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The Messenger

St. John's United Church of Christ



Message from the Pastor

My friends,

The Sunday after my first full week of service as your intentional interim minister, Richard Rohr's Center for Contemplation and Action published the first reflection in the week's series titled "A New Story". This "new story" idea immediately wove its way into my thinking. Let me share this, from Brother Rohr's opening paragraph: "It doesn't matter how old we are; we all need stories to believe in. If there's no storyline, no integrating images that define who we are or that give our lives meaning or direction, we just won't be happy... Many of us had thought that myth meant 'not true,' when in fact the older meaning of myth is precisely 'always true!'"

Now consider the ancient myth wrapped up in Genesis 1:31 (New Living Translation):

Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!

And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day.

Let me direct your attention (once again) to the work of a group of St. John's members who have been gently digging into the church's archives, studying historical artifacts and creating a truly wonderful display in the area outside the first-floor elevator landing. An heirloom bible is enclosed in one of the standing glass cases, along with clothing samples from church league sports teams. Another case offers photo images of church groups and gatherings, and bulletins from worship services, amateur theatre performances, and other congregational events. There are bits and pieces of artwork and music, confirmation classes and baptisms, evidence of church life through nearly two centuries of history here in Richmond.

Here's the question I'd like for you all to consider: how does this "summary" of St. John's UCC history reflect the "very good" state of God's creation when all of this creation began? I believe this is a legitimate question for the church to contemplate during this interim period; I hope you find it so. And not to overly influence your consideration, but I am also convinced that God's very good creation continues among us, even today!

During the month of August, I do not intend to follow the themes found in the Revised Common Lectionary, but rather will be studying and praying on this theme of "A New Story" that I read about when our year together began. As of this moment I am thinking of the new story emerging out of the old here at St. John's... and I haven't any idea of how it will read! This new story is not mine to tell, but yours. And by yours, I mean yours as a congregation and as individuals.

Following this line of thinking, a second group of church members has been developing a method to encourage our storytelling that is based on the Appreciative Inquiry interview process. They have already started interviewing outside of their own group, talking with members of the history gatherers and soon will be making interview dates with members of church council.

The next step will be yours. The story that is emerging here – in the congregation and in you – is for you to tell. I hope you feel encouraged to do so. Let me just offer one more bit of scripture, from 1 Corinthians 12, same translation: *“The eye can never say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you.’ The head can’t say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you.’ In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary.”*

In case you’re thinking you have nothing to share... you do. And sharing your story is very good.

Bless the day!

Pastor Tom

Display created by the
Congregational History Team:
Betsy and Richard Bighinatti,
David Craig, Johanna Gilbert,
and Dreama Terrill



August Devotional

Leviticus 19:33-34

“When a foreigner lives with you in your land, don’t take advantage of him. Treat the foreigner the same as a native. Love him like one of your own. Remember that you were once foreigners in Egypt. I am GOD, your God.”

Working with the History Committee in making our communal history more visible, it has become more and more clear to me that this scripture could be the organizing principle of St. John’s. Our forefathers were a group of immigrants coming to a new country, not speaking the language, not understanding the culture, yet determined to become a part of America and its promise.

Certainly there were times when folks outside that small community treated the members as strangers, finding their German speech and ways strange. I’m certain for those who came before us it could be uncomfortable from time to time. Perhaps this may be the primary reason we try so hard to dedicate ourselves to extravagant welcome. As the scripture says, we remember we too were once foreigners in a new land.

As we continue to search out the needs of our community, let us continue to remember we too were once strangers. Let us always welcome partners who need space to grow even if they don’t look like us, or worship like us. We know how hard it is to be strangers, and to be looked on with suspicion. We must dedicate ourselves to having the beautiful hearts and doors of St. John’s open to everyone!

Praise be to God!!!

Dreama Terrill

From the Council President

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Acts 2:1-21

Pentecost commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and other disciples of Jesus following the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, and it marks the beginning of the Christian church's mission to the world. Many people consider it the "birthday" of the Christian church, and in our Wednesday night Bible Study of the Book of Acts, we have been reading and discussing what happened next in the life of the early church and how those early lessons might inform our way forward at St. John's.

In Acts we read about strong element of community and fellowship, both in worship and prayer and in caring for the members of the community. The Apostles and disciples then branch out, bringing the word of God and the message of repentance and deliverance first to the Jewish community and then to the Gentiles. The members of the Christian community take care of one another, and then look to minister compassionately to the wider society.

