

The Disciple



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

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

Volume 24 Issue 40

January 2024

Howdy St. John's Family,

Happy New Year! If Pantone can declare peach fuzz as its color of the year (whatever that means), then I can declare 2024 the year of the Epistle! In our New Testament following the gospels and the book of Acts, we have the epistles, which means letters. During 2024 I will be exploring the major themes in each of our epistles so that we can revisit and become more familiar with them together! Kicking things off in January we are going to talk about the letter to the Romans! We are going to see that Paul wrote or is credited as having written many of the epistles, most often to a church he helped to plant. In this letter though, he is writing to a church he has not planted. Tradition holds that this church was planted by Roman citizens who heard Peter preach on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-41.

In Rome, the emperor Claudius had banished Jewish folks from Rome for 5 years and then allowed them to return. When the Jewish believers in Christ came back, they found a Christian church that didn't look very Jewish, and this caused some strife between the two groups. That is where we get Paul's letter to the Romans, which has four large themes that tie the letter together. In the first four chapters, Paul shares the good news of the gospel, explaining that Christ came for people of all nations, forgiving sins and offering new life! In this new life, you are made right with God, you are made part of God's people, and you are transformed through the power of the spirit! Think about John the Baptist, who baptized with water, but he explained that Jesus would baptize with Spirit! Chapters 5 through 8 talk about this new humanity that is made through the transformed people, a people liberated to love God and their neighbor, led by the Holy Spirit with them always!

Chapters 9 through 16 give us a little bit of a history lesson on the Hebrew teachings from our Old Testament to illustrate the proof that God keeps God's promises. The promise that God made to Abraham that he shall be the father of many nations was thought to be exclusively for the Israelites, but through Jesus, even the gentile world can partake in this promise of love and deliverance because Jesus died for everyone! The Jewish and gentile followers of Jesus need to unite in love to create one unified church and one unified holy family! When we share God's love, we are fulfilling the Torah, love the Lord your God and love your neighbor. When we show grace to one another in our differences, we are creating a stronger, more diverse, and more beautiful body of Christ! And we in the United Church of Christ are still united today under Jesus as head of the church! Blessings! -Pastor Becky Sausser

Consistory Summary

Our December Consistory meeting was held on December 13 at 7pm in the Trinity room. After a time of joys and concerns, Tom Raub led devotionals. Pastor Becky reported that the church welcomed two new members on December 10, Dennis and Nancy Blankowitsch. She expressed gratitude for her experience at NGLI in November. Eighty-Four covenant cards were mailed out on November 19, 29 were returned. Each person who returned a covenant card received a thank you card and an ornament. St. John's is now featured free in the *Morning Call* in the "In Your Congregation" section. Invitations were sent to all visitors and friends of the congregation inviting them to the Christmas Eve service. Battle Borne has been donating extra food from the Food Share program to the resource room.

Under committee reports, Lynn Cloak reported that Fellowship made a profit of \$296.50 on the pulled pork sale. Cakes were purchased to celebrate the Delorey family and Jay Mosebach's birthday. The Advent breakfast was a success and donations totaled \$42. Lynn and Trudi Egan are working on special refreshments for the Christmas Eve and New Year's Day services. Lynn scheduled a CPR/AED class for February 4; see this issue of *The Disciple* for more information. Jeff Rissell reported that Property is still waiting for estimates. Christian education reported a successful Youth Pageant on December 17. A "Make your own pizza & movie" night is being planned but a date has not been set. Carol Wickert from the Green Team will be planning an intergenerational hike for the spring.

The treasurer's report was submitted by Jim Bronfenbrenner and Cassidy Bell. Our pledges this year have increased, which is to be celebrated. The Personnel Committee had nothing to report. Rick Guhl reported from Green Team there will be a sermon series in January and a 60-day prayer challenge. The team has been writing articles for the newsletter. Following February they will conduct an inventory; this was approved by the Consistory. Rick also shared a brief update on Central Elementary; Megan Oblescheck is back from maternity leave. The Benevolence Committee submitted their request last month for approval of the grant requests. This was voted on via email and approved. The checks were mailed during the second week of December. The total was \$28,000! Benevolence was able to give away the full total of what was requested. The totals are as follows.

