



WISHING YOU A BLESSED CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

The Little Harbinger Bethany Memorial Church

December 2019

The Pastor's Pen

by Rev. Dr. Sharon E. Watkins

The vision statement in the preamble to the Bethany Memorial Church of Christ (Disciples of Christ) constitution says: "Here in Bethany where paths cross and journeys begin, we rejoice in God's love and grace and our belief in the Lord Jesus Christ."

My path led to Bethany, WV in about 1997, as part of the Bethany Project. This Lilly Endowment-funded program for church renewal was based on the proposition that a congregation's spiritual health depends, at least in part, on the spiritual vitality of its ministers. Ministers, it said, need peer group support and prayer to be healthy.

My peer group held its organizational meeting in Bethany. We worshipped and sang in the old meeting house, shared

spiritual biographies in the Campbell Mansion, slept at Gresham Inn, and spent 20 hours of silence wandering the village.

Single digit temperatures and snow on the ground made for chilly walking to God's Acre. Praying in Campbell's prayer study was downright frigid! Even so, the history and legacy of the place palpably warmed the spirit if not the toes. I felt connected with Disciples past and present and around the globe.

As a pastor in Oklahoma, I never dreamed I would move here in 2017!

The last two years have been spirit-warming, as well – living in a 100 year old house in the village (known either as the Weaver's house" or "Hiram and Annie Lester's house" depending on which generation of Bethanians

you talk to. Now it's the "pink house"). Big front porch, butterflies, hummingbirds, amazing neighbors and an active congregation have proven right our relocation to Bethany for Rick's call to the Historical Society.

Now begins the excitement of a new pastor-congregation relationship - a whole new way of experiencing Bethany! I look forward to getting to know you better - and getting acquainted with some of you for the first time. I'll be doing some calling right away. Please reach out to me if you know of someone who should receive a call early on - even if that someone is you!

I can't wait to hear from you about your hopes and dreams for our

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congregation together.

In the meantime, I've already met with the worship planners to get a handle on Advent and Christmas worship and hope to organize an elders' retreat right after the first of the year. I anticipate picking up the New Beginnings project we started a year ago to see where we want to go with that. President Rodenberg and I have had a conversation about the congregation's relationship with the college.

Moderator Helen Moren has been enormously helpful in orienting and encouraging me in these early days, as well as guiding us all through the search process. I'm grateful to Sydma Hatzopoulos for careful attention to a myriad of details. Others

have stepped up to be helpful in various ways - John Cole and John Rodenberg, members of the search committee - and that doesn't finish the list, though I've barely begun my work.

My general work plan is to be in the church for several hours on Sundays through Thursdays most weeks. (Exact office hours to be established when I get a better handle on the rhythms of this faith community.) Friday will ordinarily be my day of Sabbath rest.

As we begin our journey together, may God's love and grace and our belief in the Lord Jesus Christ warm our hearts and energize us for a life of witness and service together.

A Day of Firsts

First day of December, first Sunday of Advent, and first Sunday behind the Bethany Memorial Church pulpit for the Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins.

World Aids Sunday, Commitment Sunday, and the return and debut of the BMC choir under the direction of Vicki NeCastro.

It was a most blessed Sunday. The morning started with a special coffee hour in honor of Rev. Watkins, followed by worship in the newly decorated sanctuary. Jan Forsty lit the first Advent candle, representing Hope, and focused on hope for those who live with AIDS or HIV. The offering plates overflowed with pledge cards and poinsettia orders, and the message from the pulpit was perfect. So many of us remember the days of an active choir, and while it was small (seven singers), the newly organized choir harmonized beautifully.

The sanctuary felt like home again.

We are grateful that Reverend Dr. Sharon Watkins accepted the call from BMC to serve as Pastor.

After seven months of waiting and preparing for a new Pastor, the congregation of Bethany Memorial Church can now focus on waiting and preparing for the birth of the Christ child.



