

UPLIFT Newsletter

FEBRUARY 2020

I was in a thrift shop the other day when I saw a board game based on the television show, *The Office*. A friend of mine loves the show and I knew he would appreciate the board game. As I took it to the register, the young clerk picked it up and said, "That's my favorite show of all time, you love it too?" "Actually, I've never watched it," I said. "This is for a friend." He asked what show I watched when I was his age. "MASH," I replied. "MASH, I never heard of a show by that name," he said.

How things change with time. What once was familiar to one generation becomes trivia to the next. What once brought on a sense of anticipation to some is irrelevant to others. So goes the ebb and flow of life, a constant shift of values and norms and aspirations. Having just celebrated another birthday I allow myself to muse about the way things were and are and may well be. I've served the church for going on 38 years now (15 of which have been here with you). There are those things for which seminary never trained me, because at the time no one thought I would need to know. There was a time when the church was at the center of society, but the world has a way of reprioritizing what is important to it. I think of the ways this congregation has changed in the past decade and a half. Many of the faithful have gone on to the Church Triumphant leaving their earthly service to be picked up by others. Some have been called to live out their faith in new expressions and places, while others have been welcomed into our midst to share their faith in this place. The way we always did some things has been replaced by ways that are more effective. Programs that once met certain needs have been refocused to address emerging needs.

There is a time-honored motto in our tradition: "ecclesia reformata semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei," "The church reformed, always being reformed according to the word of God." That does not mean that we change things for the sake of change, nor does it mean that we change to conform to the changes in the world. What it means is that the church (and every local congregation) is called to live out its faith in a way that it is sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ in a manner that can be understood by the world. In no way is the truth of God to be watered down. In no way are we to sugar coat the expectations and responsibilities of discipleship so they appear easy. What it means is that we are to make Christ known in terms that help the world recognize his relevance to how we are and to the power of who he can change us to become.

In the Fall, we began to assess where we are as a congregation. This year we will be looking at a new process of discernment. What are the strengths of our ministry? Where have we failed to look and take action? What resources have we had all along and have not used to their fullest potential? What are some new skills we need to develop to meet the needs around us? How can we share the message of Jesus Christ in ways this community can understand more clearly? How can we more clearly hear what our neighbors most need to be made whole in the goodness of God?

We're approaching our bicentennial in a couple years. That is a reason to celebrate, not only who we have been, but maybe more important, who we are becoming. As I often say, "We have been blessed to become a blessing." May we be open to his bidding call, sensitive to his tender touch and open to the adventure on which the Spirit leads us ...

In Christ's love,

Pastor Jim

Scripture Texts for Worship

The scripture texts for February are given for your study in preparation for Worship.

Sunday, February 2

Matthew 5:1-12

Micah 6:1-8

Sunday, February 9

I Corinthians 2:1-12 (13-16)

Matthew 5:13-20

Sunday, February 16

I Corinthians 3:1-9

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Sunday, February 23

Exodus 24:12-18

Matthew 17:1-9

Wednesday, February 26

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Isaiah 58:1-12

Sunday, March 1

Genesis 2:15-17 & 3:1-7

Matthew 4:1-11

Annual Meeting of the Congregation

On Sunday, January 26th following worship, we held our Annual Congregational Meeting in Fellowship Hall. A light lunch was enjoyed by all. Thank you to those who prepared and served the food. The work of the church during 2019 was reviewed and the 2020 Nominating Committee was elected. Reports distributed at this meeting are available at the back of the sanctuary for those who were unable to attend.

