

## 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,

I am extremely heartened by how this congregation has responded to the challenges posed by the current coronavirus pandemic! We have adapted quickly to the need for social distancing, replacing worship in the sanctuary with online worship. And large numbers of you are tuning in at 10:00 a.m. on Sundays for the live stream or later at your convenience on the website.

You are making your financial contributions online or mailing them to the office. Deacons are keeping in touch with the members in their sections. Many more of you are connecting with other members, asking: "How are you and your family doing? Are you okay? Do you need anything?"

Many of you have continued to contribute to the March Food Drive to benefit the people served by the Social Service Association of Ridgewood and Vicinity. And the Mission Committee recently met by email, voting to make a financial contribution to SSA during this time of great need.

For all of these responses, I thank you!

Today I am writing to ask for your help in one additional way. Recently, at the suggestion of Jessica Strader, the Board of Deacons began a new ministry to the congregation called *What's for Dinner?* Realizing that at times, some members are unable to meet their own food/nutrition needs, *What's for Dinner?* will serve as the congregation's food bank for members and friends of the congregation.

While the initial plan was to include some home-cooked frozen meals, currently we are focusing on the following items, which will be stored in a cabinet in the church basement: pasta, sauce, rice, canned chili, canned soup, cereal, mac and cheese, peanut butter, jelly, fruit cups, granola bars, canned tuna, crackers, canned veggies and multivitamins.

As the church remains closed during the current Stay at Home Order, if you are able to support this ministry, please call me at 215-337-5623 and arrange to leave your food contribution outside a back door of the church, and I will take it to the pantry.

**If you are in need of food at any time, please call me at the same number, and I will gladly arrange to deliver it.**

All are invited to contribute or receive!

Friends, this is one significant way we can bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2) and ensure that none of our members or friends will go hungry during this challenging time. Thank you!

Forward in faith,

Bruce

## Endowment Corner



### THE FIRST "NEW LEAF" OF SPRING

We're happy to announce the arrival of a newly engraved "Leaf" for our "Tree of Life". The family of Robert Schneider has made a Memorial donation in memory of their beloved husband and father. We remember Bob fondly and his faithful attendance and favorite seat in the North Transept pew. It was made especially poignant when his daughter Susan showed up for worship service on the Sunday after the funeral service and sat in his special spot before making her trip back home to Kentucky.



## School News

Greetings from Nursery School! In March, the children and teachers enjoyed a school wide theme of Read Across America. The students enjoyed guest readers, special crafts, wearing silly clothes and delicious, creative snacks! We had a wonderful Dr. Seuss Spirit week!



We still have limited openings for the 2020 - 2021 school year in our 2 ½ and 3 year old classes, as well as our 4 Day Pre-K class. We offer programs for children 2 ½ - 6 years of age. We offer a fun, nurturing environment, while preparing our children for Kindergarten. Active members of First Pres. Church receive a tuition discount. Please contact Julia Bolt, Director, at 201-445-2552 for more information and a tour of our preschool. We look forward to hearing from you!



In the month of March, church school students chose their Lenten prayer partners. They will be corresponding and getting to know many of our church members throughout the Lenten season by phone calls or email!

## Mission



On Sunday, March 1, the Di Iorio family served 23 men at St. Paul's homeless shelter in Paterson as part of our monthly mission. Thank you to our volunteers this month: Dana Feeney for her delicious barbecue chicken and the high school youth group led by Jessica Strader- for meeting on Friday night to cook tasty pizza and hamburger casseroles. The men appreciated having a warm, home-cooked meal as always. Our next serving date is April 5 and we organize this mission on the first Sunday of every month. If you are interested in volunteering to cook or serve, please reach out to Laura Di Iorio at [lauradiiorio6@gmail.com](mailto:lauradiiorio6@gmail.com) or 551-209-9114.



pantry!



Current contents of our food

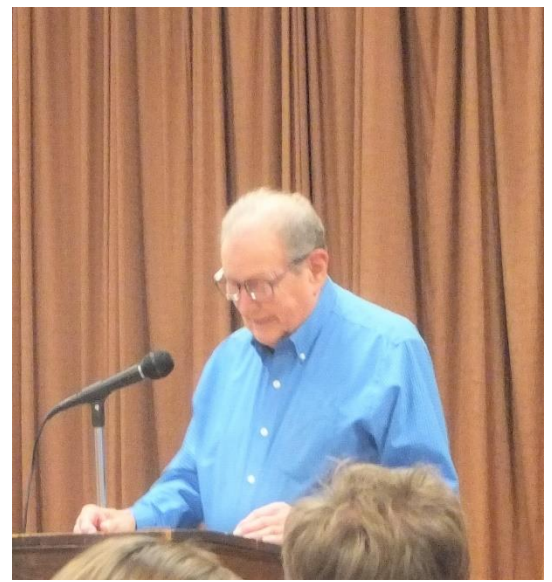
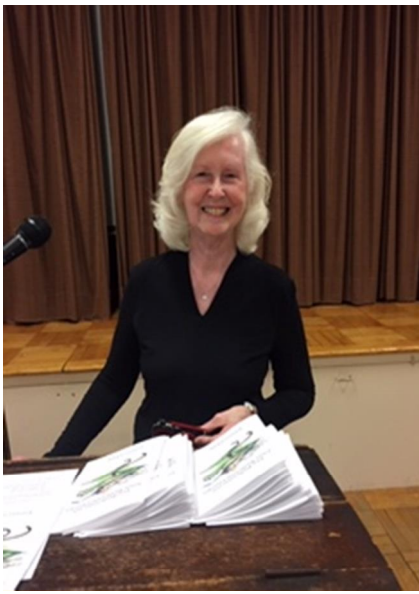


