

Let us draw
near to God with
a sincere heart in
full assurance
of faith...



Hebrews 10:22

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The Rev. Gregory W. Frey, Pastor

MAY, 2020

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1:3-7)

“Because there were so many ill, and so few priests remained as the plague progressed, (Pope) Clement VI declared that the dying could make their confession to anyone present – “even to a woman”, said an English bishop – and that it would still lead to salvation. This was a big deal for the Church, as previously only clergy were permitted to perform last rites. Clement VI [later] found it necessary to grant remission of sin to all who died of the plague because so many were unattended by priests. The priests were doing what they could, but they were paying with their lives.” (Barbara W. Tuchman writes in A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century, p95)

Coronavirus is not the Black Death... not by a longshot... but you will forgive me for quoting a book on a subject I never suspected I may be quoting in our own time of pandemic.

The bad news always comes first, I suppose. We continue to be unable to gather together. I know this is hard on you, it is hard on me, too. We

have cancelled special events and postponed others; baptisms, weddings, everything is on hold as we try to figure out our way forward.

We also must face the reality that, while things will not remain as they are now, it will be some time before things are back to normal (whatever normal will be). Until there is a vaccine or an effective preventative the virus will remain a serious threat. (I write this two days after Berks County's largest single day of positive testing [211 new cases] and this after 30 days of social distancing.) And it will be precisely the kinds of large group gatherings like full church worship services which will be the last kinds of gatherings to which it will be safe and prudent to attend.

Now some good news. We have been blessed to have Rich Saylor and Luke and Craig Yambor step forward and develop our livestream worship ministry which has enabled our congregation to “virtually” gather to give praise to God and be encouraged in our faith and hope. Additionally, our online gatherings for Bible study, confirmation and committee and team meetings have been encouraging, productive and fruitful. Church members are reaching out to one another to maintain contact and communicate care and concern, and this is a great consolation.

I also want to mention that, in a time of great financial uncertainty, you have been continuing to support the ministry of St. Paul's by mailing in your offerings and participating in *Simply Giving* electronic giving contributing.

We also recognize that some of the things we have been forced to do, like livestreaming worship and electronic meetings and Bible studies are good connective tools of outreach we would do well to continue and expand even after the pandemic is over.

The important thing to remember is that God will be with us and convey us the strength and perseverance we need to continue through this time of trial. This is not the most difficult challenge the Church of Christ, in its long history, has ever faced but it is OUR challenge and how we face this challenge will be a test of the character of our faith. But it is

also an opportunity to discover for ourselves what God's strengthening power might look like in our lives.

The letter of 1 Peter begins by acknowledging trials the recipient church had been experiencing. Likely people were being arrested, tortured, and even killed on account of their witness to Jesus Christ. Peter does not attribute the misfortune to God, as if God were testing the church to see what they were made of. But he certainly acknowledged that this was indeed a test of their mettle, or rather metal. Peter used an analogy of ancient metallurgy. The purity of a precious metal would be assessed in the ancient world by putting it in a ceramic crucible and *firing* the metal. The color of the fire would be an indication of the metal's purity. Peter acknowledged that fiery trials were testing the *metal* of the church in his care. But God's part in that trial was as the provider of protective power and faith and not as the kindler of the fire.

We would like to live our lives without trials of faith and endurance. But the downside of this is we never really know the character of our faith without challenges. Adversity forces us to assess the solidity of our spiritual resources. If they are lacking, adversity drives us to attend to the deficiency by opening ourselves more fully to the presence and power of God.

Speaking plainly, I do not believe God has inflicted us with the coronavirus to test our faith. But I do believe we are undergoing a testing of our *metal* through a fiery ordeal and God is very much present to provide the resources we need to endure. And we need to be attentive to what we might learn about ourselves and our community of faith in the midst of this.

I believe that the community of St. Paul's, though sorely tested in this time of difficulty, will emerge with a stronger bond of faith and love nurtured in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has the power to do this and we put our trust in God.

--Pastor Frey

--WORSHIP IN MAY--

Services will be live streamed on the church's facebook page at 6:00 P.M. on Saturdays and 8:00 A.M. on Sundays or they can be viewed at any time by going to the church's website www.stpaulsdouglassville.com and clicking on videos.

All committees will have zoom meetings; also Bible studies will be online.

FROM THE PARISH RECORDS.....

