

# 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,

Recently I was asked to write an online devotional for my alma mater, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. The assigned date was January 1, 2021. The devotional is based on a scripture passage from the Daily Lectionary for January 1 - Psalm 8. I share it with you below.

Blessings,  
Bruce

## **Psalm 8**

<sup>1</sup>O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. <sup>2</sup>Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. <sup>3</sup>When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; <sup>4</sup>what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? <sup>5</sup>Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. <sup>6</sup>You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, <sup>7</sup>all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, <sup>8</sup>the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. <sup>9</sup>O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

## **A Devotional Reflection on (Evening) Psalm 8**

**By Rev. Bruce Ballantine**

As we look forward to the Day of Epiphany, I am reminded that over time God has manifested Godself in a multitude of ways. And just as God once used a star to lead the Gentile Magi to Bethlehem where they discovered and worshiped the Christ child, sometimes even today God uses stars to get our attention.

In 2008, following a late dinner in a rural guest house in Malawi, my friends and I walked outside and were immediately star-struck. Looking up at the heavens, our vision unhindered by clouds or artificial light, we were dazzled by the beauty and brightness of countless stars, sparkling like diamonds painted across the canvas of the dark June sky.

As I recall, after a moment of silence, someone uttered the familiar words of the psalmist, <sup>3</sup>When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?<sup>5</sup>

*continued*

I have since come to appreciate Eugene Peterson's rendering of the same words in *The Message*: "I look up at your macro-skies, dark and enormous, your handmade sky-jewelry, Moon and stars mounted in their settings. Then I look at my micro-self and wonder, Why do you bother with us?"

It's a fitting but perhaps disturbing question as we consider the majesty of God, the vastness of the universe, and what, at times, may feel like our own insignificance.

Yet the psalmist goes on to remind us that God has made human beings a little lower than God, and crowned us with glory and honor. As people created by God, we have intrinsic value and dignity. We matter. What's more, God has given us a job to do. Specifically, God has given us dominion over creation.

Unfortunately, too many have understood dominion as a license to dominate the earth and its non-human life forms; as a license to exploit the earth and its resources for profit, without regard for the damage which such exploitation might cause; as a license to freely harm the environment, if that's what it takes to support a certain lifestyle. In the words of the 1970 Joni Mitchell song, "we paved paradise and put up a parking lot."

However, dominion, as understood biblically, does not mean to exploit creation but to exercise care for God's domain, in much the same way that a just ruler would care for those living in his or her realm. It means to act as responsible stewards of God's creation.

So, the next time you see a sky full of stars, may you be reminded, not only of the majesty of God, but also that as people created by God, we have intrinsic value and dignity. Not only that, we've been given a job to do: creation care. May we do our job well!

Prayer: Majestic God, creator of all that is good and beautiful, so inspire us to be faithful stewards of your good creation that we might leave to future generations a healthy planet capable of sustaining life. Amen.



## Endowment Corner



With the passing of Christmas and New Year's celebrations we can almost hear a gigantic, collective sigh of relief. We're glad to be done with the stress and unrealistic expectations the holidays often impose. But once we catch our breaths, we realize we miss, especially, the feelings of joy and hope the season stirs in us. We want to carry it with us into the New Year...and we can, if we remember each day to dress ourselves with a Christmas heart.

As our Endowment Committee begins a New Year we are happy and grateful to share the news that recently two more engraved leaves were added to our 'Tree of Life'. We now have a total of 46 leaves and 7 stones. Our two newest additions are a leaf in memory of James Willey who passed away in April 2020 and a leaf to honor the extraordinary work of Jessica Strader to help make possible our virtual on line worship services during the pandemic. We remember long time member, Jim Willey for his service as an elder, his active participation on many committees and his hilarious stints as MC at our Christmas dinners for many years.



We say a very gracious thank you to all who have made memorial donations this past year in memory of Bruce and Phyllis Crocco and Laura Fleming. Our Green Umbrella note cards and outright cash donations also continue to help build a strong financial present and future. It is with deep appreciation that we say a collective THANK YOU!

Your Endowment Committee,  
Joanne Bonwick, Richard Davies (Chair), Don Dexter,  
Laura Magrath, Al Schagen, David Shaw



## Mission Giving

On December 6th, the McDevitt family delivered dinner for the men at St. Paul's Homeless Shelter.

Thank you to all the wonderful volunteers who provided such good food for the men. Joan Davies made stuffed peppers, Dana Feeney made her chicken, Laura Magrath made mac and cheese with ham, Suzy McDevitt made roasted vegetables, and the Torielli family brought fruit and bread.

The men are always appreciative of the delicious homemade food that each volunteer brings.

If you feel called to help with the St. Paul's mission, we welcome any and all volunteers! We provide dinner on the first Sunday of every month, and we try to plan ahead by at least 3 weeks.

You can email Sam McDevitt at [sammcdev99@gmail.com](mailto:sammcdev99@gmail.com) or text 201-820-8056 with questions, or to volunteer for the meals on January 3, or February 7.



On a rainy and cold Dec. 14th \$500 worth of cereal and canned meats were delivered to CUMAC in Paterson by some Mission Committee members! Pictured under masks, alongside CUMAC employee, Richard Davies and Robin Byrne!



Gift cards were delivered to Eva's Village in Paterson and the Center for Food Action in Mahwah.

Oasis in Paterson received the unwrapped toys you donated (thank you!) along with gift cards.

All on behalf of First Presbyterian Church!