- Battle Borne received \$6,000
- Bloom Women received \$2,500
- Bradbury Sullivan received \$500
- Community Bike Works received \$2,000
- Communities in Schools (Central) received \$4,000
- Family Promise of the Lehigh Valley received \$3,000
- Lehigh Conference of Churches received \$5,000
- The Neighborhood Center received \$5,000

There was no old business. Under new business, Jeff Rissell presented the proposed budget for 2024. The Consistory approved a motion to present the budget to the congregation at our Congregational Meeting to be held on January 14 following the service. Our next meeting is January 9 at 7pm.

- Submitted by Pastor Becky.

January Special Mission Offering

Our Special Mission focus for January is **Central Elementary School**. We will be collecting various items that they have requested to meet students' needs. These include hats, gloves/mittens; shampoo, deodorant, bar soap, tissues (small packs), small games and toys (to be used on Award's Days). You can drop off your donations in the Central box in the Narthex. You can also donate money using the weekly or blue pew envelopes and the Donate Button on the website. Be sure to designate your contribution **for Central Elementary**.

Thank you for helping us support St. John's efforts in this vital ministry.

January Sermons

- January 7
 - Reading 1: Genesis 1:1-31
 - Call: Psalm 104
 - Title: The Improbable Creation.
 - Summary: This week we begin a sermon series focused on our relationship with creation.
 - Points of focus - the improbability of creation existing as proof for God's intervention, examining our role in creation as curator and caregiver, reinterpreting the word *dominion*. Introduction of Green Team and its work.
 - Works cited: Timothy Keller's *The Reason for God*, Brian Thomas Swimme & Mary Evelyn Tucker's *Journey of the Universe*, Stephen Gould's *Rocks of Ages*
- January 14
 - Reading 1: Job 38:1-21
 - Reading 2: Job 40:15-24
 - Call: Great is Thy Faithfulness, v2
 - Title: Creation Song.
 - Summary: In the book of Job we find a beautiful description of creation spoken from the voice of the Creator! In our gospel.
 - Points of focus- Job 38-40, unquantifiable qualities of the universe, God's singing the universe into being (Lewis), discussion of Hebrew alphabet as building blocks and connection (Magnify), the need to protect creation (bridge to next week).
 - Works cited: C. S. Lewis *The Magician's Nephew*, Rupp & Southard's *The Cosmic Dance*, Flora Slosson Wuellner's *Prayer and Our Bodies: Prayer for the body of the earth*.
- January 21
 - Reading 1: Deuteronomy 11: 8-21
 - Reading 2: Matthew 25:14-30 (or Titus 1:5-9)

- Call: Psalm 107
- Title: I'm Not the Land of Canaan.
- Summary: In Deuteronomy we hear of the pleasures of the Promised Land, watered by the rain and yielding a bounty for God's people. In the gospel of Matthew, we hear the parable of the talents.
 - Points of focus- transitioning the promised land into the reality of stewardship and responsibility. Using 1 Timothy to tie together obligations for future generations.
- Works cited: *Land of Canaan* by the Indigo Girls, 1 Timothy 5:8, Nihon Zasshi's article "Human selfishness and environmental problems", R.S. Sugirtharajah's book *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*.
 - <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34719534/>
- January 28
 - Reading 1: Genesis 2:1-4
 - Reading 2: Revelation 21:1-8
 - Call: Psalm 62
 - Title: Rest, Repair, Renew.
 - Summary- On the seventh day, God rested, but what is the significance of this? In Revelation we hear about the new heaven and new earth as we discuss what God is calling us to.
 - Points of focus- the sabbath as the completion of creation, the idea that the new heaven and new earth can be current reality, Tikkun Olam (repairing the world), call to action Green Team and the next steps.
 - Works cited: Motmann's *God in Creation*, Jonathan Krasner's article, "The world is broken and humans must repair it, Tikkun Olam", UCC Website on Green Team and the next steps.
 - <https://www.brandeis.edu/jewish-experience/history-culture/2023/may/tikkun-olam-history>.

