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The Messenger

St. John's United Church of Christ



Message from the Pastor

My friends,

I always get turned off when I read the words, at the beginning of an article, “As I write this...”. And so, I have always tried to avoid opening with the phrase. But today, as I was thinking about writing this article, I received a phone call from a colleague and friend in Springfield, Massachusetts. Pastor Clemmons serves as teacher and spiritual counsel to a small congregation that meets in the chapel of South Congregational Church in that city. She and I became acquainted while I served South Church as senior pastor. We consulted regularly while I was there, and we have remained connected through monthly phone calls and occasional letters.

My phone went off while I was reading about the letter of James in our New Testament. I was considering a critical explanation and focusing on a central theme of the text: faith without works is dead. It occurred to me that this theme plays like a chant in the faith life of St. John's. It is evident in your consistent support for local mission partners; in your commitment to social justice issues in the city and the world; in your love for one another and hospitality for visitors to our worship gatherings. And it is especially apparent, to me, in the longing of the congregation to move on through this interim period.

Let me be clear: I take no offense at this sense of urgency. The desire to get on with the devoted ministry of involvement in works of faith is worthy, an impulse of which church leader James would certainly approve. My friend Pastor Clemmons would affirm this observation, I believe. This morning, she and I agreed on another important point: the importance of prayer.

When I left Richmond for Springfield in the fall of 2014, I received the gift of a print of 15th century artist Albrecht Durer's "Study of the Hands of an Apostle". It has served me as a reminder of the importance of prayer in sustaining and strengthening my faith. It is also the subject of James' letter as it closes (James 5:13-18).

Prayer is as essential as works to a life of faith. This wisdom extends to the very origin of our community of faith, even before a word was written. It not only sustains and strengthens us; it heals us and makes us well. I know my friend in Springfield agrees; I hope you do, too.

Peace be with you now, and always.

Pastor Tom



September Devotional

Psalm 126:2-3

Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongues with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad.

Laughter is a blessing, a stress-reliever like no other. We can navigate some of the darkest times in our lives by finding moments of levity with a smile. When my brother was killed in an accident at the young age of 29, our family was crushed. We did not abandon our joy though. We celebrated all his crazy antics and the way he always tried to make sure everyone around him was happy. God gave him the gift of happiness and joy and he embraced it wholly. Coping with sadness and the struggles of everyday life is a bit easier when embracing the amazing gift of laughter that God has bestowed on us.

Laughter and smiles are a universal way to communicate regardless of any other barriers. We can become closer with the people around us and be thankful for friends. The happiness that comes from laughter and its necessity in our everyday lives cannot be understated.

Today, laugh at something silly. Smile at a stranger. Appreciate the things that make you feel good as you reflect on all the Lord continues to do in our lives.

Terri Weaver

From the Council President

And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10:25

As the Autumn season starts, we typically mark this as a traditional “back to church” time, when people have returned from summer vacations and travels, young people return to school, and we prepare for a new round of church activities. This year is the same in many ways, and yet very different. The Covid-19 pandemic interfered with our usual travel and vacation plans, but people found ways to safely gather with friends and family. The pandemic prevented us from physically “meeting together”, but thanks to Zoom technology we were able to continue to worship together and engage in meaningful weekly Bible study. Since July 11th, when we returned to in-person worship, despite the need to remain masked, many of us have enjoyed the opportunity to be together in the church building, while others have been able to continue worshipping with us by Zoom.

We have continued to engage in “good deeds”, through the support of our Missions of the Month like Caritas, Child Savers, ACTS, Habitat for Humanity, Feed More, and others, and our Giving Tree collections of back-to-school supplies and (as you will read elsewhere in this newsletter) humanitarian supplies for Afghani refugees. We have demonstrated love and encouraged each other through our expressions of joys and concerns during worship, our Bible Study Fellowship, our published prayer list, and our “check-in” calls with each other. And we responded to the civil disturbances surrounding racism, police killings and the Confederate statues on Monument Avenue with our weekly vigil in support of the Black Lives Matter movement and our Juneteenth observances.

