



UPLIFT Newsletter

The United
Presbyterian Church
of Blairsville, PA

MARCH 2022

We've all heard the story in our childhood, Mrs. Pig Laments as she talks to her children, "I can't do this work anymore. So I'm afraid you must leave home and make your own way in the world." So off the three little pigs went—one built a home of straw, one a house of sticks, one a house of bricks. Along comes the big, bad wolf, huffing and puffing and down come straw and sticks, but did the brick house cave in—not by a hair on his chinny chin chin.

As he preached from the mount, Jesus tells us of two men who each build new homes. One builds on rock, the other on sand. Then the rain fell and the floods came and the winds came and beat upon those houses. When all was said and done, the man who built on the rock was lauded for his wisdom, while the one who built on the sand was declared a fool.

The Bible is filled with images of construction—the foundation on which you build and the material you use. It also speaks of the wisdom and foolishness of our choices and the consequences thereof. As Peter writes to the churches, he issues an invitation and a challenge: "Come to him (Christ), a living stone though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (I Peter 2:4-5). Scripture likens the church to many things: a family, a bride, a body, a temple, a lampstand, a flock. But the most powerful image is that of a building, not just a stagnant edifice, but a building that is alive, active and growing. Paul writes, "The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually in a dwelling place for God" (Ephesians 2:20-22).

Through this year, we will be celebrating our bicentennial as a Presbyterian family of faith here in Blairsville. The fact of the matter is that we're not merely celebrating 200 years, but 350 years. First Presbyterian Church lived out its faith for 150 years. During that period, just a block away, the United Presbyterian Church was also bearing witness to Jesus Christ. Then, in 1969, the two congregations merged to become The United Presbyterian Church of Blairsville, a new congregation that blended a variety of spiritual gifts and a shared heritage of commitment to mission. Through the years there have been six different buildings that have served as a place for the faithful to gather, but our ministry has in no way been confined to bricks and mortar.

Each of us, and each Christian who has borne witness to Jesus before us has been a living stone. As Paul alluded, Christ is the cornerstone who sets the direction for our ministry. The apostles and prophets, chosen, called out by God, have laid the foundation of the truth and steadfastness of the Gospel. And each believer who followed served as a living stone by the way they bore witness to the faith. And stone by stone, layer by layer, generation by generation, the church has grown. We would not be who we are in our faith if it had not been for the faithful who have taught us by their example, enlightened us by their maturity and challenged us by their vision. We are in Christ because of the ways the Spirit moved through them, and anything accomplished through us has been built on their labor of love for the Lord. Take a moment some time to start listing the names of those God has used to nurture you in the faith.

While we look back and celebrate all the Spirit has done in our midst, we are also called to look forward and consider the next generation of the family of faith. While we have had the benefit of living out our witness atop generations of living stones, what will be said of us by those Christians yet to be born. Will our witness be found to be of straw or of sticks, or will it be rock solid? No matter the sureness, the firmness of our foundation, generations to come will only be as strong as the sureness of our witness. All that is not to say the entire future of the church depends solely on us. Indeed the Spirit can and does work in spite of us, but faith is so much sweeter when we are open to fullness of life which endues us.

In coming weeks, special stones will be available in the sanctuary. You are encouraged to take one and to carry it with you as a reminder of your calling, the blessings of your heritage and your responsibility to live out with boldness the work entrusted to your care. We look forward to our celebration of God's presence in our midst.....

In Christ's love,

Pastor Jim

Scripture Texts for Worship

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

Ash Wednesday, March 2

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Isaiah 58:1-12

Sunday, March 6

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Luke 4:1-13

Sunday, March 13

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Sunday, March 20

Isaiah 55:1-9

Luke 13:1-9

Sunday, March 27

II Corinthians 5:16-21

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Sunday, April 3

Isaiah 43:16-21

John 12:1-8

April Newsletter

Articles to be published in the April edition of the UPLIFT newsletter are due to the church office by Tuesday, March 15. Please call the office with any questions or concerns.