Contribution to the **Agape Fund** in memory of **James Rhoads** given by Calvin & Ellen Sheeler

UPLIFTING THOUGHTS AT A DISMAL TIME.....by Joy Gerhart

I have found that it is very easy for me to repeat myself in little thought pieces like this. We certainly are living in a time like no other so there was nothing I could write about this time that I would have written before. But I am trying to think of positive things over against all the dismal things we can too easily name.

What have you found to be uplifting and amazing? I'm amazed to hear about the loud cheers and noises made by New Yorkers every night at 7:00 pm to acknowledge and thank the courageous health care workers. I am heartened to see all the reports of volunteers handing out food to people who need it. I am impressed by all the diligent grocery and postal and delivery workers who work every day for us. I am inspired by the creative activities and thoughts we hear about online and in the news. I am thrilled to be learning new things about technology, especially zoom (and hope to create my own virtual back drop sometime soon!). I am touched by how grateful we are to see others, online or even in person, but 6 feet apart. I am moved by the performing artists and actors who have shared so much of their time

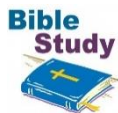
and money to keep many people fed and cared for and many others entertained and uplifted. I am extremely grateful that I have access to technology that can keep me connected to others. I am hopeful that soon scientists will find a way to vaccinate us and defeat this awful virus.

Have you gotten closer to God through this time of quarantine and uncertainty? Have you prayed more than ever? Have you questioned more than ever?

I think we are learning to appreciate many of the things we simply took for granted, whether we didn't have the time to think about being appreciative or just expected these blessings to continue. I would never want to say that this time is a blessing with all the frustration-pain-fear-death-political controversy, but I do think we can make this time into a blessing by really thinking about what is important in life and what kind of a relationship we have with God. I think of the verse in Romans 8:28: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." God doesn't inflict hardship upon us, but can bring good out of the bad. Many are learning to develop forbearance and patience. What uplifting message can you share with others now, and what positive story will you tell when this crisis has passed?

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES.....

*Mark Bible Study for inspiration and enrichment



If you haven't already started the Bible study series on Mark led by Pastor Frey, please check it out.

The Bible study is offered every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 12:00 noon and usually lasts 30 minutes. It is very easy to access. Just go to St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Douglassville website (not facebook) and look for the tan or mauve background. There is a rectangle to click to take you to the Bible study at 12 noon. Below that spot are other places you can click to enjoy previously recorded sessions on Mark. The Bible study will cover the ENTIRE Gospel of Mark and will continue

through May 20. The information is great, and it is exciting to see so many faces online!

*Evening Bible Study on April 27 at 7:00 pm

Easter Sunday is not the only day we can talk about Jesus' resurrection! It is the miracle that has given us faith and confidence and has transformed our lives. We will look at a resurrection passage via zoom and also look at how it is illuminated in the St. John Bible. Other illuminations will be compared with this to see how the miracle of the resurrection following the horror of the crucifixion is depicted. The more people we have participating, the more insights we will have in interpreting the artwork.

Check the eblast on April 24 or contact Joy Gerhart, who will be leading this study, for information on how to log on to the zoom meeting.

OUR BIBLE READINGS FOR MAY

If perhaps you have a little extra time on your hands, or if you might like to read along with the lessons we read in church, here are the Bible readings appointed for each Sunday in May and Ascension Day. Do you notice that there are not any Old Testament lessons in the list for the Easter season (there is an alternative OT first lesson for Pentecost—Numbers 11:24-30). Notice that we read from Acts throughout Easter. Notice also that in this year A, the Year of Matthew, we are reading a lot of John's Gospel, and on Ascension Day, we read from Luke because Luke is the only gospel that has an account of the ascension. (The gospel readings are in **bold**.)

May 3 (Fourth Sunday of Easter) Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2:19-25; **John 10:1-10**

May 10 (Fifth Sunday of Easter) Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; **John 14:1-14**

May 17 (Sixth Sunday of Easter) Acts 17:22-31; Psalm 66:8-20; 1 Peter 3:13-22; **John 14: 15-21**

(Thursday, May 21—Ascension of our Lord) Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47 or 93; Ephesians 1:15-23; **Luke 24:44-53**

May 24 (Seventh Sunday of Easter) Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35; 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11; **John 17:1-11**

May 31 (PENTECOST!) Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13; **John 20:19-23 or John 7:37-39**



ATTENTION! YOUTH.....

