

First Press Newsletter



We are a welcoming community formed in Christ, committed to sharing his love with others – with feet that carry us out into the world, with hands that serve, and with hearts in fellowship and faith.

Dear Friends,

Although we're still living through a pandemic, and life is so different than it was six months ago, the church continues to be the church! That means, of course, that September marks the beginning of a new program year. I hope you'll read this issue of First Press, asking yourself how you might be involved in the life of the congregation. Of course, I hope that you will join us weekly for worship - whether online or in the sanctuary. And I hope you will join me for the seven-week series, *Living Into the Beloved Community*.

Please Join Pastor Bruce for Video-Inspired Zoom Conversations
~ Living into the Beloved Community ~

Seven Sessions on Wednesday Evenings ~ 7:00 ó 8:00 p.m. September 16 ó October 28, 2020

“Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well quantitative change in our lives.” - Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

You are invited to view a video(s) prior to each session on your own and then engage in conversations about the realities of race and racism. We will explore how they affect ourselves, families, congregations and communities ó even the ways we live out our faith and how we can move through racialized differences toward becoming God's beloved community. **What is our hope?** May each of us strive to close the gap between the world God intends of justice, kindness and love, and the world as it is in our communities.

Session 1 ó September 16	<i>Be the Light, Open Your Hearts to Grace</i>
Session 2 -- September 23	<i>Adam Hamilton Sermon: Jesus, Justice & Repentance</i>
Session 3 ó September 30	<i>Silence Isn't the Answer</i>
Session 4 ó October 7	<i>The Roots of Racial Injustice</i>
Session 5 ó October 14	<i>Recognize and Overcome Our Biases</i>
Session 6 ó October 21	<i>Grace, Justice & Mercy</i>
Session 7 ó October 28	<i>Guest Speaker: Rev. Mack Brandon</i> <i>Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church, Ridgewood</i>

If you plan to participate, please register by emailing me at pastorbruce@firstpresridgewood.org or Donna Flagg at flaggbda@gmail.com. We will send you the weekly video links as well as the zoom link. **See you online!**

Grace and peace, Bruce

Endowment Corner

Pundits, Parrots and People

Since we all last met in person our world has changed. It seems that the pundits are in charge. The definition of a pundit is an expert, in a particular field, who is frequently called on to give authoritative opinions to the public. Pundits proliferate in panicky times. They dominate the news cycles. We the people parrot their prophesies of doom or redemption and pray for someone to take charge and lead us to the Promised Land.

What should we do when even going to church feels like a risky business? Should we start building an Ark? Maybe we should re-read the Noah story in Genesis. It may have new relevance. So, we take a deep breath and consider our options.

When we need to go back to the drawing board we might consult with the Master Architect Himself. (In order to create a more perfect Ark) During this time of sheltering in place the planet is doing a bit of healing, skies are bluer, the air in many places is cleaner. We need the earth more than the earth needs us. God has given us a beautiful planet and charged us with its care. It's not in our best interest to disappoint Him. All He asks is that we give love and receive love which means we offer to others those things that we wish for ourselves.

The church is a powerful vehicle for being a force for good in the world. The church needs its people to demonstrate what love can do to help and heal a hurting world. Our kind words and deeds, our active participation and our continued financial support tell God that He is loved as He loves us.

Your contributions to our Endowment Fund help us be the church at work in the world and at home. God knows and sees what our priorities are and He walks with us every step of the way. We can all be pundits for God and parrot His message to all the people



Let's Go Build an Ark!

Gifts to Endowment can be given at any time in any amount. Checks can be made out to First Presbyterian Church with a memo for 'Endowment'.

Thank you for your continuing support!

We Remember Bruce Crocco

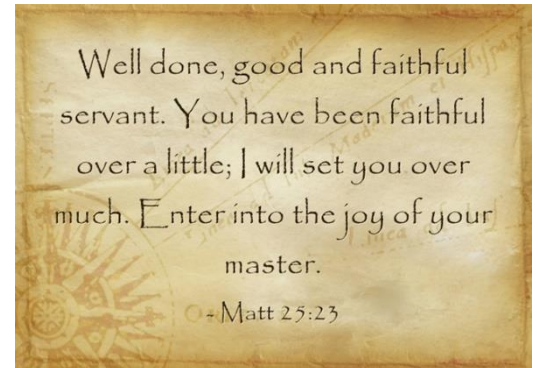


It is with great sadness that we said goodbye in June to long time member and friend, Bruce Crocco. The Endowment Committee is especially grateful to Bruce for spearheading the effort in 1999 to create a permanent Endowment Fund for First Pres.