Advent - A Season of Waiting and Preparation

*A voice cries out:
"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

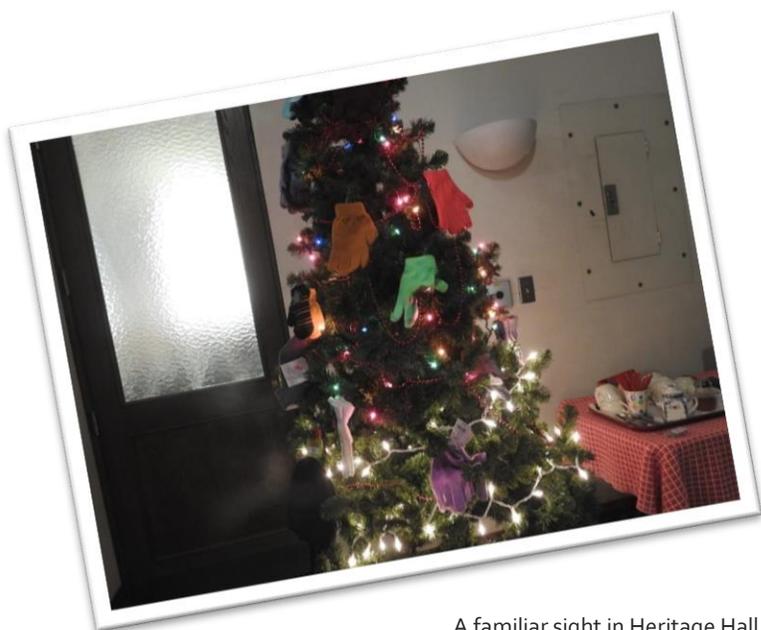
Isaiah 40:3

What better way to start the Season of Advent than a very successful "Hanging of the Greens."

Over a dozen gathered on the morning of Saturday, November 30th to decorate both the inside and the outside of the church building. Anita Weaver and John Cole had brought from storage decorations of years past, and John had made a few purchases to replace tired ribbons and greenery that most likely outdated many congregational members. Within a short amount of time, the Sanctuary, as well as Heritage Hall, were transformed to reflect the season of Advent and Christmastide.

New this year is a Chrismon (a contraction for "Christ monograms") tree, decorated with ancient symbols for Christ or some part of Christ's ministry: the dove descending down, fish, Celtic cross, Jerusalem cross, shepherd's crook, chalice, shell, and many others.

The addition of a Bethlehem star on the Baptistry window adds additional beauty and significance to the sanctuary.



A familiar sight in Heritage Hall, the "Hat, Gloves, and Scarves" tree. Donations accepted up until Christmas and will be donated to those in need.

HANGING OF THE GREENS SATURDAY



Penny Tittle, Rev. Sharon Watkins, John Hull, John Cole, and Jan Forsty discuss the Hanging of the Greens process.



Connie McVicar climbs a ladder to hang one of the wreaths beside the baptistry.



Noah Gills, first year student at Bethany College, hangs Chrismons on the Chrismon tree.

The Art of Receiving

by Herb Weaver

As a child, during the Christmas season, I'm fairly certain that I was more focused on receiving gifts than giving gifts. That's not to suggest I was void of feelings as I selected and purchased various items for friends and family, but to be sure, the anticipation of Christmas morning revolved around what was under the tree for me. As I aged, and particularly after having children, this paradigm of giving and receiving completely reversed and I enjoyed seeing the faces of joy while others received my offerings to them. After all, Christmas is there to remind us that the ultimate gift was God giving us Jesus to save humanity.

However, none of this "giving and receiving" prepared me for an incident that happened several years ago while teaching at Bethany College. I was quietly alone, milling around the ceramics studio on a Saturday, when I looked up to see two individuals standing near the doorway. It appeared that a younger lady was helping the other lady navigate slowly through the building. I'm not sure but they seemed related to each other, perhaps a daughter and mother,...or maybe a niece helping her aunt. In either case, the more elder of the women was assuredly struggling to move, and breathe for that matter. I greeted them softly and inquired about their journey. As our conversation unfolded the mystery of their intentions, I

began to formulate a mental picture of what was happening.