Game time

Pastor Frey arranged a game event via zoom and Jackbox for the members of his confirmation class on Easter Sunday. The games were wild and fun, and the kids had a good time. We are going to expand the experience to members of SPLAT on April 26 and hope to gather a good crowd online. The time is yet to be determined.

MISSION TRIP BIRDSBORO.....

Plans for Mission Trip Birdsboro are still being made! The leadership committee is adapting MTB to be a healthy experience for both home owners and volunteers. The committee is carefully monitoring the COVID-19 health crisis and will adapt plans accordingly. All work to be completed will only be done on outside requests. No inside projects will be completed this year. While the July dates are still being considered, plans may be pushed into the fall.

Please consider signing up to volunteer by filling out the volunteer forms now. You can even defer the \$15 cost until you are absolutely sure you will participate, when plans are solidified! Send you paperwork to the church office. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call (610-960-2378) or email (annmyers@aol.co) me. Thank you for your consideration. Stay safe! Ann Myers

Weekly Prayer Service -- Wednesdays--9:00 AM



Our Wednesday morning prayer group will resume when the pandemic restrictions are lifted. We pray for every member of the congregation on Wednesday mornings at 9 am. If you see your name here it is not because we think you have a specific need for prayer, but to let you know you are in our prayers whatever your need may be. On Wednesday mornings we also pray for churches around the world, leaders in the ELCA, our staff and council members, our political leaders, those in the military, special requests, and many more. If you are free a Wednesday morning, stop in and join us. We are always finished before 9:30 AM. Please include in your prayers this month: Claude Shaner, Adrienne Sheeler, Calvin Sheeler, Ellen Sheeler, Michael Shingle, Dori Shingle, Nathan Shingle, Brett Simmons, Tim Simmons, Bonnie Simmons, Ryan Siwinski, Barbara Smale, Deb Smith, Henry Smith, Mark Smith, Jessica Smith. If you have anyone to add to the prayer list, please fill out a Prayer Request Card found in the pew racks or call the church office. Please pray for those with special concerns: : Makayla Becker, Blaine, Janice Boccella, Jerry & Joanne, Kathy Carpani, Gail Clifford, Melanie D'Alessandro, Diane Davis, Barbara DePrefontaine, Terry Eberly, Ellen Edman, Emily, Jerry Evans, Tom Flood, David Friedman, Mary Graefe, Keith Greusel, Bonnie Hammond, Connie Hunter, Terry Johnson, Sue Keay, Jean Korf, Gerald Levengood, Jacob Oister, Patricia Omilak, Reaghan O'Rourke, Mildred Pate, Carol Pearson, Ernie Pizzico, Joseph Pollock, June Rhoads, Antonio Rodriquez, Karlina Schmidt, Audrey Serrian, Debora Shreves, Marge Sloan, Eva Thomas, Roslyn Tornetta, Erna Vroman, Sandi Zelinski, family and friends of Elaine Woudstra, Cyril Arnold, Ollie Pribanick, and all others listed below or those we name in our hearts: Cynthia Adam, Jake Campbell, Karin DiSanto, Ron Glaser, Diana Gower, Charles Heffner, Larry Herbst, Bobby Hubert, Robin Hynes, Linda Loshnowsky, Karen McGavin, Edith Moyer, Jerry Muller, Ron Mutter, Richard Pool, Richard Randolph, Lenore Robinson, John Shaner, Vernet Spence-Brown, Jason Stalneckner, Craig Williams, Jane Williams; homebound -- Peggy Burns, Jennie Clouser, Carol DeLong, Jan Haas, Arlene Hildebeitel, Alma Shirey, Patsy Smale, Dale Szajek, Pauline Trout, Richard Wise.

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY.....May 10

There is beauty in a budding rose,
A brightly colored leaf;
There is beauty in a friendly smile,
A small child's rosy cheeks.

There is beauty in a sunset,
And in a falling star;
But the beauty of a mother's love
Surpasses all by far.

WE'RE DECORATING WITH RED GERANIUMS FOR PENTECOST.....

On Pentecost, May 31, we will be decorating the sanctuary with red geraniums. An order form is printed below if you care to place an order. Cost is \$5.00 per plant. You may take the geraniums or leave them to be planted around the church building.