An Endowment Committee was formed with Bruce serving as Chairman in 1999. He served with integrity to establish a fund that would be designed to grow in principal while using the interest and investment income to serve God's people in need through mission and to support the church's unbudgeted needs now and into the future.

Bruce created the gold standard for our Endowment program and succeeding members have worked diligently to uphold those standards.

Thank you Bruce for the gift of your life and love for our church and for answering God's call in this place. Your life has been a blessing.



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A SOCIALLY DISTANT BAPTISM



On Sunday, August 16th Hunter Benjamin Wilson, son to Chris and Sarah Wilson, received the sacrament of baptism!



St. Paul's Ministry - Changes and Updates as of September 2020~ by Carola Di Iorio

As most of you know, our family started this grassroots Ministry when Anthony, Laura and Christine were in middle school. We have enjoyed serving the homeless men living in St Paul's Episcopal Church in Paterson for the past 7 years. We were blessed by getting to know some of them personally, listening to their stories and serving them the wonderful home cooked meals that many of you have offered to them.

Several of you have been particularly generous and steadfastly involved since the very beginning. We thank you, Joanne Bonwick and Dana Feeney, for cooking for St Paul almost every month! Thank you to Laura Magrath, Joan Davies, Marcia Unger, Mary Ellen Castaldo, Li Towt, Jessica Strader, Linda Cascardo, Sue Dickinson, Kali Roi Eklof, Salwa Eliya, Donna Flagg, Jessica Lee, Jo-Ann Massey, Sandy Santangelo, Sue Sofka, Linda Strickand, The Torielli family, Marjorie Vanacore, Mary Weyant, for also helping out with meals.

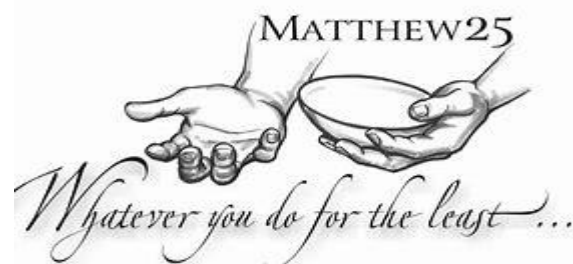
One family stood faithfully with us from the very beginning and continues to this day to encourage and support the St Paul Ministry in a meaningful and loving way, not only through the many delicious meals they cooked but also through the time they took to go serve the meals at the shelter on Sunday afternoons. Suzy Mc Devitt deserves our heartfelt gratitude for her big help in keeping the Ministry going. Now her daughter, Samantha, who also has often helped with cooking and serving, has offered to coordinate the Ministry.

Samantha Mc Devitt will succeed Laura Di Iorio as St Paul's Mission coordinator as of September 1st, 2020. Here are some of her own words as she steps up her commitment to serving the homeless of St Paul: "Some of my most memorable moments were in serving dinner to the men with my mom and brother, when we were still pretty young. I've made a point of helping my mom to make our dishes for the shelter. Also memorable, were the times we had my Girl Scout Troop over to my house to make the entire dinner, and then we served it together at the shelter. It felt good to get my friends involved and helping out. I've watched Laura Di Iorio take over the organization of volunteers for the mission from her mom in the past couple of years. And now that she's going to college, I decided that it was a good time for me to take an even more active role in the mission. This is such a meaningful and worthy mission of our church. I urge you all to get involved if you haven't already. Even if you're not a particularly good cook, there's a place for you! While most volunteers make their own food, some do purchase food, like fried chicken or pizza. And someone also provides a salad, or fruit and bread each month, which don't require cooking. Of course, if you are a good cook, we'd love to have you prepare something special for the men! "Our next Serving Day is September 6th. We still need a large salad to complete this meal you are welcome to sign up for our next meal, on Sunday, October 4th.