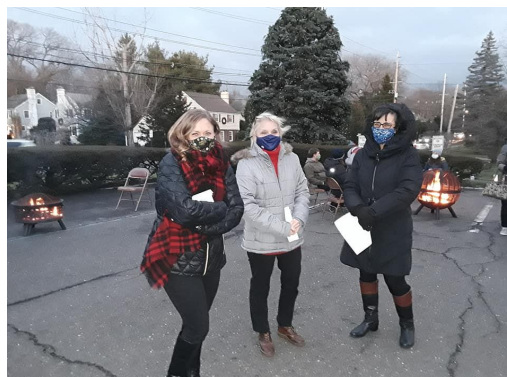
+++++



**The Mission Committee would like to thank everyone who participated in the virtual Angel Tree program- all 25 children we pledged for were sponsored!**



## A Celebration of Light!



**COLD BUT JOYFUL!**  
Thanks to all who helped set up and clean up!

Jill Critchley, Carola & John Dilorio,  
Joan & Richard Davies,  
Donna Flagg, Tom Moore,  
Carol & Ed Schmiedecke,  
The Santangelo family and Shane Strickland.

A special thank you to Brian Princing for  
wonderfully playing guitar (with cold fingers)!





## Sunday School News



Thank you to our Middle School and High School students who participated in our Virtual Christmas Pageant this year! And a Huge thank you to Jessica Strader for creating our annual "Christmas Pageant" virtually for us to enjoy .... What a gift!

Collin Feeney      Amanda Schnure      CJ Torielli      Luca Torielli  
Hudson Feeney      Kyle Schnure      Dante Torielli      Shane Strickland  
Samantha McDevitt      Ryan Schnure      Gianna Torielli      Nicole & Joel Torielli



Our High School students lit the Advent candles this year!



Isabella Burger & Amanda Schnure



Francesca Feltmann & Madeline Santangelo



Collin Feeney & Palmer Yates



Katelyn Edelbach & Gianna Torielli

Hope

Peace

Joy

Love







Our First Pres Sunday School families made Gingerbread houses & trains!



Frankie & Luke's creation

Did you know [The Guinness Book of World Records](#) lists a Texas A&M club for the record of the biggest gingerbread house at over 39,201.00 feet!

The gingerbread house was built in 2013 and raised money for a hospital trauma wing by charging a fee for guests to visit. It was so popular that it raised over \$150,000!

But these gingerbreads are priceless!

+++++



Thank you to all who participated in the Virtual Bake Sale to support Camp Lots of Fun!

**Over \$1,000 has been raised!**

Thank you to Kate Yates and to all who helped in making this event a great success!  
A very special thank you to Jessica Strader ...a virtual virtuoso!

*~Members shared their favorite Christmas memories or traditions~*

Feeney Tradition:

Happy Birthday Jesus Cake and we sing to him every year. Mike's grandmother started this tradition when he was a little boy.



About 50 years ago I started making Advent calendars for friends and family with children. I'd fill each pocket with a tiny ornament to place on the tree each day. I saved my son's calendar and I still use it myself, just to keep the 'kid' in me alive. I retired my sewing machine about 30 years ago but people have passed them down 2 generations now.

Joanne Bonwick



Early December at Susquehanna University in Selingsgrove Pennsylvania, the college hosts a candlelight service consisting of beautiful music and readings. My husband and I would attend each year with great anticipation. We would stay at the Country Cupboard Inn, in Lewisburg P.A. after the service. The next morning after a great country breakfast we would head out to buy our Christmas tree at a farm called Forever Green. One year at Forever Green Farms, my husband Jim purchased a glass ornament of a Victorian couple ice skating, he said that it reminded him of us. It has a special place on our Christmas tree every year. We would then set out for our Lancaster County farm house to decorate and celebrate the holiday. We would sit on our deck all bundled up sharing a glass of wine, thanking God for each other and this beautiful view of snow covered Amish farms. My Jim always referred to our Pennsylvania home as "God's Country". My husband has been in Heaven since 2014. I thank God and my Jim every day for these precious memories and many more. I will hold them in my heart until I can share them again in heaven with the greatest joy of my life, "My Sweet Husband James Richard".

Blessings to my First Presbyterian Church Family Greta Noel Croucher

Decorating the Christmas tree is one of my favorite things to do at Christmas time as each ornament holds a memory or reminds me of the person who gave it. Among the lights and hand blown glass, its branches are strung with baby rattles, seashells from beach trips and souvenirs of places we've been, glittery handmade reindeer (with missing eyes), favorite sport players (no longer on the team!), they all make me smile and are cherished, especially the 3 pictured below, given to me by church friends many years ago! Joan Davies



One of our favorite traditions over many years was celebrating on Christmas Eve with the Unger family and the Byrne family.

So many happy memories of great celebrations! Marjorie and Richard Vanacore





O Holy Night



For unto  
us a  
Child  
is born



*And His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor  
The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.*



Thank you to everyone who generously donated gloves, hats, scarves and mittens to support the Center for Food Action during the month of December! You have brought warm blessings to many!

+++++



Save the Date! The Annual Congregational Meeting will be held after Worship on Sunday, January 31, 2021. It will be in the Sanctuary and on ZOOM.

Pastor	Rev. Bruce Ballantine
Director of Children & Families	MaryEllen Castaldo
Director of Music	Dr. Edward Schmiedecke
Organist	Linda Sweetman Waters
Director of Youth Music and Handbells	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](http://www.firstpresridgewood.org)**