Although never explicitly stated, the older lady who had been a student at Bethany many years ago, was near death. Having observed her vigorous rubbing a set of rosary beads, I should have been sensitive to this revelation in the first place. Sensing the gravity of the moment, I soon gathered that her experience at Bethany was so meaningful that she insisted on a final visit to the place. But a weekend morning on a college campus can be somewhat empty and I was seemingly the only living option around. As she viewed and admired some of the pottery in the studio, I was overcome with her intensity and excused myself momentarily. I returned with a piece of my pottery and offered it to her as a memento of Bethany. Tears welled-up in her eyes as she held the vessel close to her chest. I could tell how much it meant to her but was uncertain why she thanked me so profusely. After a few seconds of silence she handed me her rosary beads and said, "I'd like you to have these."

Of course my first internal reaction was "no way!" These beads had obviously sustained her through so much turmoil and pain...and now she wanted to give them to me in return for one simple gift of pottery? As my lips formed to say, "I couldn't possibly accept this precious gift," something else came out of my mouth.



"Thank you, so much," I said. We hugged and she departed.

Twenty years later, I still have those rosary beads. I learned in that moment the valued meaning of receiving. I didn't need that gift,...but she needed to give it.

"Some give freely, yet grow all the richer; others withhold what is due, and only suffer want. A generous person will be enriched, and one who gives water will get water."

Proverbs 11:24-25



Timothy Who?

It started with a midsummer phone call from the Rev. Paul Sandusky. The congregational board of the First Christian Church in Brownsville, Pennsylvania (at which Rev. Sandusky is the pastor) had voted to collect items for a "Timothy Basket" to be given to a deserving Timothy Scholar at Bethany College. First problem? There are no longer Timothy Scholars at Bethany and most employees contacted at the College were unfamiliar with the Timothy Scholarship program. The Board's second choice was to give the basket to a pre-ministerial student at Bethany College. Second problem? Privacy laws prohibited the sharing of that information from the College to the Church. After multiple emails and phone calls, it was decided the Timothy basket should be given to a Disciples of Christ student. Several names and brief biographies were given to Rev. Sandusky, and their Board chose Jennifer Oberthur to receive the goodies. On November 11, Rev. Sandusky drove to Bethany with two containers filled with everything from shampoo to chips and surprised Jennifer with the gifts.

Jennifer Oberthur and Rev. Paul Sandusky of the First Christian Church of Brownsville, PA. Jennifer is a sophomore from Indianapolis, Indiana who hopes to one day become a veterinarian. She plays softball for Bethany College.

Veterans Day Service

A special Veterans Day service was held on Sunday, November 10, 2019.

The GFWC WV Bethany Woman's Club hosted a coffee hour before worship in honor of all veterans. A folded American flag was placed on the communion table.

As part of the Veterans Day weekend, a program was held at the Town of Bethany community center featuring the Brooke High School Madrigal singers. This was followed by a spaghetti dinner in the basement of the church. All veterans were invited to dine for free. The Bethany Woman's Club sponsored this event.

Shown in the picture to the right are Connie McVicar, Helen Moren, and Charlotte Chambers, all members of the Woman's Club.



December Events

DECEMBER 8

BMC Christmas Potluck

Bring a covered dish and a \$5.00 or under gift to exchange. Celebrate by wearing your ugliest Christmas sweater to worship. Potluck to follow worship service. This is also our official welcome to Rev. Sharon Watkins!



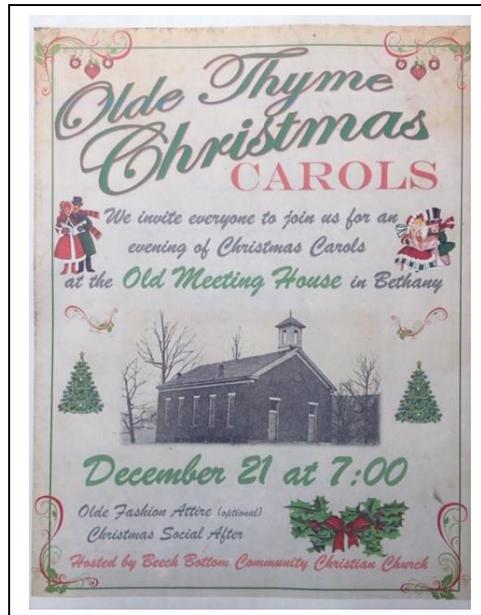
DECEMBER 15

Congregational meeting following worship to vote on the 2020 BMC budget and proposed slate of officers.

