

Presbyterians Today

March/April 2020

Celebrating the Easter Vigil

**Ancient liturgy
deepens faith**



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never truly considered. It made my
faith stronger and prepared me well
to serve as a pastor."***

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Faith Presbyterian Church, Emmaus, Pennsylvania

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On the cover: The Rev. Dr. David B. Batchelder, center, of West Plano Presbyterian Church in Plano, Texas, begins the Easter Vigil with a bonfire at sundown. Accompanying him are the Rev. Matthew Calvert, parish associate, and Scott McLain. Photo: Michael Williams

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A 'pie for breakfast' event becomes a Eucharistic moment

A community puts aside differences to come together

For this country pastor, March doesn't just mean that Lent is in full swing. It also means Town Meeting Day is here.

A Vermont tradition since 1762, held on the second Tuesday of the month, Town Meeting Day is where residents in sleepy hamlets and frozen-in-time villages throw on their boots and trudge through the mud (or sometimes a foot or more of snow) to get to schools or village offices to speak for or against proposed policies, budgets, prospective town clerks and supervisors, and then vote.

I've always been intrigued with Town Meeting Day. Why call it a "meeting" when really no one is there to have deep discussions? Just like church parking lot conversations, meetings have already taken place inside musty general stores and, of course, in the most popular gathering place — the rural post office. Still, Vermonters will discuss, debate, disagree and hopefully cast votes that will benefit the many who are struggling in the Green Mountain state.

While running errands and out on pastoral calls, I see the "Vote for..." signs hanging from dilapidated porches or stuck into the ground near mailboxes. Many of these signs are written in marker on poster board and stapled to a wooden stick. These are simple signs, yet not so simple issues. Vermont, like many places in our country, is struggling with families moving out because of the lack of jobs, the inability to get high-speed internet that prevents businesses from moving in, farm closures and the rampant use of opioids. And don't even get me going on the state of our churches. I've never held onto the promise of resurrection so tightly as I do now as a rural pastor. Those who idealize country living for its simplicity fail to see it is anything but simple. There was one recent Town Meeting Day that proved just that.

The vote was about merging rural schools into larger districts to save money and resources. Those for the merger cited that rural schools couldn't continue as is with the number of children and funding shrinking. Those against the merger supported the tax increases that would keep the current school system in place. I would like to tell you that there was a resolution, but sadly, the school debate has seen no clear winners or losers. The issue is complex and ongoing.

Still, as the sun went down on that particular Town Meeting Day, I was thinking about the vote that was asking us to change, and how scary that change can be. But no matter how unsettling, doesn't change give us a chance to see how God can take our dashed dreams, failed attempts and deflated hope and make something wonderful out of it all? Can we see beyond winners and losers and focus on bringing people together in a way that moves everyone forward?

When I moonlighted as a reporter at a local paper, I interviewed a woman in one of Vermont's hamlets that had been dotted with "No to school merger" signs. She was planning a "pie for breakfast" event the weekend after Town Meeting Day. After asking her the important question of what flavor of pies would be served, I asked why she was doing this. Her answer was "to bring the community back together."

"We are still to be a neighbor to one another, and what better way to remember that than to gather over homemade pies for breakfast?" she said.

Without realizing it, she was capturing the hope and redemption that I witness in the breaking of the Eucharist bread. When I say the words that this is Christ's body given for you — take, eat, remember — I'm inviting us to remember how Jesus came to show us a better way, a different way forward, a way of loving even when disagreements arise.

While it wasn't a loaf of bread, I couldn't stop thinking how Vermonters would be doing something very holy when breaking into the flaky pie crusts with their forks. For in the breaking of the pie crusts, they were in fact inviting the spirit of unity to fill the room. And, I believe, the Spirit of God was with them in a powerful and healing way that Saturday morning.

It's March, and for this country pastor that means Town Meeting Day is here. Votes might get contentious as change can be hard, but fear not. God's steadfast love changes not. Lenten journeys lead to the Good Friday cross, but death is not the last word. New life abounds. The empty tomb proves it. Rejoice. There is pie for breakfast waiting for us to dig into!

Donna Frischknecht Jackson is editor of Presbyterians Today.

Photo project helps church see God

Snapping a shot of the holy in the ordinary

God is everywhere. You only have to open your eyes to see. That was the invitation the congregation at Preston Hollow Presbyterian Church in Dallas received last summer during a sermon series called “Sacred, Ordinary Life.”