Yes, I/We would like to order ____red geraniums @ \$5.00 per plant.
Amount Due_____

____I/We will be taking the geraniums,
____I/We will be leaving the geraniums to be planted in the church beds.

Information for the bulletin: Given to the Glory of God—

____In Honor of _____by

____In Memory of _____by

____As a gift by _____

Name _____

Deadline to order is Sunday, May 24.



- | | | | |
|--------|--|--------|--|
| May 1 | Brittany Cloutier Calla Eisenhard Sherry Rhoads Jim Trout | May 17 | Rich Bowersox Drew Musselman |
| May 2 | Brian Hicks Janet Musselman | May 19 | Marianne Graefe Zachary Hasara Linda Heisey Howard Hunter |
| May 3 | Tiffany Cappellano Alexander Crichton Darlene Light | May 20 | Betty Brumbach Mya Saylor |
| May 4 | Lily Dougherty Kayleigh Johnson Anne Trout | May 21 | Sharon Loscig Seth Szajek |
| May 5 | Diane Davis Tatum Poole | May 22 | Russell Burns Nathaniel Crichton |
| May 6 | Katlyn Hilbert | May 23 | Susan Eisenhuth Ruth Krouse Apyll Ware |
| May 7 | Lucas Gross Claudia McCalicher Ron Rhoads Judy Weiler | May 24 | John Bologa Jennifer Matosky |
| May 8 | Jack Prizer Darrell Reitmeyer Ryan Yetter | May 25 | Carter Longstaff |
| May 9 | Reese Muschick | May 26 | Jan Bause Suzanne Lander |
| May 10 | Riley Yetter | May 28 | Baylee Dominick Sieglinde Fretz |
| May 11 | Linda Kiak Andrew Weiler | May 29 | Jenevieve Bortz Matthew Mengel |
| May 12 | Richard Adams William Gleeson | May 30 | Dale Szajek |
| May 15 | Joshua Secord Katherine Trout Carl Yerger | May 31 | Harlan Swavely |

HAPPY WEDDING ANNIVERSARY TO –

| | | |
|---------------------------|------|---------|
| Tim & Bonnie Simmons | 5/3 | 40 yrs. |
| Ray & Pat Oxenford | 5/5 | 58 yrs. |
| Rick & Judy Weiler | 5/7 | 2 yrs. |
| Charles & Anne Weiser | 5/9 | 50 yrs. |
| Fred & Mary Ellen Hoffert | 5/11 | 52 yrs. |
| Larry & Eileen Swavely | 5/14 | 65 yrs. |
| Russ & Suzanne Lander | 5/16 | 11 yrs. |
| James & Renee Waring | 5/16 | 13 yrs. |
| Ralph & Robin Rohrbach | 5/19 | 36 yrs. |
| Richard & Debbie Konarski | 5/21 | 26 yrs. |
| Jim & Kim Sarro | 5/21 | 26 yrs. |
| Barry & Carol Gross | 5/22 | 49 yrs. |
| Jim & Judy Trout | 5/22 | 51 yrs. |
| Nathan & Elizabeth Haring | 5/24 | 34 yrs. |
| Keith & April Royer | 5/24 | 34 yrs. |
| Charles & Joyce Drey | 5/27 | 59 yrs. |

--YTD Giving thru March 2020--

| | <u>Jan- Mar.,2019</u> | <u>Jan-Mar.,2020</u> | <u>Variance</u> | <u>% chg.</u> |
|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Offerings | \$ 91,899 | \$ 93,952 | 2,053 | 2.23 |
| Vision 2020 Contr. | 15,000 | 16,479 | 1,478 | 9.86 |
| Total Giving | \$ 106,899 | \$ 110,431 | \$ 3,532 | 3.19 |

thank you!

Thanks to all who have been mailing their contributions to the church office and to those who signed up for electronic giving through Simply Giving.

SYNOD NEWS

Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA

Being the Church in a Time of Pandemic

As this article is being written, social distancing and "stay at home" orders in response to the spread of the Coronavirus are preventing our congregations from gathering for face-to-face worship. But in the midst of circumstances that keep people from "going to church," it is heartening to see the ways in which the congregations of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod are focusing on God's call to "be the church," bringing a message of hope to their members and their surrounding communities. Leaders are discovering a number of creative ways in which God's people can still "gather" for worship and conversation - via Zoom, Facebook Live, YouTube, email, telephone chains, cars parked at a drive-in movie theater, and other means.