DECEMBER 15

At 1:00 pm, a Christmas Cantata by the choirs of Beech Bottom Community Christian Church and the First Baptist Church of Wellsburg will take place at the Beech Bottom church. Refreshments will follow.

(There will also be a performance of this cantata on December 8 at 6:00 pm at the First Baptist Church of Wellsburg)



DECEMBER 24

Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship Service

Bethany Memorial Church

7:00 pm



CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

If you would like to purchase a poinsettia in honor or memory of a loved one, orders are being accepted from now until December 8. For those of you who live out of town, you may call the church office at 304-829-7138 with the number of poinsettias and who they are to honor or memorialize. You can then mail a check to cover the cost. This year, the poinsettias are \$12.50 each. If you prefer, you can pay with a credit card through the BMC web page at bmcwv.org. Click on the donate button and be sure to indicate for whom the poinsettias are for. Poinsettias can be picked up after the Christmas Eve service. Unclaimed poinsettias will be given to shut-ins or nursing home residents.

Prayer List

Therefore...pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. – James 5:16

- Barbara Chambers
- Rick Lowery
- Pam and Alan Clifford (Connie McVicar's sister and brother-in-law)
- Sharon Poyneer (sister of Vonnie Larson)
- Katrina Beery (mother of Debra Hull)
- Mary Sutherland (sister of Pat Sutherland)
- Della & Ed Rodgers (Parents of Vicki NeCastro)
- Holly Cramblet Bowman
- Mike Cunningham (Sydma's Dad) and Dottie Hanners
- Caden Knisley
- Joanne Sykes
- Ellen Sanford
- Nancy Sandercox
- Mary Jane Jackson
- Ruth Tye
- Holly, Frank, and Sharley Hillgardner
- Elizabeth DeJong
- Donna Norman (Becky Ayers' sister)
- Nancy Pietrangelo (sister of Penny Tittle)
- Dottie Smith
- Robert Andrews
- Linda Owens Walters
- Paul Gardner
- Kerry Kerr
- Dara Cobb Lewis and family
- Chib Gratz (friend of Kim Lawless)

Birthdays and Anniversaries

*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
-Ephesians 2:10*

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| 7 – Jean Schwertfegar (90) | 17 – Connie McVicar |
| 7 – Sydma Hatzopoulos | 20 – Rev. Larry Edward Grimes |
| 13 – Hannah Pearl Pauls | 26 – Jan Forsty and Penny Tittle (2014) |
| 15 – Jennifer & Chuck Kilmer (1999) | 29 – John & Debra Hull (1972) |
| 16 – Ted Pauls | 31 – Rev. Daniel & Nancy Harry (1988) |

Warm Comes in Many Forms

“How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?”

1 John 3:17

A challenge goes out to collect 100 cans of soup to warm the bellies of those who are cold and in need. Another challenge is issued to donate coats and blankets for those who are homeless and in need of shelter.

It is no surprise that the congregation of Bethany Memorial Church responded quickly and favorably. In roughly 30 days, 151 cans of soup were collected. And it wasn’t just the congregation. Members of the Bethany community stepped up with donations as well. A volunteer and a worker at the Salvation Army in Wellsburg were thrilled when these cans of soup were delivered. In addition, an anonymous donor gave \$200 to Chambers Store to purchase even more soup, so another delivery will be made in the near future.

Outreach Chair, Debra Hull, delivered a carful of coats and blankets to the Youth Services System in Wheeling. In addition, a monetary donation was made to the Youth Services System to be put toward their Winter Freeze Shelter which provides overnight shelter to the homeless population during the winter months.



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