Worship Assistants

February 2

Liturgist: Mary Anzelone

Acolyte: Brady Doak

Flowers: Marilyn Neal

Ushers: Doug & Andrea Clayton
Kim McKinney, Linda George

Projector: Chase Stuchal

Audio: Andrew Baker

February 9—Scout Sunday

Liturgist: Deb Lint

Acolyte: David Kerin

Ushers: Boy Scouts Troop 4

Projector: Kayla Moran

Audio: Olivia Eckenroad

February 16

Liturgist: Jean Heberling

Flowers: Nancy Boone

Ushers: Bob & Vicky Doty
Elizabeth & John Clark Bruner

Projector: Shakira McKinney

Audio: Jaison McKinney

February 23

Liturgist: Gene Artman

Acolyte: John Kerin

Ushers: Rick & Willa Shoemaker
Elaine Jellison, Alan Lowman

Projector: John Clark Bruner

Audio: Elizabeth Bruner

Offering Counters

Tom & Janet Smith



Lent begins

Ash Wednesday

We will gather for worship at 7:00 p.m. on Ash Wednesday, February 26th. There will be the imposition of ashes for those who wish to receive them and the Lord's Supper will be celebrated. We hope you will plan to join us as Ash Wednesday is the beginning of the Lenten Season.

2020 Flower Chart

The 2020 Flower Chart is hanging in the hallway outside the church office. If you would like to order flowers for Sunday worship, please use the chart to sign-up for your choice of date. Flowers are \$20/Sunday and checks can be made payable to the Board of Deacons. We hope that those ordering flowers through the deacons would take the arrangement following worship or pick them up at the church by the following Tuesday. Flowers that remain at the church after Tuesday will be shared with homebound members of the congregation. Please contact the church office with any questions or concerns.



A Community Devotional

Last year we tried something a bit more local, a bit more personal with regards to our Lenten Devotional. We had folks from the community prepare a devotional message for the scripture of each day through Lent. Each devotion listed the assigned scripture lesson, a devotional message of about 400 words, and a one or two sentence prayer. The submissions were compiled into booklet form, duplicated, then distributed to area churches for use during the Lenten Season. The response was very positive so the ministerium decided to do it again this year. Devotionals will be available to you soon to use in your personal study during the Lenten Season. What a wonderful way for the Christians of Blairsville to share Christ as one.



Mission Moment—Presbyterian chaplain: Congregations can prevent veteran suicide by building connections

According to the Rev. (Capt.) Lyman M. Smith, director of the Presbyterian Council for Chaplains and Military Personnel, “more than 18 million veterans live among us. And of those 18 million, some 18 are likely to die by suicide today.” While there is no all-encompassing explanation for veteran suicide, the Rev. Michael Gillespie, a retired Veterans Administration chaplain, says contributing factors include economic disparities, homelessness, service and social connection, and health and well-being, which apply to the general population as well. Most veteran suicides involve firearms. And veterans have greater access and more familiarity with firearms, which is why “gun violence and gun control are somewhat related to this topic,” Gillespie said. What is alarming to Gillespie is the dramatic increase in veteran suicides among both younger and older veterans. While the 2019 VA report on Suicide Prevention from 2005–17 states that there was a 43.6 percent increase in deaths by suicide in the general population, compared to a 6.1 percent increase in veteran suicides — making it look as if veterans are doing better than the general population — Gillespie says it’s “not that simple.” Among the report findings:

- The suicide rate among veterans ages 18–34 increased by 76%.
- That group also had the highest suicide rate in 2017 (44.5 per 100,000).
- The number of suicides was highest among veterans ages 55–74, which accounted for 38% of all suicides.

The report defined a veteran as someone who had been activated for federal military service and was currently not serving. According to PCCMP’s Smith, more veterans seek help in faith communities than in hospitals, which is why chaplains like Gillespie encourage people in PC(USA) congregations to build bridges and human connections to the veterans in their midst. “Veterans tend to get isolated because they no longer fit in at their social gatherings,” Gillespie said. “But they need social connections.” Gillespie, who served as the chief chaplain at the Roseburg (Oregon) VA Healthcare System before retiring in April 2018, believes the VA remains the pre-eminent place with the expertise to deal with veterans’ mental, social and spiritual needs. Calling chaplains “subject matter experts,” he said they address social connection and the health and well-being of veterans. They’re also an integral part of suicide prevention and other interdisciplinary teams at all VA medical centers, he said. Chaplains interface with local faith communities, Gillespie noted, providing faith leaders and parishioners with resources and education about the military culture and warning signs for veterans in crisis. Brigadier General Ed Brandt, the deputy chief of the chaplains for the Army National Guard, says there isn’t a day that goes by where he and his bosses don’t think about trying to prevent suicides in the National Guard. In 2018, there were 123 members of the National Guard who died by suicide among 335,000 troops. The majority of those were single white men, ages 18–26. Most had never been deployed. Through October 2019, the number of deaths by suicide among National Guard members was down to 65. While there’s no explanation for the drop, Brandt believes it all comes back to relationships and community. “We’re calling on people to connect, to be proactive, to let someone know there is someone who cares,” he said, adding, “there is a lot of emphasis now in training that teaches soldiers to say, ‘Are you OK? Are you hurting yourself?’” In 2018, Brandt said, 700 Army National Guard chaplains in 50 states, three territories and in the District of Columbia did 1,800 suicide preventions while counseling 45,000 soldiers and providing 98,000 of them with worship services. And yet there are only 72 full-time chaplains in the guard; the rest are part-time. Chaplains make up just two-tenths of one percent of the Guard’s strength. More than one-third of Guard troops say they have no religious preference. “As an ordained PC(USA) minister, my faith tells me that life is valuable, that we are children of God,” Brandt said, “which is the message we’re trying to get out.”

