health Ministry team, the UCC Mental Health Network and the

UCC Disabilities Ministry.

This vote affirms that we join in the process of always becoming more welcoming, inclusive, supportive, and engaged with all of God's people.

Our Ministry with Central Elementary School

We collected chap sticks and tissues for Central in December. You are more than welcome to bring other wintertime necessities, as well. There is always a need for hygiene products, such as toothbrushes, toothpaste, and soap. Sanitizing or cleaning products can always be used. Monetary offerings can be given using pew or weekly offering envelopes (write Central on them) or by using the donate button on our website and look for the Central Elementary column.

-Submitted by Wendy Williams

Important Dates:

Worship Information – January Sermons

January Sermons

- January 1- New Year's Day Sermon
 - Rev. Allan Kramer-Moyer will be preaching a poignant sermon to begin our new year!
- January 8- Baptism of the Lord
 - Reading 1: Isaiah 42:1-9
 - Reading 2: Matthew 3:13-17
 - Call to worship: Psalm 29
 - Title: With whom I am well pleased.
 - This week we revisit the baptism of the Lord, reminded of the light that we find in Christ Jesus prophesied in Isaiah! We are children of God, filled with the Spirit, through the Son! Amen!
- January 15- Second Sunday after Epiphany
 - Reading 1: John 1:29-42
 - Reading 2: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9
 - Call to worship: Psalm 40

- Title: Follow Me
- Christ finds his first followers and in 1 Corinthians we receive the invitation to follow the Lord as well!
- January 22- Third Sunday after Epiphany
 - Reading 1: Matthew 4:12-23
 - Reading 2: 1 Corinthians 1:10-18
 - Call to worship: Psalm 27
 - Title: In the beginning....
 - In our gospel lesson, Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee; in our epistle lesson we see a call to come together as a united Body of Christ!
- January 29- Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
 - Reading 1: Matthew 5:13-20
 - Reading 2: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31
 - Call to worship: Micah 6:1-8
 - Title: Blessed & Blessing.
 - In the gospel we hear the beatitudes, and in the letter to the Corinthians we learn about Christ's power and wisdom.

Announcements:

ADULT FORUM

Adult Forum looks forward to welcoming several wonderful guests in the new year! 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.

January 1-No Adult Forum. Happy New Year!

January 8-In August 2022 beloved author, preacher, and theologian Frederick Buechner died. We will remember his gentle spirit with a DVD interview.

January 15-We look forward to our annual time with Lois Mease, who will share her "Quilt Theology" and show some of her work and talk about how God is revealed in the creative process.

January 22-Pastor Becky is excited to tell us all about her latest experiences with the Next Generation Leadership Initiative. Come share in her excitement!

January 29- We are delighted to be able to reschedule a return visit from our neighbors at the Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center. Gabby Hochfeld, Arts and Culture Programs Coordinator will discuss what is happening at the center.

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 January 2023



January 1 – First Sunday of Advent –

Isaiah 63: 7-9; Psalm 148; Hebrews 2:10-18;
Matthew 2:13-23

January 8 – The Baptism of Christ –

Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10:34-43;
Matthew 3:13-17

January 15 – Second Sunday after Epiphany –

Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9;
John 1:29-42

January 22 – Third Sunday after Epiphany –

Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18;
Matthew 4:12-23

January 29 – Fourth Sunday after Epiphany –

Micah 6:1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5:1-12

January 2023



- 5 – Stephanie Heffelfinger
Richard Hausman
- 8 – Jeffrey Krapf
- 9 – Benet Bronfenbrenner
- 10 – Jaleesa Hein-Cooper
- 12 – Jeff Rissell
- 18 – Kendall Heffelfinger
- 22 – Emma Beltran
Taylor Fillman
- 23 – Marissa Bortz
- 26 – Karen Dopera
- 30 – Emily Ferrol
Max Bronfenbrenner
- 31 – Glenn Kent

Celebrating 
An Anniversary This Month

1	2	3 Elders Meeting 1pm	4 9am Prayer Call	5	6	7
8 11am Worship	9	10 Consistory Meeting 7pm	11 9am Prayer Call	12	13	14
15 11am Worship Annual Meeting (Right after service)	16 Martin Luther King's Birthday (Office Closed)	17	18 9am Prayer Call	19	20 Youth Group Pizza Night 6:00pm	21
22 11am Worship	23	24	25 9am Prayer Call Christian Unity Service 7pm	26	27	28
29 11am Worship	30	31				

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January – Named for the Roman god Janus, protector of gates and doorways. Janus is depicted with two faces, one looking into the past, the other into the future.

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