Electronic Giving Information

I love making my life easier! Every night I set the coffee machine up so I can simply hit a button in the morning and enjoy my fresh cup of coffee. Most of my bills and donations are set to be paid automatically and I love it! If you are like me and you want to make your donations to St. John's UCC online, all you have to do is visit our website and click on the "Donate" button in the top right corner. This will take you to a secure page where you can make a one-time donation, or make an account for weekly, monthly, bi-weekly, or semimonthly donations! When "checking out" you have the option to cover the cost of us receiving the donation. This cost is small for the donor, only a small percentage of your gift, but for the church it adds up quickly; we deeply appreciate everything and anything you are able to tithe. Thank you!

ADULT FORUM

Happy New Year!! You are all invited to join us Sunday mornings before worship for a variety of studies and programs. And bring your friends! We gather in the Trinity Room at 9:30 for coffee or tea, then begin our program at 9:45 with a sharing of joys and concerns.

This is what we have planned to start the new year:

Jan. 7-Staff from the Allentown Health Bureau will be with us to discuss emergency preparedness and to answer questions about their many programs, including immunization, testing, disease prevention, emergency response, and many more important services.

Jan. 14-Martina Obenski from Congregation Keneseth Israel will lead us in a discussion about Judaism and her faith community. Please come learn more about our Jewish sisters and brothers.

Jan. 21-Joyful Giving is a non-profit organization that packages essential items that look and feel like gifts with the intention of creating joy. Hannah Cotta Coleman will share how this program touches both the creators and recipients of these "Joy Bags".

Jan. 28-We are so pleased to have folks from Emmanuel UCC with us at St. John's, but have you wondered what is now happening at 16th and Chew? Sherri Binder, Executive Director of Ripple Community, will update us on how the church building is being repurposed to continue to serve our community.

Announcements

Lenten Dates

- February 14 – Ash Wednesday Service 7:30pm
- March 10 – Daylight Savings Time Begins
- March 24 – Palm Sunday Service 11am
- March 28 – Maundy Thursday Service 7:30pm
- March 29 – Tenebrae Service 7:30pm
- March 31 – Easter Morning Service 11am

Getting to Know you

We have been incredibly blessed to have so many wonderful folks in our congregation! Some of these folks are friends who can no longer attend in person but are still a blessed part of the body of Christ and beloved members of St. John's UCC! In this new section of The Disciple, you will get to know who they are!

Marian Litts Anderson became a “friend” of St. John’s UCC, after Zion UCC closed this year. She was a member of Zion from age 10 and is now a very young sounding 91-year-old! Marian was born in Allentown and jokingly said she raised her four children *and her husband* here. She lives in her own home on the south side with her two cats.

Three of her children live in the Lehigh Valley and one son lives in Wisconsin. She has a godson living close by. Marian has lots of grandchildren and half a dozen great-grandchildren.

Marian worked for Mack Truck for a short time. Her husband, James, was a long-haul truck driver. After their children were raised, Marian joined him for three years on the road, traveling from coast to coast and border to border. She says those were their best years. She then worked at BonTon. Unfortunately, James died twelve years ago. Ironically, this telephone interview with Marian was on December 7, the anniversary of his burial.

Marian is blessed with good health. She enjoys watching television, both Sunday morning evangelists and the Eagles. Talking with her is a true delight. Thank you, Marian.

- *Submitted by Nancy Kramer-Moyer*

Consistory Supports 60-Day Spiritual Challenge

Join us during January and February as we engage in a 60-day challenge of Scripture readings and prayer. We want all of us to exercise our spiritual powers for personal growth, for discerning where God is leading us as a church, and for the sake of our troubled world. The Consistory said, "Yes!" to this challenge at its October meeting. We hope you will too. Watch for more details in upcoming newsletters and announcements.

CPR/AED Certification Class to be Offered at St. John’s

An American Heart Association **C**ardio **P**ulmonary **R**esuscitation and **A**utomated **E**xternal **D**efibrillation certification class has been scheduled for Sunday, February 4, 2024, from 1pm to approximately 4:30pm, with a snow date of February 11. As the owner of an AED, it is the responsibility of St. John’s to have people trained to use it.

We are very fortunate to have an instructor willing to come to St. John’s to teach this class.

The fee to take the class is \$41. St. John’s will pay the fee for anyone interested in taking the class, but unable to pay; just speak to Pastor Becky.

Please contact Lynn Cloak with any questions
or to sign up for the class.