Contact Samantha at 201-820-8056 or at sammcdev99@gmail.com



Thank you to the Di Iorio family for starting this meaningful ministry!



And thank you Samantha for carrying it on!

Session Statement Condemning Racism

Adopted by Session 8/11/2020



The Session of First Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood, a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (USA), expresses outrage over all instances of racism and racially-based violence.

Our denomination states: “Racism is a sin against humanity. Our sacred text tells us that **ALL** humans are made in God’s image and likeness. As people of faith, we must honor the inherent value and dignity of all people and seek justice when that value and dignity is attacked.”

We are committed to educating ourselves regarding racism and positions of privilege and earnestly working for change. We will work to promote understanding, respect and compassion among all races and ethnicities. We will pray for forgiveness, healing and peaceful reconciliation for all peoples locally, nationally and globally.

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?~Micah 6:8*



The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Affirms Black Lives Matter with a week of Action 8/24-8/30.

For more information~

<https://www.pcusa.org/weekofaction/#3>

Why are we saying that “Presbyterians Affirm Black Lives Matter”?

Simply put: because Black lives do indeed matter. They/we matter to God, which means they/we should matter to God’s people.

But don’t *all* lives matter?

Saying unequivocally that **Black Lives Matter** in no way means that all lives do not matter. It is rather an acknowledgment that many lives . . . specifically Black lives . . . are systemically devalued. As a community that tries to follow Jesus, we proclaim that such a devaluation of our siblings is an affront to the Living God.

Does that mean we are claiming affiliation with the Black Lives Matter organization?

As an organization, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has no affiliation or official status with the Black Lives Matter Movement.

I’m sorry, but I just cannot agree with supporting the Black Lives Matter organization.

We understand there are those who do not agree with positions of the Black Lives Matter Movement as they understand them. Presbyterians have always been invited to use discernment in matters of faith and practice, understanding that **God alone is Lord of the conscience.** However, in our discernment we must be careful that we do not expect that we, a majority-white institution, may determine the path of liberation and equity for Black people, nor should we expect that we may **correct** the goals and methodologies developed by any community we seek to support. In all justice efforts, we must be led by the ones who are impacted. We hear similar claims that Black Lives Matter is **violent Marxist** and seeks to undermine the American (and Christian) way of life. While again respecting the discernment of each, we must name that these labels are not only untrue but rooted in anti-Blackness with intent to frustrate the efforts of Black people seeking justice for themselves. These things must be confronted with truth. Black Lives Matter is very clear about who and what the collective is and consistently addresses misinformation about the movement on its website. (Excerpted from PCUSA website)

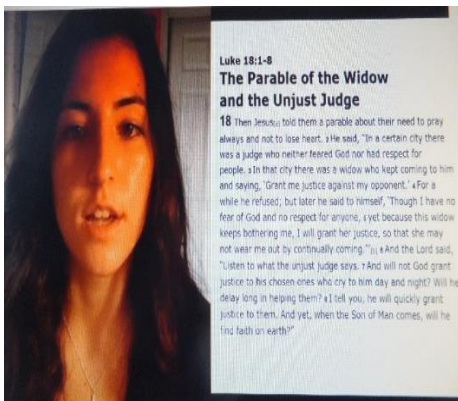
Living the Gospel



Sandy Santangelo spearheads the First Pres Produce Mission at Ridgewood train station on Sundays. To sign up online ~ <http://bit.ly/fpcproduce>
AND if you missed it, check out the terrific video made by Alex Santangelo on our website!



Donna Flagg organized and delivered donations collected for Paterson Habitat drive.




First Pres re opened safely on July 26th by adhering to CDC guidelines. To worship in the sanctuary go to <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054faeae29a3f94-sunday> Or email the church office at fpoffice@firstpresridgewood.org To view online go to <https://www.firstpresridgewood.org>



Plans for our new Church School year at First Pres!

Watch our weekly video lessons posted on our church Facebook page on Sundays,

There will be a “Monthly Zoom Chat”  with Sunday school students.

You will receive upcoming emails and texts from Mrs. Castaldo!



Drive thru “Blessing of the Backpacks”

We invite all youth and their families at First Pres. to bring your
BACKPACKS, CHROME BOOKS, LAPTOPS ETC.



