

The Good News Gazette

The First Presbyterian Church
94-96 Main Street Chester, NY 10918

February 2016

Welcoming God into the Darkness

Lent is fast approaching. Ash Wednesday kicks off the early start of Lent on February 10th this year. While the days are starting to get longer, with such an early Lent, there is still much darkness as we move towards Easter. This darkness often makes most of us uncomfortable. We'd rather not only have the longer days, but also see bright light at the end of the tunnel rather than a faint glow of a tiny dot at the other end. But there is something about being able to sit in the darkness that allows for reflection and examination. Of course, this is hard to do at times. This darkness makes us take a deeper look – perhaps at something we don't want to see so we search for whatever light we can find. It often happens that in the darkness all of our fears come out. Fears of the unknown, fears of what cannot be seen, fears of what might be lurking around the corner. For some reason all of our fears seem more prominent in the dark. Not only this, but everything sounds louder in the dark – the creaking of the tree branches, the settling of the house, the thoughts running through our heads. And so we search intently for whatever light there is offered to us. But there is a need for darkness just as much as there is a need for light. There is a need to sit with our most inward thoughts – examining ourselves all the way down to the deepest darkness of our souls.

Theologian Barbara Brown Taylor recently wrote a book called, “Learning to Walk In the Dark” where she journeys through the phases of the moon. Starting from a full moon to a new moon all the way back to a full moon again. She journeys deeper into the darkness not just of the world around her but what this darkness means for her life, especially along her faith journey. While darkness usually is not seen as being a good thing in the Bible, she points to times where God is found in the darkness or where God meets the people in the darkness. Jacob wrestles an angel of God in the middle of the night before reconciling with his brother Esau. The Israelites escape Egypt through the Red Sea in the dark of night. God is a cloud of darkness that leads the Israelites in the wilderness. God promises Abraham his descendants will be as numerous as the stars. There is something about the fact that in this covenant promise the stars can only shine at night.

It is truly in these times of darkness, both the literal darkness of night and the metaphorical darkness of doubt, worry, fear, grief, pain, of wondering what is next, where God meets us. It is only in examining ourselves, entering into the darkness within us, that we can welcome God further into our hearts. For in examining these darkest parts we are acknowledging they are there and we are acknowledging we need God in them. Without this, pretending they don't exist, the darkness remains in us but we deny God access. Barbara Brown Taylor states, “If we turn away from darkness on principle, doing everything we can to avoid it because there is simply no telling what it contains, isn't there a chance that what we are running from is God?”

This Lent I invite you to reflect on the darkness around you. Both in the phases of the moon and the journey from shorter to longer days and also the darkness within. Where do you still need to invite God into your soul? What parts are still hurting that you need to give over to God? What doubts or fears are you tired of holding on to? Where do you need to let go of sins and be forgiven? God is waiting to be welcomed. While this welcoming may mean a wrestling match in the middle of the night or a promise made in the beauty of the stars, remember either way you are left with a blessing. It is worth the work of walking through the dark.

Pastor Erin

Deacons' Report

The Deacons have started 2016 on a positive note. We are looking forward to another busy year of Food Pantry and Roast Beef Dinners.

Once again, we received the Food Pantry rules that indicate the correct amount of protein, calories, etc... in the food that participants are entitled to receive. This can change from year to year. It also means we will be moving some things around on the shelves to model the new guidelines.

There was a slight drop in participants in December from the same time last year and we hope that this is a good sign.

Our numbers of helpers on Food Pantry delivery dates is growing. We are very appreciative of the help we receive from groups such as Key Club, Girl Scouts, the High School Basketball and Football teams. They help carry boxes in and stock the shelves. We are so grateful. Rotary continues to help stock the shelves every other month, as well.

Thank you to all who gave monetary gifts. The Chester Elementary School staff and teachers generously gave a gift in honor of their Principal.

Help is always needed on Food Pantry distribution days – which is usually the 4th Thursday of each month. Please just drop by – we'd love to see you!

February Second Offering

Our second offering for Sunday, February 28th will be for Buildings and Grounds.

Challenge to Change

Our Session has decided to apply for a Challenge to Change grant through our Presbytery. These grants range in gifts of \$200-\$7000 to church's that are willing to engage in new ideas, new forms of ministry, or new uses of their space. We have a few ideas and will possibly submit two grant proposals but we will need some help to get the applications done and in on time. The first project we are considering is fixing up the old chapel (gym) behind the sanctuary. This space could be used for trivia or game nights, youth or young adult indoor volleyball, church teas or other social events, etc... While we are working on getting some quotes for work that would need to be done, we also need to really start cleaning it out. There is a lot of junk back there that needs to be cleared out to make it a useable space. Any help in cleaning out that area (as well as the CE building) would be greatly appreciated!

Another project we are considering is a community vegetable garden. We need some more help on this project with getting quotes of materials needed to build the garden beds, soil, fencing, etc... If anyone, or any group, would like to help with getting quotes of materials it would be greatly appreciated! Please see Pastor Erin or a member of session.

We are very excited about the possibility of these projects and the hope of receiving some money from Presbytery to help us try something new. We do not want to waste this opportunity but session cannot do this all ourselves. Getting quotes, figuring out best use of space, writing the grant application all takes a lot of work. Whatever help you are willing to offer would be greatly appreciated as we begin our journey of trying new things!

Looking Ahead

February 2 – Deacons meeting at 12pm in the library

February 7 – Session meeting following worship

February 9 – Pancake Supper 5-7pm

Confirmation Class 7pm

February 10 – Ash Wednesday Service 7pm

February 13 – Women’s Council Tea at 3pm (sold out)

February 18 - Crafters meeting at 3pm in the library (planning crafts for the next church dinner)

February 23 – Confirmation Class at 7pm

February 25 – Food Pantry Distribution

Also, be on the look out for announcements about our New Members Class.

Pastor Erin will be away on Study Leave February 2nd-February 5th. Please contact the church office or a session member if there is an emergency.

If you have an article or announcement you would like to have in the next newsletter, please have it into the church office by February 22nd.

Pastor: Erin Moore

Moderator of Deacons: Okey Barrett (845) 651-4707

Treasurer Alan Eckard

Assistant Treasurer Betty Ann Reilly

Secretary: Ruth Magyar

Church Office: (845) 469-4877

E-mail: info@chespresny.com

Website: www.chespresny.com

Facebook page: www.facebook.com/chespresny

If you are in need of pastoral care, please contact our pastor at the church office number (845-469-4877).