Join the Green Team's 60-day Challenge

Beginning January 1 and running all through February, we invite you to participate with us in our 60 process of listening to God as we seek to understand what God is calling us to in these challenging times. The reality of climate change is upon us, and its impact on future generations may be grave.

What is God saying to us about the care of Creation? What comfort do we need as we face the hard reality? What challenges will we need to rise up and meet? What corrections will we need to hear and make along the way?

To prepare our hearts and minds for this process of healing and justice with regards to Creation, we are offering you 60 days of prayers, Scripture readings, and meditations to ponder. We do so knowing that as people of faith, as followers of Christ, we can bear the cross and rise to this momentous occasion. We encourage you to do this as an individual, a couple, or a family. We encourage you to share this challenge with friends and neighbors, too. The challenge will be available on our website (www.stjohnsuccallentown.org), on our Facebook page, and will be emailed to you as a pdf.

As I have stated this is a time of preparation. Our Consistory has already blessed the next step in the process: doing assessments of our church's practices as it impacts the climate, as well as inviting you to assess your own household's impacts. You will hear more about this in the coming months. You may well find this a hard task but remember; we aren't doing this alone. We have each other and most of all, we have the God who loves us abundantly in Jesus Christ.

Benevolent Grant Recipient Letter

Every year when we disperse the benevolence grants, we request that the individual or group send in a report at the end of the year sharing with us their success and what they were able to accomplish. Below is a letter from Battle Borne sharing their story of what they were able to accomplish in 2023 thanks to the St John's UCC Benevolence grant!



To whom it may concern,



Battle Borne would like graciously to thank the St. John's Benevolence Grant for 2023. We have been able to assist veterans in the Lehigh Valley with food insecurity and veteran resource benefits, as well as homeless veterans with hygiene and safety items.

We have assisted 49 local veterans with resources such as grocery gift cards, gas gift cards, veteran massage therapy, connections with Veteran Resource Officers, as well as many other local resources. Thanks to the space we rent from St. John's UCC, we are able to host a veteran's Empowerment Group, a Military and Veteran Family Support Group, as well as the Lehigh County Military Food Share. This is a partnership between Second Harvest, The PA National Guard Family Groups, and Battle Borne. Since we started this partnership in April 2023, we have fed approximately 60 households, which includes 50 veteran families, 1 widowed family, and 8 active duty families. We fed 154 individuals including 41 children and 57 seniors.

We are so incredibly grateful for the financial and physical support of Pastor Becky and St. John's UCC of Allentown. We could not have helped the amount of Lehigh Valley families as we have without a stable, secure location to host these services.

Household Size							Branch of Service					Family Members		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Army	Air Force	Marine	Navy	Coast Guard	Seniors	Adults	Children
17	19	5	11	4	3	1	40	9	7	8		57	56	41

January 2024

<div></div> <div>5 – Stephanie Heffelfinger Richard Hausman 8 – Jeffrey Krapf 9 – Bennet 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</div>	<div><div>Celebrating</div><div>An Anniversary This Month</div><div></div></div>							
	Sunday		Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 Office Closed	2 Elders Meeting 1PM	3 9am Prayer Call	4 Food Bank	5	6	
	7 9:30am Sunday School & Adult Forum 11:00am Worship	8	9	10 9am Prayer Call	11	12	13	
	14 9:30am Sunday School & Adult Forum 11:00am Worship Annual Meeting	15	16	17 9am Prayer Call	18	19	20	
	21 9:30am Sunday School & Adult Forum 11:00am Worship	22	23	24 9am Prayer Call	25	26 Food Bank	27	
	28 9:30am Sunday School & Adult Forum 11:00am Worship	29	30	31 9am Prayer Call				

Check out our website: <https://stjohnsuccallentown.org/> If you found this, contact Pastor Becky to be entered to win a gift card.
 Follow us on Facebook by searching St. John's UCC Allentown (our logo is a picture of the church)

Happy New year



New Year FIND THE WORD



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JANUARY	FRESH	PRESENT	FESTIVE
CLOCK	FUTURE	PAST	FIRST
COUNTDOWN	FIREWORKS	NEW	JOYFUL
CALENDAR	WORLDWIDE	TOAST	NIGHTTIME
KISS	WISHFUL	CELEBRATION	BEGINNING



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9		5	1		6		7	2
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What's your New Years resolution?

Name: _____