The early Christian church faced many challenges – persecution, arrests, martyrdoms and other efforts by the authorities to suppress this challenge to the established order. But through it all, the church prospered, and many thousands were baptized and converted.

We as a church at St. John's have also faced many challenges throughout the past nearly 180 years, but we have persevered. We have figured out ways to deal with challenges, and I am confident that we will continue to do so.

Encouraged by falling infection and increasing vaccination rates, the Church Council voted to resume in-person worship on June 11th, and it has been a wonderful blessing to be able to worship together again, in community, even with the precaution of maintaining mask wearing.

Unfortunately, since then, infection rates have increased. The Church Council is continuing to monitor public health information and guidance, to maintain the health and safety of our congregation. As this message is distributed, it seems prudent to continue to worship in the Sanctuary, with masks, but without congregational singing.

We encourage everyone who is eligible to be vaccinated to do so, and to follow public health guidance regarding the wearing of masks indoors. Let us follow the lessons of the early Christian church, watch out for each other and the wider community, and be led by the Holy Spirit.

Jeff Jacobs

Congregational Life & Care

The Giving Tree — School Supplies for Coal Pit Learning Center

Our Sanctuary has been adorned by a decorated tree for the all of the holidays during this past year, and we hope that all have enjoyed the changes each month. We are now going to be calling it a "Giving Tree", and giving items that you will be asked to donate to various non-profits in the Richmond area.

Our first Giving Tree, in August, will be themed "Back to School" This will be in celebration of the children returning to their classrooms this fall. We ask that you bring some school supplies, such as crayons, magic markers, glue, construction paper, pencils, pens, etc. as well as paper towels, napkins and facial tissues to church and place them under the tree. We will be donating them to a non-profit called the "Coal Pit Learning Center", a pre-school serving low-income students in western Henrico County. The Center takes its name from the Historic Coal Pit School, originally built in 1905 to serve the African American coal mining families in the Glen Allen area. It operated in this form until 1955, when its functions were assumed by the Henrico County school system. It eventually closed and the building was left vacant for years.

In 1976 the building was repurposed as the Coal Pit Learning Center, a non-profit pre-school with a mission to provide children from low-income families with the educational skills necessary to succeed in school. In the fall of 2010, with the support of the Rotary Club of Innsbruck and a number of generous donors and volunteers, the Center re-opened with a renovated building, but continues to depend on donations of school supplies. Please bring your donations to church by the end of August.

Birthdays and Church Directory

If you have had a Birthday during the past year and we have neglected to list it in the Messenger and celebrate it on the second Sunday of the month, we probably don't have it in our records. Please contact the church office at office@stjohnsrichmond.org so that we can celebrate with you!

Likewise, if you are new to the church (since 2019) or have recently changed your home address, updated your e-mail address or changed your home or cell phone numbers, please contact the church office at office@stjohnsrichmond.org so that we can keep our church directory up to date.

August Mission of the Month: Habitat for Humanity

Our Mission of the month for August is Richmond Metro Habitat for Humanity.

Richmond Metro Habitat works to put God's love into action by bringing people together to build homes and communities. In this process they give people the hope of a better life with improved and affordable housing. They have been serving our community for 35 years in the City of Richmond, Chesterfield and Henrico Counties. This summer they are completing a house in Richmond and beginning work on 2 others on the same street. These homes are built by the future owners along with volunteers like us. They must put in 350 hours of sweat equity. The new owners are required to meet strict criteria for income and credit history. They are usually in substandard housing. We can help bring hope for safe, affordable housing to our neighbors by supporting Habitat Richmond.

Please give generously.



August Announcements

Wednesday Night Bible Study Fellowship

All are invited to participate in our Wednesday Night Bible Study from 7:00 to 8:00 PM on Zoom, for 14 weeks beginning on June 2nd. Join other members of our beloved community to study the Word. All are invited, welcomed and affirmed. This is a great way to be with others in a time of study and fellowship.

We will be studying the Book of Acts, sometimes known as the Acts of the Apostles, with Interim Pastor Tom Gerstenlauer and Scott Siefert as our co-facilitators. Major themes, including the universality of the Gospel, the role of women, the work of the Holy Spirit, the fulfillment of Old Testament promises, and the nature and mission of the Christian church, will connect with St. John's active discernment in this time of interim ministry.