On Saturday September 12th at 1:00pm

Have your picture taken and take a “treat bag” filled with goodies to begin your new year at school!

This new school year may begin with a different format. Some of you will attend school part time, some of you will begin school virtually on Zoom. Or maybe you will be attending school part time and using Zoom on alternate days! You will need to wear masks in your classrooms and will be asked to wash your hands ALOT! We are in an unusual circumstance and we all have to try our best to adapt to these changes at least for a while longer. We at First Pres. will be praying for our students, that you will have a safe and wonderful experience! Wishing you all a great year! Remember, the start of a school year means a brand NEW start.

Wishing you all a happy NEW beginning. God bless each and every one of you!

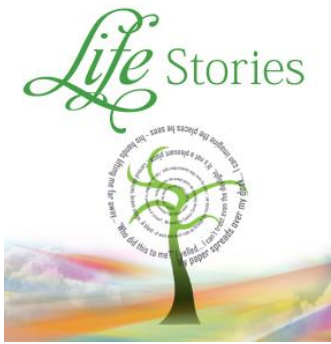
Lord, we know you hold the future and walk with us even now on this unpredictable path of the pandemic. We trust you work through the most difficult of seasons and never abandon us to navigate life's challenges alone.

As we look to a new school year, we worry about the ongoing impact of COVID-19. It seems to be a time of no right answers, no clear good choices and no comprehensive way for parents, educators and administrators to meet the pressing needs of students, teachers, staff and families. We do not want children to fall further behind in their learning. We do not want to put caregivers in the position of choosing between going to work or tending to their children. We do not want to endanger the health of any in our community. Already stretched resources are pushed to the limit as we attempt to reduce class sizes, expand the ways content is delivered and seek to enact needed safety precautions.

We look to you, Lord, to take, bless and multiply our efforts to educate and nurture your children. We look to you, Lord, who gives us the peace that passes understanding, hears the cries of the hurting and promises that small amounts of faith can precipitate large, life-giving change. We look to you, loving God, for wisdom, for courage, for inspiration, for creativity.

As we make difficult decisions in an unprecedented time, grant us an unshakable commitment to one another, especially to the most vulnerable among us. Send your Spirit to open our eyes to the new thing you are doing. Send your Spirit to open our ears to the voices we need most to hear. Send your Spirit to open our hearts to the profound love you have for us all so that everything we do in this time of fear, anxiety and uncertainty reveals your compassion, kindness and grace. Send your Spirit to comfort and direct us as we humbly look to you for guidance and strength. Amen.

Prayer by Jill Duffield reprinted with permission from Pres-Outlook.Org.



You are invited to join the First Pres Senior Ministry group in sharing snippets of your life stories.

Send your writing of 200 words or less to Donna Flagg (flaggbda@gmail.com) by the 12th of the month.

November Feature will be: ~ Family Stories of Sacrifice ~

LIFE STORY VIGNETTES

September Feature ~ Cherished Childhood Memories ~

Love in the Afternoon by Joanne Bonwick

You know when someone loves you unconditionally. You feel it in your soul. You trust your heart with them. They breathe life into your existence. My very reserved maternal grandmother was that for me. She loved me in all my skinny, stringy-haired, freckle-faced awkwardness. In her presence I felt beautiful and smart.

One of my favorite memories with my grandmother was of her taking me into New York City at Christmas time. It was 1951 and I was eight-years-old and had never been to the city before. We strolled Fifth Ave. and she took me into B. Altman's Department store to see all the Christmas decorations. Then we went upstairs to their famous restaurant, The Charleston Gardens. It took my breath away... I was a guest in a southern plantation and the staff treated me as if I were a princess. We had dainty little tea sandwiches and then they came by with a rolling cart full of desserts from which I could choose anything I wanted. I had never been treated to such grandeur.

To share this experience with my grandmother made it a forever memory, just the two of us in love with life for an afternoon.

Parkchester the Bronx by Greta Noel Croucher

From the time I was a little girl, three or four, through my late teens, three days before Christmas my daddy would take me to the railroad cars on Tremont Avenue to pick out our Christmas tree. The price always seemed to be five dollars, but my dad always got it for three. I would help him carry the tree all the way home, or at least he let me think I was helping.