In addition to worship, prayers, and pastoral care for members, congregations are also turning their focus outward to bring tangible expressions of God's presence and love in the midst of extraordinary circumstances to their most vulnerable neighbors. This brief article highlights just two of these outreach ministries, as examples of the kinds of things that are happening in numerous sites across the territory of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

The Food Pantry at Holy Trinity, Dingmans Ferry



Every weekday morning, volunteers gather at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in rural Pike County to prepare bags of food for community members who are food insecure. In the past, typically 85 - 95 families would turn to Holy Trinity each month to supplement their nutritional needs. Food Pantry Director, Barbara Hupner, reports that the number of those turning to the pantry has increased due to the Coronavirus pandemic. And the members of Holy Trinity are responding, even as some of the traditional sources of food - such as donations from individuals or local stores - have decreased.



In addition, there are concerns for the safety of both the volunteers who staff the pantry and those who come for food. Barbara reports, "Due to this crisis we have begun a drive-up pantry pick up for our families. Each family receives three bags of non-perishable foods along with a bag of frozen meats, vegetables, butter, fresh fruits and cheese. This has helped us to maintain social distancing as well as keep our volunteers safe."

The Food Pantry at Hope Lutheran Church and Hope's Table, Reading

Hope Lutheran Church in the northwest section of the City of Reading, and its partner ministry, Hope's Table, together host the largest pantry in the Helping Harvest (Berks and Schuylkill Counties) system. Typically, 200+ families are served in the biweekly distribution. Due to neighbors losing their work - and their income - during the pandemic, at the last pantry more than 350 families came for food.

To counter the empty shelves at local groceries stores, the volunteers at Hope's Pantry are committed to providing more items for those who turn to the pantry, rather than less. In addition to the food they receive from Helping Harvest, the congregation has developed partnerships with other congregations, local restaurants, bakeries, and farmers to provide healthy nutritional options for their



guests. They are also collecting other items, such as toilet paper, cleaning products, and soap that they distribute to families on each Thursday.

Meanwhile, the staff members of Café Esperanza, another ministry birthed by Hope, are offering drive-by or walk-by cooked meals to neighborhood residents two evenings a week - to supplement the prepared food assistance that is available to families through the Reading School system.



Delivery is available for those who can't come to the congregation's parking lot. Advertised only through word of mouth and a sign at the church, the response of the community has been notable - both in terms of the growing numbers of those coming for assistance and the growing numbers of those who want to support the ministry!



These two congregations - in different corners of the synod and in two very different contexts - are endeavoring to "be the church" by seeing the face of Jesus in their most vulnerable neighbors in this unprecedented time and responding in love. We know there are many other congregations conducting similar ministries that are also bringing to life Jesus' parable from Matthew 25:31-46, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you..." Please share your stories of how your congregation has been and is engaging in ministries of care in your communities by sending a brief summary to info@nepasynod.org.

[This article was written by the Rev. Dr. Michael Bennethum, Executive Associate of the Bishop.]

COVID-19 Resources

There are many resources for dealing with the challenges arising out of the coronavirus pandemic. The synod website lists many of these for you use on a page that is updated on a regular basis. You can view it at <http://nepasynod.org/virus-resources>. Above all, please have patience in this rapidly evolving situation. No one has all the answers, but everyone can lend a hand.

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ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

May 2020

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|--|-----------|--|-----------|-------------------------------|--|
| | | | | | 1 | 2 6 PM—Worship live streamed |
| 3 8 AM—Worship live streamed | 4 Noon—Bible Study | 5 | 6 Noon—Bible Study | 7 | 8 Noon—Bible Study | 9 6 PM—Worship live streamed |
| 10 8 AM—Worship live streamed | 11 Noon—Bible Study 7 PM—Pastoral Care | 12 | 13 Noon—Bible Study | 14 | 15 Noon—Bible Study | 16 6 PM—Worship live streamed |
| 17 8 AM—Worship live streamed | 18 Noon—Bible Study | 19 | 20 Noon—Bible Study | 21 | 22 Noon—Bible Study | 23 6 PM—Worship live streamed |
| 24 8 AM—Worship live streamed | 25 <i>Memorial Day</i>  | 26 | 27 Noon—Bible Study 7 PM—Worship & Music | 28 | 29 Noon—Bible Study | 30 6 PM—Worship live streamed |
| 31 <i>Pentecost</i> 8 AM—Worship live streamed | | | | | | |