We will be using the Kerygma Program study guide, which costs \$22. Please contact Jeff Jacobs, at jwjacobs9@gmail.com or (202) 361-9887, if you'd like to order a book. We would love to have you in our group, so if cost is an issue we may be able to help out. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Scott Siefert at (804) 350-0826, or email him at sesiefert@gmail.com.

Guest Preacher - Sunday, August 8th

The Rev. Stephen Poore is a Richmond native and blessed with the camaraderie of his wife, Devin, and two children, Howdy and Jed. Stephen is also a licensed pastor with the Evangelical Covenant Church. Stephen and Devin have partaken in adventures spanning from the favelas of Sao Paulo to the pasta of Rome. Stephen received his Bachelor of Science in Psychology from VCU. Before finishing his undergraduate degree, Stephen trekked the United States from coast to coast with his punk rock band, Ten 33. Youth Ministry has been a focal point of Stephen's life, which led him to become the Student Ministries Director at West End Assembly of God in Richmond.

Stephen received his Masters of Divinity degree from North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago, IL. While in Chicago, Stephen worked with Soul City Church as the College-Connections Director. Devin and Stephen eventually made their way back to Richmond in August of 2014 to start a church, intentionally in the heart of the city, called Center Church, where Stephen currently serves as Pastor.

August Announcements

Communion on August 1st

As is our custom, we will be celebrating Communion on August 1st, the first Sunday of the month. In order to protect the health and safety of our congregation, instead of passing the communion elements in the pews we will be using individual self-contained communion kits. These kits, which resemble coffee creamers, contain a gluten-free communion wafer on top of a small serving of grape juice. They will be available as you enter the Sanctuary, to be used during the Communion portion of the worship service.

More Postcards to Voters

Reclaim Our Vote, and the Justice and Witness team of the Central Atlantic Conference of the UCC, is writing more non-partisan postcards urging infrequent voters to check their registration and vote in the upcoming November 2nd Virginia election. If you are able to write some postcards please let Kathy Freise know, at ksfreise@gmail.com. We would provide the postcards, stamps, addresses and the script to use.

The postcards will need to be mailed by September 18th. Early voting in Virginia starts September 17th.

Looking Around the Church

When you're back in the church building, enjoying the new HVAC system and the brighter and energy-efficient LED lighting, you are invited to take a few moments to notice the new church history exhibit in cabinets in the niche just outside the Parlor by the elevator; the upgraded restrooms (with hot water!); the upgraded elevator; the new chairlift on the back stairs to the Parlor; the newly-refinished exterior doors; the new carpeting in the Narthex; the new carpeting, light fixture and restored woodwork in the foyer by the copy room; the new awning over the back entrance; and the newly-resurfaced sidewalk leading to the elevator beside the alley, with its new safety railing.

Pastoral Care

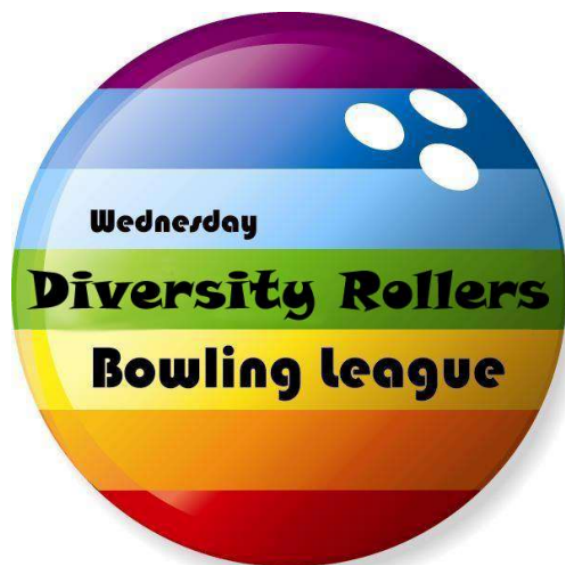
We are fortunate to have The Rev. Tom Gerstenlauer with us to provide spiritual support and pastoral care to our congregation. He can be reached at revtrgerst@gmail.com or (413) 378-0828. As you know, Pastor Tom is serving as our Interim Pastor on a three-quarters time basis, and this month will be unavailable from August 6-13 and August 16-25. During that time, please contact the church office at (804) 358-9291 with any pastoral care emergencies.