But with the new season, what more can we do? Certainly more of the same, but we are also initiating an exciting new community service outreach through the establishment of a mini-pantry at St. John's, to provide groceries to our food-insecure neighbors. You will read elsewhere in this newsletter about opportunities to volunteer for this initiative. We are starting a new Bible study of the book of Genesis in October. I hope that as many as are able will join us for the all-church picnic, to be held outside at the Walton Lake Clubhouse in Midlothian on Saturday, September 18th. And we will also continue to offer meal assistance to those who are unable to shop or cook for themselves by virtue of illness or infirmity, and help anyone needing assistance to make an appointment for a Covid vaccination.

Let us enter this new season by meeting together, both virtually and in-person, and continuing to do good deeds and show love to our neighbors and encourage one another.

Jeff Jacobs

Jwjacobs9@gmail.com

September Mission of the Month: Diversity Richmond

Our Mission of the Month for September is Diversity Richmond. As its website says, “Diversity Richmond is a catalyst, a voice, a place and a resource for Richmond’s LGBTQ+ community.”

Diversity Richmond envisions a community where LGBTQ+ citizens are treated with respect and dignity, and their unique gifts are championed and celebrated, thereby strengthening our community.

They use donations to actively support non-profit organization that are dedicated to serving the LGBTQ+ community, their families and allies. In addition to donations, they raise money through sales at Diversity Thrift, Diversity Bingo and special events. Since its inception, Diversity Richmond has distributed more than \$850,000 to area non-profit organizations, such as Richmond Triangle Players, Fan Free Clinic, ROSMY, Equality Virginia and many others. They have remained active during the pandemic and depend on your generous gifts to continue their valuable work in our community. Please visit their website at diversityrichmond.org to learn more about their important work.

Please give generously.



The Giving Tree - Supplies for Afghan Refugees

For September our Sanctuary giving tree will be used to collect much-needed items for the Afghan refugees arriving in our area. These items will be donated to the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Richmond. The IRC has been at the forefront of the resettlement effort at Ft. Lee. We will also be making a donation from our Stille Grant funds.

Here are some suggestions:

Kitchenware - baking pans, small utensils, cutting boards, mixing bowls, food storage containers, dish towels

Personal Hygiene - deodorant, feminine pads, toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap/shower gel, shampoo

Cleaning products - laundry detergent, cleanser, kitchen trash bags, sponges, dish soap, kitchen trash cans, plastic hangers

Baby items - bottles, sippy cups, diapers

All items should be new. Please help as you are able. All of these people are starting with nothing; let's help them feel welcome.

Please contact Marcie Agee at Marcie.Agee@gmail.com or (516) 425-0465 if you have any questions or need additional information.

Micro-pantry at St. John's

St John's is launching a micro-pantry and we are in need of volunteers! Our goal is to provide an accessible, nutritional and free alternative food source for the food-insecure residents of downtown Richmond.

The operation will function through our website, where patrons order the food they want, and choose a time slot on Sunday afternoon for pickup. The micro-pantry will be operational biweekly, and we hope to start operations in early October.

Volunteers are needed to buy non-perishable items for the pantry, using funds from the church's Stille Fund grant. On Sundays two sets of volunteers are needed to bag orders and drop them off curbside to patrons. Any time and effort you can put towards this pantry service for the community is greatly appreciated! We will be hosting a zoom meeting on Friday, September 10th at 6:30 pm to discuss this community service initiative in more detail. If you would like to volunteer, please fill out the Google form linked below. In the meantime, if you have any questions or would like more information please contact Winston at aiwinston88@gmail.com.

Zoom meeting link: <https://vcu.zoom.us/j/94861875474>

Volunteer Google form: <https://bit.ly/minipantry>



September Announcements

Communion on September 5th

As is our custom, we will be celebrating Communion on September 5th, 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.