“When we think about God, we often think about these big, huge mountaintop moments, but we wanted to claim all the ways God is present in the ordinary moments,” said the Rev. Dr. Sarah Johnson, senior associate pastor. Those ordinary God moments could be anything from “forgetting your keys or getting stuck in traffic,” she added.

This, however, wasn’t a “sit back and listen” sermon series. It was interactive, with worshipers invited to submit their pictures each week showing where they found the sacred in the ordinary. The photos came pouring in, with folks either bringing them to worship or submitting through email or posting on the church’s social media sites. The project engaged all generations, said Sara Stoltz, Preston Hollow’s director of communications.

Stoltz printed the photos and hung them on the church’s atrium wall, creating what she called “a living art display that was always growing and changing.”

More than 150 people participated in the “Sacred, Ordinary Life” photo project, with youth especially engaged via social media. The photos not only generated interest among the congregation, but also helped tell the story of life in Preston Hollow Presbyterian to outside groups using the building.

The project was also easy to do, Stoltz said. Pictures taken with cellphones are abundant. To hang them, all a church needs is a display space and some pushpins or staples. Preston Hollow has a magnetic wall in its atrium and so magnets were used.

—Donna Frischknecht Jackson

MORE IDEAS

Create a photo wall celebrating God’s creation

With Earth Day turning 50 this April 22, invite your congregation to celebrate the beauty of God’s creation, challenging members to take pictures of all the natural resources in their community. For other earth care ideas, go to presbyearthcare.org/resources/pcusa-programs



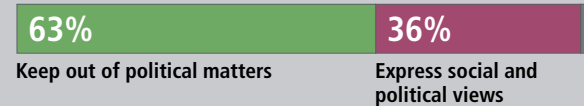
COURTESY OF PRESTON HOLLOW PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Preston Hollow Presbyterian Church invited its congregation to take pictures of where they saw God in the ordinary moments of life. The pictures were on display in the church’s atrium.

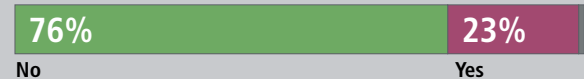
PC(USA) Snapshot

Most Americans want churches to stay out of politics

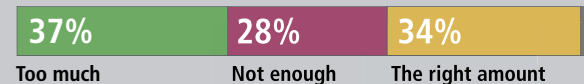
% of U.S. adults who say churches should...



Should churches endorse one candidate over another?



Influence that churches have in politics



Source: Pew Research Center, Nov. 15, 2019, “Americans Have Positive Views About Religion’s Role in Society, but Want It Out of Politics”
Graphic by Jeffrey Lawrence



Do you have an idea that has worked in your congregation that you would like to share?

Send stories and pictures to editor@pcusa.org.



Fellowship is not just social time

Showing up for one another — and God — is a necessary practice

Years ago, I had the pleasure of talking with Bruce Joel Rubin, a screenwriter who won an Oscar for his screenplay of the romantic thriller “Ghost.” The next project he would direct was “My Life.” It was a film about a young man dying of cancer played by Michael Keaton. The movie premiered the same weekend as “Mrs. Doubtfire,” starring Robin Williams. Guess which movie the public went out in droves to see?

Rubin felt bad, until he met a young man who told him how much the movie had meant to him. His mother was dying of cancer and she could see that her son was having trouble dealing with her impending death. She suggested that they see “My Life.” They came home able to talk more freely about their situation, and they wept together.

“I realized that I had made that movie for those two people,” Rubin said. “And that was enough.”

When I was a young pastor, I had a recurring dream that the church would be full, and I had no sermon. I’d wake in a sweaty panic. Now I wonder if pastors have the opposite dream. They’ve got a sermon, but no one shows up. I’m thinking about this because I have a sneaking suspicion that churches hold and treasure a spiritual practice I personally prize above all others: coming together in fellowship. But in our busy world, it’s hard finding the time to get together, and not just for social events. Fellowship goes deeper than socializing. Fellowship is participating with God and with one another in the trials and blessings of life together.

In seminary I served a little white-steepled church. When I was ordained, a group from that church came to the service, including a grandmotherly lady named Jean. She took me aside after the service to tell me how I had helped her once. I didn’t remember, so she filled me in.

“Remember when you called me and asked why I wasn’t at the party where we decorated the church for Christmas? And then you came and got me?” she asked. “Before that day, I had decided I was too old to be going out at night. But I had such a good time that night, I decided that perhaps I was being too hasty in retiring from life. I went back to my doctor and said I’d like to go ahead with those treatments for my arthritis he’d been after me to try. I felt so good I decided I’d go on a cruise. I met a man on the ship, we fell in love, we got married and ...”