Then there were my teen years. I had a group of girlfriends, five or six. Each time one of us had a birthday, we made a corsage consisting with long ribbons hanging on it. On the ribbons would be a large amount of Tootsie Rolls, or lollipops, or Bazooka Bubble Gum, or Mary Janes, or even pennies. How many corsages you had hanging on you depended how popular you were with the other girls.

Then there was my potholder era. During the hot summer months, I would sit outside of Macy's with other children, and make and sell potholders for two for twenty-five cents. When it got too hot I would go inside Macy's to the perfume samples and spray "Great LADY" perfume, my then favorite.

Popsicle Prices by Betty Lee

On a hot July Friday afternoon in 1947, I hurry to Joe Lancelot's grocery store on a dusty Seventh Street Extension with a nickel in my fist to buy a grape popsicle. A sign on the door says "popsicles 6 cents." Oh, dear!

Next Friday another hot day and I hurry to Joe Lancelot's grocery store with 7 cents in my fist. Buy my orange popsicle and hurry back down the dusty road with sticky goo dripping from my elbow.

Learned: Pay debts quickly and Mum always has some money tucked away for emergencies.

Streets of Brooklyn by Donna Flagg

Memories of growing up in Park Slope, Brooklyn, New York during the late 50's early 60's are etched in my mind. It was a blue collar urban neighborhood - a tapestry predominantly of Italian and Irish with a sprinkling of Hispanic, Black, Jewish and Chinese living in apartments above storefronts. Living on city streets of row houses built tightly next to each other impelled us to be a close knit community where we felt like family, helping and depending on each other to survive.

Tingling feelings of love and gratitude stir in my heart when I think of my childhood days, playing on the sidewalks outside our family laundry shop. I cherish the snapshot memory of playing, having fun and laughing with my girlfriends of color and different races. Red Light Green Light One Two Three, Hopscotch, Jump Rope, Hula Hoop, Double Dutch, playing Tag and drawing on the sidewalk with colored chalk were favorites. We played from morning until night especially in the summer, except going home for a snack, lunch and dinner. As an adult, I long for children, youth and adults to experience the beauty of connecting with and having friends of color, adding to the richness of their lives.

Fridays at the Bakery by Marcia Unger

My family owned a bakery in Asheville, NC. I was 5 before I realized that a loaf of bread could be purchased at the local grocery store, because Daddy always brought such items home from work. My sister and I eagerly awaited Daddy's return each day to see what delicious treats he'd have in hand!

When a dreaded disease took Daddy from us way too soon and our daily bakery surprises no longer arrived, Fridays took on a whole new meaning. That was the day Mother took us in our big old 1953 green Oldsmobile down to the Moore's Bakery (co-owned by my dad's brother, Uncle Wilson) to stock up for the week.

Before entering the bakery, we always admired in the front window the faux wedding cakes with the little plastic brides and grooms atop. Upon entry, we were engulfed in the smells of freshly baked bread and cake and feasted our little eyes on huge bowls of chocolate icing, which seemed deep enough in which to bathe! Then the fun part began when Uncle Wilson let us choose 1 cookie for now and 1 to take home in a crisp white bag of our very own. But the best part was the surprise Uncle Wilson always had in store for us. Sometimes, it was a giant-sized red apple. Other times it would be a bright, shiny quarter for our piggy bank. Memories of this Friday routine and the loved ones I shared it with never get old..... and live forever in my heart.



Congregational **MEETING**

PEASE NOTE:

A MEETING FOR THE ELECTION OF OFFICERS
will be held in the sanctuary and via Zoom
on Sunday, September 20, 2020 following
the worship service.

Church Staff~

Pastor	Rev. Bruce Ballantine
Director of Children & Families	MaryEllen Castaldo
Director of Music	Dr. Ed Schmiedecke
Organist	Linda Sweetman Waters
Director Cherub Choir and Bells	Carol Schmiedecke
Administrative Manager	Dana Feeney
Youth Leader	Jessica Strader
Tom Carozza	Sexton
Custodian	George Wood
Director Nursery School	Julia Bolt
Newsletter Editor	Joan Davies (Volunteer)

Church Phone (201) 652-2504

Pastor Bruce: (215) 337-5623 please contact him directly for Pastoral Care
www.firstpresridgewood.org