Church Picnic — Saturday, September 18th

Our all-church picnic will be held on Saturday, September 18th from 4-8 PM at the Walton Lake Clubhouse, 12700 Walton Lake Drive, Midlothian, VA, which features a large outdoor deck area and indoor space in case weather is inclement. The church will provide barbecue, and attendees are invited to bring salads and side dishes. David Craig is providing cupcakes for dessert! Contact Betsy Bighinatti (at grandude42@aol.com or (804) 502-1007) or Jeff Jacobs (at jwjacobs9@gmail.com or (202) 361-9887) for more information, or to let us know that you're coming and what you'll bring.

Guest Preacher - Sunday, September 26th

Rev. Jamie Lynn Haskins serves as the Chaplain for Spiritual Life at the University of Richmond and is an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). She is excited to begin the process of seeking ordained ministerial partnership with the United Church of Christ in the coming months. Jamie Lynn completed her graduate studies at Vanderbilt Divinity School in Nashville, Tennessee where she graduated with a Master of Divinity degree in 2009. Prior to her arrival at the University of Richmond, Jamie Lynn served as the Chaplain at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri and as the Minister of Faith Formation and Social Justice at University Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Seattle, WA. She lives in the Church Hill neighborhood of Richmond with her partner and giant, fluffy dog.

September Announcements

Wednesday Night Bible Study Fellowship - New Study of Genesis

As our study of the Book of Acts draws to a close, we are looking forward to starting a new study of the Book of Genesis, beginning October 6th.

All are welcome to join other members of our blessed community to study the Word. Major themes, involving a fresh look at some very familiar Bible stories, include creation and creationism, the rebellion of humankind and the Flood, and how the experiences of Abraham, Esau, Jacob and Joseph speak to Christians seeking to live responsibly in our world.

We will be using the Kerygma Program study guide, which costs \$22. Jeff Jacobs will be placing a group order to save on shipping costs, so please contact him at jwjacobs9@gmail.com or (202) 361-9887 to order a book. We would love to have you in our group, so if cost is an issue the church can 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.

Pastoral Care

Our Interim Pastor, The Rev. Tom Gerstenlauer, is available to provide spiritual support and pastoral care to our congregation. He can be reached at revtgerst@gmail.com or (413) 378-0828. As you may know, Pastor Tom is serving on a three-quarters time basis, and this month will be unavailable from September 20-26; during that time please contact the church office at (804) 358-9291 with any pastoral emergencies.

Have you been vaccinated?

The Virginia Department of Health has announced that everyone aged 12 and older is eligible for a Covid vaccination. We recommend and encourage everyone to be vaccinated, both to protect yourself and to protect those around you. If you need help in registering for a vaccination, please contact Jeff Jacobs (at jwjacobs9@gmail.com or (202) 361-9887) or Betsy Bighinatti (at grandude42@aol.com or (804) 502-1007) for assistance.

September 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.

September Welcome Team

9/5/2021 Don and Beth Steigler

9/12/2021 Don and Beth Steigler

9/19/2021 Jeff Hetzer Lynn Snyder

9/26/2021 Richard and Betsy Bighinatti

September 2021 Calendar

Sunday, September 5th, 10 a.m. - Worship Service with Communion in person and by Zoom

Wednesday, September 8th, 7 p.m - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, September 9th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee meeting by Zoom

Friday, September 10th, 7 p.m. - Micro-pantry initiative Zoom meeting

Sunday, September 12th, 10 a.m. - Worship Service in person and by Zoom

Wednesday, September 15th, 7 p.m - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, September 16th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee Meeting by Zoom

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

Sunday, September 19th, 10 a.m. - Worship Service in person and by Zoom

Wednesday, September 22nd, 7 p.m - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, September 23rd, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee Meeting by Zoom

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

Sunday, September 26th, 10 a.m. - Worship Service in-person and by Zoom

Sunday, September 26th, after service. - Mission Committee meeting in person

Wednesday, September 29th, 7 p.m - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, September 30th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee Meeting by Zoom

September Birthdays

September 3rd Chris Hagan
September 8th Eddie Allen
September 14th David Pittman
September 21st Jeff Jacobs
September 25th Lee Ford
September 26th Karen-Marie Yust
September 28th Betty Pecka
September 29th Ashley Quick
September 30th Pam Miller



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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