August Announcements

LGBTQ+ and Allies Bowling League

A bowling league of members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies is forming at Bowl American Short Pump in Glen Allen on Wednesday evenings starting on September 8th. Organizational details are below, or you can contact Gary Williams at elwil1@outlook.com or Facebook at

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/570164043974739/> for more information.



When: Wednesdays Beginning September 8, 2021

Organizational Meeting Sept 1, 2021

Where: Bowl America Short Pump

4400 Pouncey Tract Rd, Glen Allen, VA 23060

Time: 6:30 pm (practice begins at 6:20)

Cost: \$16.00 per week per bowler (excluding shoes)

League will be for 26 weeks, prize money to be determined by members.

This a sanctioned league. All bowlers must be a member of United States Bowling Conference: \$23



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/570164043974739/>

August Announcements

Sunday Parking

Although Sunday parking is still permitted along the Monument Avenue median strip, there are parking spots marked "CH" and reserved for St. John's along the alley just north of the church off of Lombardy Street and inside the adjacent apartment building parking garage.

Sunday Volunteers Needed!

With our return to in-person worship, we once again need volunteers to prepare simple refreshments for post-worship fellowship time and greeters to distribute bulletins and welcome members and visitors. Please contact Richard Bighinatti (at grandude42@aol.com or (804) 502-1005) if you'd like to be a greeter, and Betsy Bighinatti (at grandude42@aol.com or (804) 502-1007) to sign up to provide refreshments.

Faith Night at the Diamond, August 19th

We have purchased an additional bloc of tickets for the Squirrels game against the Erie SeaWolves on Thursday, August 19th. This is Faith Night, so there will be player faith testimonials before the 6:35 PM first pitch. Tickets are \$12, although if cost is an issue we can help you out. Please contact Betsy Bighinatti at (804) 502-1007 or grandude42@aol.com to order your tickets.

Fellowship Lunch, August 12th

A dozen of us enjoyed a wonderful return to indoor dining at Candela's in North Chesterfield in July. This month our Fellowship Lunch will be across the river in the West End on Thursday, August 12th at 1 pm at Beijing on Grove, 5710 Grove Avenue in Richmond. Please contact Beth Stiegler at (804) 475-7340 or bsstiegler@verizon.net to make your reservation; all are welcome!

August 2021 Calendar

Sunday, August 1st, 10 a.m. - Worship Service with Communion in-person and by Zoom

Wednesday, August 4th, 7 p.m - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, August 5th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee Meeting by Zoom

Sunday, August 8th, 10 a.m. - Worship Service in-person and by Zoom with August birthdays celebration

Monday, August 9th, 6:30 p.m. - Church Council Meeting by Zoom

Wednesday, August 11th, 7 p.m - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, August 12th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee Meeting by Zoom

Thursday, August 12th, 1 p.m. - Fellowship Lunch, Beijing on Grove, 5710 Grove Avenue in Richmond

Sunday, August 15th, 10 a.m. - Worship Service in-person and by Zoom

Wednesday, August 18th, 7 p.m - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, August 19th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee Meeting by Zoom

Thursday, August 19th, 6:35 p.m. - Faith Night at the Diamond, Richmond

Squirrels v. Erie SeaWolves, 6:35 PM with fireworks after the game

Sunday, August 22nd, 10 a.m. - Worship Service in-person and by Zoom

Sunday, August 22nd, after post-worship Fellowship Time - Congregational Life & Care Committee meeting in-person

Wednesday, August 23rd, 7 p.m - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, August 24th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee Meeting by Zoom

Sunday, August 29th, 10 a.m. - Worship Service in-person and by Zoom

Sunday, August 29th, after post-worship Fellowship Time - Missions and Outreach Committee

Sunday, September 18th - Church Picnic, 4-8 PM, Walton Lake Clubhouse, Midlothian, VA

Sunday, September 25th - Richmond PrideFest, Brown's Island

August Birthdays

August 6th - Ella L. Roberson

August 9th - Deniz Michel

August 16th - Dreama Terrill

August 20th - Ray Pollard

August 20th - Lindsey Franklin

August 22nd - James Cook

August 22nd - Don Warren

August 23rd - Josh Lyle

August 23rd - Jennifer Martin

August 26th - Jeff Michel



St. John's United Church of Christ

St. John's United Church of Christ is a diverse community forming a united congregation, seeking to grow our faith, share it with others, and serve God's people wherever the need is present. We are living God's love and all are invited!!!

An Open and Affirming Congregation

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