Everything for Jean had changed and she had chalked

it up to a phone call inviting her not to retire from life.

The spiritual practice of fellowship is also important because it reminds us that no one is expendable, especially in a small church.

In my first, small church, there was an elderly usher named Eddie Gatzke. No one could remember a time when Eddie wasn’t the usher. He was warm and quiet, and before Christmas he always, very quietly, handed me a card with \$20 in it.

When he died, no one jumped into the position of usher, because no one presumed they could fill Eddie’s shoes. So, for over a year we were sloppy when it came to getting bulletins into people’s hands. We couldn’t imagine the church without Eddie and there was something sweet as well as bitter about that. It just made the church all the more precious.

What does the spiritual practice of fellowship look like? In the words of Frederick Buechner, “It should have us throwing our arms around each other like people who have just discovered that every single man and woman in those pews is not just another familiar or unfamiliar face, but is our long-lost brother and our long-lost sister because despite the fact that we have all walked in different gardens and knelt at different graves, we have all, humanly speaking, come from the same place and are heading out into the same blessed mystery that awaits us all.”

Scott Dalgarno is the lead pastor of Wasatch Presbyterian Church in Salt Lake City.

PUT INTO PRACTICE

- » For one month, make more of a commitment to your church family and take note of the blessings that you discover.
- » Call someone you haven’t spoken to in a while or visit a church member you haven’t seen in a few Sundays.
- » Offer new fellowship opportunities in your church. If you don’t have a prayer group, start one. Are people looking to walk more to get healthy? Suggest a time of prayer walking.



Did Jesus really descend into hell?

The Apostles' Creed question that everyone ponders

Of the 12 entries in our Book of Confessions, odds are you're most familiar with the Apostles' Creed. Every branch of Christianity's family tree accepts it. It's often recited at baptisms, as it was originally a baptismal creed. And, since it's only 110 words long, if you have any creed memorized, this is probably the one. But of those 110 words, four have tripped up Christians for centuries: *He descended into hell*.

Appearing between "crucified, dead, and buried" and "the third day he rose again," "descended into hell" wasn't originally part of the Creed. It was sometime around A.D. 400, in the writings of Rufinus, a monk and theologian, that the first mention of Jesus' descent appeared. In A.D. 750, the Latin church made it an official part of the Creed.

But why add this line? It all depends on whom you ask.

Let's start by understanding the definition of the word "hell" in Hebrew (sheol) and Greek (hades). Both translate to mean "land of the dead." So, like Rufinus, some folks believe that this clause simply means that Jesus, being fully human and fully divine, experienced a true human death. Critics of this view, though, ask why it was necessary to include it in the Creed.

Others argue that "hell" refers to Gehenna, a valley outside of Jerusalem that was originally used for child sacrifice and later used as a garbage dump, which became Hebrew "shorthand" for a place of everlasting punishment. Further complicating matters, Gehenna advocates have different views on why Jesus would have gone there:

- **To suffer the consequences of human depravity.** Thomas Aquinas held this view, but critics argue that Jesus' statements on the cross ("Today you will be with me in paradise" and "It is finished!") contradict it.
- **To preach the gospel, thus giving hell's inhabitants a second chance at salvation.** This view is based on a particular reading of Ephesians 4:8–10 and 1 Peter 3:18–20, where the Scriptures seem to indicate that Jesus might have visited the lands of the dead to save those who were there. Critics say this view forces an interpretation originally not intended.

Other views, including John Calvin's as well as that found in the Heidelberg Catechism, assert that "hell" shouldn't be understood literally. Instead, Jesus' separation from God on the cross constitutes ultimate suffering.

So what do Presbyterians believe about Jesus "descending into hell"? All of the above ... none of the above ... some combination of the above. (Seriously, you thought I was going to solve a centuries-old theological squabble in one column?)

While we might not necessarily agree on the meaning of this phrase, we can agree on the role it plays as part of our confessional heritage.

As Presbyterians, we take a Reformed view of the Bible and the church's creeds. In the words of our ordination vows, "the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments [are], by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to [us]," and we "receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do." That's a lot of fancy language that means we believe that the Bible is the authority by which we understand and live out our relationship with God and each other. Scripture gets the final word. Our confessions serve as conversation partners. They come out of specific contexts, giving us snapshots of how those siblings in Christ in those times and places understood what being Christian meant. For example, the Reformer Theodore Beza didn't agree with John Calvin, as he preferred to omit "he descended into hell." Calvin kept it.