Handbell Choir

The Handbell Choir has changed its rehearsal time. Rehearsals are now each Wednesday at 5:45 p.m. in the Bell Room. The choir is currently in need of 3 or 4 new ringers so it can ring the 3-octave music. We welcome any seasoned ringers and any new to handbell ringing. Contact Vicky Westley, director, for more information.

Worship Assistants

March 2—Ash Wednesday

Liturgist: Bobbi Monroe

Streaming/ Olivia & Kristi

Proj/Audio: Eckenroad

March 6

Liturgist: Mary Gorslene

Flowers: Emma Riggi

Streaming/ Elizabeth, Abigail & John

Proj/Audio: Bruner

March 13

Liturgist: Lon Ferguson

Flowers: Eileen Brown

Streaming/

Proj/Audio: Eli & Brylea Borbonus

March 20

Liturgist: Barb Brown

Streaming/ Olivia & Kristi

Proj/Audio: Eckenroad

March 27

Liturgist: tba

Streaming/ Elizabeth, Abigail & John

Proj/Audio: Bruner

Offering Counters

Charlotte & Bob Cosharek

Souper Bowl Update

We received the Souper Bowl of Caring Offering during morning worship Sunday, February 13th. As of March 1st our total received equals \$1,365.00. All of these funds will be sent to ICCAP to purchase food for distribution at the county Food Banks. We thank all of you who contributed to the offering.

Happy 200th Anniversary!

The 200TH Anniversary Committee met a couple times and plans have started for our celebration. The next meeting will be Tuesday, March 22nd at 6:00 p.m. in Fellowship Hall. All those interested in joining the planning process are welcome.



Dates to Remember for the Season of Lent and Easter

Wednesdays

Online Community Lenten Services,
12:00 p.m.

Ash Wednesday, March 2

Worship & Communion, 7:00 p.m.

Sunday, April 10

Palm Sunday

Maundy Thursday, April 14

Worship & Communion, 7:00 p.m.

Good Friday, April 15

Community Worship

C&MA Church, 7:00 p.m.

Easter Day, April 17

Early Easter Worship, 8:00 a.m.

Light Easter Breakfast, 9:00 a.m.

Easter Day Worship, 11:00 a.m.

Bible Study

Wednesday morning Bible Study meets at 10:00 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall. For those who would like to participate from home, we are set up to connect you by Zoom. If you are interested, please call the church office for more details.

Chancel Choir

The Chancel Choir gathers for rehearsal each Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. in the sanctuary. If you are interested in joining the choir or if you would like more information, please contact Cindy Borbonus. We also invite those who would like to share their musical gifts during worship to contact Cindy for more information.

Community Lenten Services

Community Lenten Reflections will be presented by local ministers and available online each Wednesday during Lent. The 2022 Lenten services will focus on the theme: *True Religion—The Spiritual and Social Responsibilities of the Church*. The first service will be available Ash Wednesday, March 2nd. Please use this link to access the youtube channel.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3nq0fsIDKtI4d1bpHN1pHg>

The schedule of speakers is listed below.

Mar 2	The Abused & Violated
.....	Linda Corle
Mar 9	The Elderly
.....	Rev. John Buchmann
Mar 16	The Imprisoned
.....	Rev. Fred Craig
Mar 23	The Lonely
.....	Rev. John Smaligo
Mar 30	The Poor & Hungry
.....	Rev. Harold Hicks
Apr 6	The Prejudiced & Oppressed
.....	Rev. Joe Baird
Apr 13	The Sick & Dying
.....	Rev. Timothy Monroe
Apr 15 Good Friday	Rev. Rusty McClurg
7:00 p.m. in person at the C&MA Church	

Lenten Devotionals

Lenten Devotional Booklets are available at the back of the sanctuary for anyone wishing to take one. The booklets include a Daily Lenten Reflection for each day through Lent and concludes on Easter Day. We would like to thank those from our church who participated by writing a devotion. Thank you to Kathy Bella who provided the artwork for the cover. And thank you to the C&MA Church for providing the labor to organize the booklet and print, fold and staple each copy. It truly is a labor of love. If you would like a copy of the devotional and are unable to pick one up, please contact the church office and one can be mailed to you.