The Veteran Crisis Line is a great resource for any veteran in crisis. The telephone number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 800-273-8255.

Paul Seebeck, Communications Strategist, Presbyterian Mission Agency

March Newsletter

Articles to be published in the March edition of the UPLIFT newsletter are due to the church office by Sunday, February 16th. Please call the office with any questions or concerns.

Bible Study

Wednesday mornings at 10:00 a.m., a group gathers for Bible study in the Fellowship Hall. The focus is on the New Testament book of Acts and Pastor Monroe is the leader. The group is open to all who would like to attend.



Consider Taking Part

The Session Committees for 2020 are looking for interested members to be active participants. Chairs for the committees are listed. Please review the committees and responsibilities of the committees and consider serving.

Worship – Worship services, sacraments, music, funerals, weddings—Dennis Gould, chair

Mission – Benevolences, special offerings, global & local mission and missionaries—Gene Artman, chair

Christian Education – Sunday school programs, curriculum, adult education, youth work, leadership education—Mary Anzelone, chair

Finance – Finances, special funds, and annual budget—Rick Shoemaker, chair

Stewardship – Stewardship education and programs, challenges the congregation in its faithful use of the many different resources entrusted to our care—Rick Shoemaker, chair

Property & Maintenance – Construction, maintenance, repairs, housekeeping, safety, security, yard work, inventory—Bob Cosharek & Pat Swope, co-chairs

Congregational Fellowship – Suppers, Dinner Theater, picnics, outings, trips, camping—Joan Moran, chair

Evangelism – New member recruitment and assimilation, outreach, publicity—Lisa Hainaut, chair

Souper Bowl of Caring Offering

We received the Souper Bowl of Caring Offering Sunday, February 2nd on Super Bowl Sunday. All gifts received will be sent to the Food Bank to support families in Indiana County. To date a total of \$548.00 has been received. We will continue to accept gifts through the end of February. Please prayerfully consider your gift.

News from the Kitchen

There are many unclaimed dishes in the church kitchen. If you are missing a pan or brought a dish to share at an earlier event, please check to see if your dish is in the kitchen and take it with you.

Community Lenten Lunch Schedule

The Community Lenten worship services are held each Wednesday through the Season of Lent and begin at 12:00 noon. Following the service a soup and sandwich lunch is served by the host church. This year's schedule follows:

Feb. 26..... Rev. Tim Monroe.....Simon of Cyrene.....Black Lick United Methodist Church

Mar. 4..... Dawn Krishart.....Pilate's Wife C&MA Church

Mar. 11..... Rev. Joe BairdNicodemus Hebron Lutheran Church

Mar. 18..... Rev. Steve BugayPeter.....United Presbyterian Church

Mar. 25..... Rev. Rusty McClurgPilate Hopewell United Methodist Church

Apr. 1..... Sharon KendallMary Magdalene First United Methodist Church

Apr. 8..... Susan O'Shaughnessy.....Guards at the TombSS Simon & Jude

GOOD FRIDAY—7:00 p.m.

Apr. 10..... Rev. Harold Hicks.....Thieves on the Cross Crossroads Community Church

..... (former Free Methodist Church in Blairsville)