Creeds aren't supposed to give us all of the answers. Rather, they help us ask better questions. They drive us back to the Bible, where, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can encounter the love of God expressed through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that, regardless of our own understanding of Jesus' descent, is our takeaway from these four words in the Apostles' Creed. By reciting these words, we affirm that Jesus loves us so much that he was willing to make — and be — the ultimate sacrifice for us. We celebrate that there's nowhere devoid of God's grace and mercy. And we rejoice that death no longer has the final say.

Jodi Craiglow is a ruling elder at First Presbyterian Church of Libertyville, Illinois, and a Ph.D. candidate at Trinity International University. A self-acknowledged polity wonk, she is a member of the PC(USA) Committee on Theological Education.



Justice through a child's eyes

We can equip our children to see the world as Jesus does

We were walking back to the car after dropping off Christmas cards at the post office. My 7-year-old son skipped as he held my hand. Without changing his movement, he asked how much money I had in my purse. I told him I didn't know and asked why. Down the street, a handful of children experiencing homelessness had set up a camp on the sidewalk. Mattresses, cardboard, shopping carts and belongings were pushed around chaotically 10 yards from our car.

"Please give me whatever money is in your purse, Mama," my son said. "We have to give it to our friends on the street. They don't have a debit card like we do."

I hear a common narrative in our culture: The city is no place to raise a family. Often, families with children move to smaller towns or the suburbs to keep them away from whatever ills they perceive to be in cities.

I admit, raising my kids in urban Los Angeles is not easy, and I try to surround our children with the love, support and tools they need to see Jesus in an urban environment.

No matter where we live, though, we cannot isolate our children in a bubble or insulate them in a padded room. If the opioid crisis has taught us anything, it's that harmful substances like drugs are rampant in rural America and suburbia as much as in the urban centers. We cannot protect our children through strategic geography. They will encounter the world. And what a blessing that God did not choose to stay distant from the world either, but rushes to be by our side.

As Christians, we have an opportunity to equip the children in our families and in our churches with eyes to see the world the way Jesus sees it. Instead of avoiding neighborhoods of poverty, we have an obligation to talk to children about systems of poverty, to help them see the larger picture in ways they can understand, and to creatively brainstorm with them loving ways to respond. We can embrace the invitation for children to live an intentional, justice-oriented life.

In fact, an orientation toward justice comes easily to many children. In his book "The Mystery of the Child," Martin E. Marty observes that children often take Jesus' teaching further than adults. Children, he writes, are "moved by love to live out the vocations to effect change, to embody justice and mercy."

Spend any meaningful time with children and it becomes clear they understand what's right and wrong. Day in and day out, they are discovering how the world works — and how the world is not fair. Many young people have an uncanny ability to cut right through the hypocrisy and smokescreen that adults create. They see clearly. Once they get it, they are overwhelmingly passionate and sometimes even indignant. Greta Thunberg, a Swedish environmentalist, and Emma González, an American advocate for gun control, are just two examples of determined youth today who hold firmly to the truth and speak passionately to people of all ages.

Harnessing a child's sense of justice unleashes tremendous power for change in our world. Paoli Presbyterian Church in the outskirts of Philadelphia hosts a yearly Race for Refugees, raising money for World Vision's work with Syrian refugees in camps throughout Lebanon and Jordan. One 8-year-old girl, Eleanor Bruner, was so moved and inspired, she decided to raise additional money to help refugee kids. She even wanted to go visit the camps, which led to a conversation about where Jesus is in the world and how our love connects to Jesus' love even when we can't be there in person. All in all, Eleanor's passion issued a clarion call that raised \$1,800.

We need the voice of children to help us remember what we have forgotten. Whether it's during our regular errands to the post office or making a difference around the globe, children have more gifts for advocacy and justice work than many adults. But that doesn't mean we don't have a role to play in creating a hunger for justice in our children.

In my family, I find opportunities to talk to my children about race, pointing out illustrations in children's books that only have people of one skin color. When driving through different parts of town, we talk about income inequality and how God sees run-down neighborhoods. When we read stories about Jesus, I connect those stories to our community.

My part in raising justice-oriented children is to point them to Christ's action in the world, and then get out of their way and follow where they lead us.

Frances Wattman Rosenau is the pastor of Culver City Presbyterian Church in greater Los Angeles.