It's a Shower!

The deacons are having a shower for the Alice Paul House in Indiana! We will be collecting items needed by the Alice Paul House through the months of March and April. We ask that all donations be brought to the church by Sunday, May 1st. A container is located at the back of the sanctuary to collect items.

Their Wish List

- Walmart, Sheetz, Lowes gift cards
- Laundry detergent
- Laundry baskets
- Dryer sheets
- Toilet paper
- Paper towels
- Tissues
- Disinfectant wipes
- Toilet bowl cleaner/Comet/Bleach
- Magic Erasers
- Tall kitchen & small trash bags
- Hand soap & hand sanitizer
- Chapstick
- Dry goods
- Canned food

The mission of the Alice Paul House is to promote awareness of domestic violence, sexual assault, and victimization in our community through primary prevention and educational programs; to assist and empower all victims of crime; and to provide safety to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

If you have any questions, please see Bobbi Monroe or a deacon.



Summary of Church Survey (2022)

Overall, the findings from the 2022 Church Survey were very positive with 99% of the respondents satisfied with the church. The majority of the respondents (80%) believed the church was successful in its obligation to meet the needs of the church family as well as the needs of the community. On another positive note, the majority of the respondents (80%) enjoyed the music ministry at the church.

With regard to interest in new program and activities, the respondents were very interested in the activities related to the 200th Anniversary Celebration, Church Socials/ Dinners, Youth Group and Vacation Bible Study.

Based on the age distribution of the congregation it was not surprising that 83% did not have youth attending the church and therefore offered few suggestions for how to get the youth more involved. With regard to worship time preference, 53% prefer 11:00 and 33% prefer 10:00. There were several comments encouraging the continued practice of 11:00 during most of the year and changing to 10:00 for the summer months.

Three possible concerns identified from the survey included the following:

1. The first concern is an older congregation with very few young/middle aged members to keep the church moving forward. Of the 97 respondents, 69% were older than 60 and 8% were in the 30 to 50 age group. This is not a sustainable model moving forward and needs to be addressed.
2. The second concern was the decrease in church attendance over the past year. This was highlighted in the survey by 34% of the respondents who indicated their attendance at worship services has decreased in the past year. The most common reason for this drop in attendance according to 22 of the respondents was covid concerns.
3. The third concern was the lack of interest in Sunday School. The vast majority of adult respondents (66%) are not interested in Sunday School. Although disappointing this is not surprising if you look at the very low attendance in Sunday School since the start of the pandemic. Analysis of child's interest in Sunday School was problematic based on the low sample size of 10 respondents as well as very few responses on how to improve interest in Sunday School.

Session plans to address all of these concerns in the future and is open to any and all suggestions from the congregation to help us resolve the concerns.

Holy Spirit Tension Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit:

Replace the tension within me with
Your holy relaxation.

Replace the turbulence within me with
Your sacred calm.

Replace the anxiety within me with
Your quiet confidence.

Replace the fear within me with
Your strong faith.

Replace the bitterness within me with
Your sweet grace.

Replace the darkness within me with
Your gentle light.

Replace the coldness within me with
Your loving warmth.

Replace the night within me with
Your day.

Replace the winter within me with
Your spring.

Straighten my crookedness.