A brief message written by Scott Millard, CEO, Paterson Habitat for Humanity

Effective at 6pm on Monday 3/16/2020 all operations in Paterson including our administrative offices and construction sites are **closed to the public**. All volunteer activities and in person meetings have been cancelled. If you had intended to volunteer over the coming weeks I ask that you instead [show your support with a donation](#) to help keep building brighter futures for the families we partner with and the city we love.

Thank you for your continued support and please take the necessary precautions to stay safe. We will make it through this together and it will make us stronger.





On March 4<sup>th</sup> Joanne Bonwick shared her faith journey and it was Al Schagen's turn on March 11<sup>th</sup>!



“Our Faith becomes stronger as we express it; a growing faith is a sharing faith”

~Billy Graham

Please note: in a recent Advisory Opinion from the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, congregations should reschedule and refrain from sacramental celebrations (baptism, Lord's Supper) until congregations are able once again to gather in person.

## Al Schagen's Faith Journey Postscript - March 15, 2020



During the past few days, since I shared my faith journey at Wednesday's Lenten Supper, I've reflected. As I presented I got emotional and as a result, I did not share a lot of what is in my heart about my faith and how First Pres Church has been a vital part of my life. When you are 93 years old, you have a lot of stories to tell. I would like share a few nuggets of my life, faith journey and as a member of First Pres for 60 years.

As a child and youth, I grew up in a Presbyterian Church in Paterson with wonderful Sunday School teachers. I recall as a teenager, I would sit in the sanctuary alone and felt God's presence in the silence. When Mina and I moved to Glen Rock, we were looking for a church. From the first time we attended First Pres, we felt welcomed and the warmth of the congregation.

Mina and I joined the church in 1959, and we became very active members.

I served as Clerk of Session for 35 years, and Mina was active as a Deacon and spearheaded church fundraisers, antique shows and dinners. Over the years, Mina's strong faith helped deepen my faith. We had a wonderful faith journey as a married couple until she passed in 2005.

The loss of Mina and the death of my daughter, Wendy, a year later tested my faith. My Christian foundation and faith made it possible for me to endure those difficult times. First Pres Church has been the saving grace that has sustained me.

My daily spiritual routine in praying helps me to trust in God's grace each day. I believe a church is not a building, but the church is the congregation. First Pres congregation is my family. I am grateful for the relationships I have with such a loving and caring congregation, and how it has deepened my faith and sustained me.



On Sunday, March 8<sup>th</sup> Donna Flagg, Jan Cross, Li Towt, Ruth and John Plucinski shared their recent experiences on a Mission trip to New Orleans followed by candle lighting.

MaryEllen Castaldo shared the Good News with Sunday school students.



*Before Last Wednesday* by Pastor Joshua Gritter



Before last Wednesday  
We were like ancient Babylonians  
Huddled together building our babel towers

And we all spoke one language  
Work, make, produce!  
I never knew my neighbor's name

Then God came down and saw the mess we made  
So East of Eden we can't remember it  
If they keep building, they'll get everything they want.

Now the air has gone viral with invisible fire  
Dust to dust goes my ambitious American dream  
The Palms will burn early this year

Do you remember the clanging symbols of the internet wars?  
I hated you and we had never met  
But last night we both were afraid and cried in our lover's arms.

My body has become a bearer of cross-shaped questions  
Oh my God,  
How, where, why, when?

But all I find is a chasm, a silence  
Where lonely Job has the only reply  
Welcome to the ash heap, my friends

So cacophonous is the spreading sound  
Of this pandemic pandemonium  
Yet louder is God's awe as the dogwoods bloom



*As of now, please plan to gather together on line April 12<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 AM as we celebrate God's victory over death and the promise of the resurrection!*

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

Please send your on line worshipping pictures and/or Easter pictures to Joan at [davies333@aol.com](mailto:davies333@aol.com) for publishing in May's First Press!

#### 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) |

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**Church Phone** (201) 652-2504

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

*"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." John 16:33*