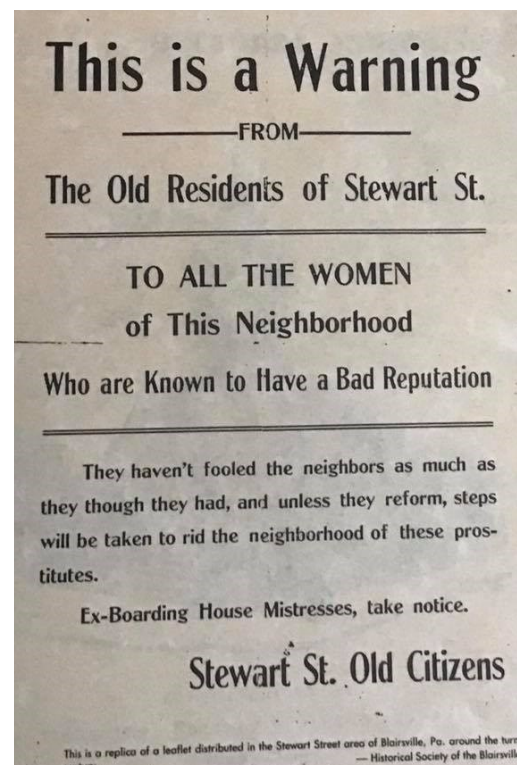
Fill my emptiness. Dull the edge of my pride.

Sharpen the edge of my humility.

Light the fires of my love.

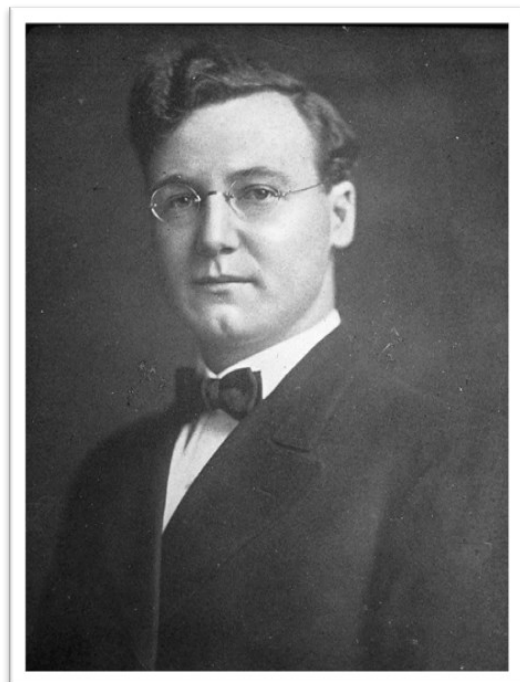
Quench the flames of my lust.

Let me see myself as You see me that I may see You as You have promised, for "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God." (Matthew 5:8)



200th Anniversary Celebration

As part of our 200th anniversary, we'll be including some newspaper articles and pictures from early days.



The Rev. Michael M. McDivitt served the First Presbyterian Church from 1911-1919 and his wife, Mrs. M.M. McDivitt



Rev. Michael McDivitt (1911-1919) and the Session



Bible Trivia

How Well Do You Know Your Bible?

Answers in the next newsletter

1. Which two tribes of Israel were not named after sons of Jacob?
2. What did Melchizedek give to Abram?
3. When the disciples saw Jesus walking on water, what did they think he was?
4. Which missionary was described as having known the holy scriptures from an early age?
5. Which tribe of Israel received no inheritance of land?

BIBLE TRIVIA ANSWERS FROM JANUARY

1. Who was the first appointed king of Israel?
Answer: King Saul (I Samuel 9:15-17)
2. What was the giant's name that David killed?
Answer: Goliath (I Samuel 17:45-50)
3. What did God change Jacob's name to before his meeting with Esau?
Answer: Israel (Genesis 32:22-28)
4. Who was the king of Israel anointed by Samuel after Saul?
Answer: King David (I Samuel 16)
5. What Israelite saved her people from being murdered and was a wife of a king?
Answer: Queen Esther (Esther 1-9)

Food for Family Thought

1. If someone gave you \$1,000 in cash—in the form of ten \$100 bills—and told you that you had to give it all away within 24 hours, to whom would you give the money?
****Advertising fills our children's imaginations with many things they can acquire and possess. Counter that by showing your child the joy of being a creative giver. For example, invite your child to donate toys and clothes to those in need or to assist a neighbor who could use a helping hand.**
2. If you could open the back door to your house and step out into the perfect backyard, what would that yard be like? Be as specific as you can.
****Take a moment to imagine in what ways heaven will be the perfect place. Jesus said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Take one action today that will make life in your family more like your vision of heaven.**