Our longest liturgical season

Easter's 50 days invite us to go from followers to believers

I was born and raised in Monterrey, Mexico, where I was a member of a congregation in the Mexican National Presbyterian Church denomination. The worship life of our congregation noted the important days of the Christian calendar — Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. But I don't ever recall a mention of liturgical seasons.

In retrospect, this probably was an effort to draw a distinction between the minority Presbyterian denomination and the majority Roman Catholic Church. (Pew Research reported in 2014 that 81% of Mexicans identified as Roman Catholic.) The Catholics may have had their 40 days of Lent, but we didn't. The only multi-day "season" Presbyterians ever mentioned seemed to be Holy Week. It wasn't until I immigrated to the United States and joined a PC(USA) church that I became familiar with the liturgical seasons. Yet even in the PC(USA), we struggle with living into those seasons.

As a pastor, I can't ignore the grumblings from the pews during Advent that we should be singing Christmas hymns. Though we anticipate Christmas, when Christmas Day arrives it feels as though we've crossed the finish line like an exhausted runner. We don't seem to have the energy for the 12 days of Christmas. Besides being the title of a quaint song, those days are often misconstrued to be the 12 days leading to Dec. 25. In reality, the 12 days follow Christmas.

Easter mirrors our Christmas dilemma. We see Easter Sunday as the destination following Lent, but then we neglect the Easter season known as Eastertide, which spans seven weeks. Eastertide is also referred to as "the 50 days of Easter." Those days begin with Easter Sunday and end with Pentecost Sunday.

The early church wasn't focused on the Easter season either. It sought to clarify when exactly to celebrate the Good Friday sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. When we take into account the different chronologies in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) and in John, and add to that the differences between the Jewish lunar calendar and the Roman solar calendar, we can see that determining that date wasn't a clear-cut answer.

While we won't soon be singing, "On the twelfth day of Easter, my true love gave to me ..." our congregations would benefit from prayerfully considering the time between Easter and Pentecost. Celebrating the Easter season is sure to deepen our faith, connecting us to

the spiritual drama that took place in real time for the original followers of Jesus. The season marks the space between an empty tomb and a room filled by the Holy Spirit, the shift between followers in a room hiding in fear and those gathered in hope, the feeling between the vision of a transformed Jesus and transformed believers.

I see the Bible as a love story between God and humanity, and Easter marks the turning point of that story. What the 50 days call us to do is to apply to our lives the meaning of the transformation Jesus experienced and how it transforms us. Eastertide also invites us to prepare spiritually to celebrate the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh come Pentecost.

When I was a student at McCormick Theological Seminary, I attended worship with my wife, Tracy, at the Methodist church she attended. In the Easter season, during the Prayers of the People, the pastor would ask the congregation for more than joys and concerns. She would ask: "Where are you seeing signs of resurrection?"

That was a poignant question for a congregation that had once been on the brink of being closed. That was a provocative question for members who lived from paycheck to paycheck and were faithfully in worship. That was a pertinent question for anyone who was eagerly awaiting God's answer to their prayers. And it is a question that guides us during Easter's 50 days. May this season bring us ever closer to the risen Jesus.

Felipe N. Martinez is the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Columbus, Indiana.

IDEAS FOR EASTER'S 50 DAYS

- » Reinforce the Easter Sunday message by preaching in the season of Easter on themes such as faithfulness, transformation, renewal or healing.
- » From Easter to Pentecost, invite your church family to post pictures on social media that reflect the Easter message. Hashtags can be #resurrection, #empty-tomb, #newlife.
- » Prepare a congregational devotional — daily or weekly readings —featuring stories of new life written by church members.



A focused message elevates excitement

Pew sitters become doers of the Word

BY DONNA FRISCHKNECHT JACKSON

Webster Groves Presbyterian Church | St. Louis | Approximately 700 members

Matthew 25 focus: We are defining congregational vitality by how our members are engaged in hands-on mission, not by total dollars given to an agency.

This April 22 will mark the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. Last year, a St. Louis church, Webster Groves Presbyterian, celebrated the 49th event in a big way — with a water-themed worship service, featuring a flowing fountain with blue and green fabric “water” cascading down the chancel steps. There was also an ethereal rendition of “Amazing Grace,” complete with the sounds of birds filling the sanctuary, and a slide show displaying photographs of water from the congregation, along with a soulful version of “Wade in the Water.”

The service was created by Webster Groves’ environmental stewardship team, and it was just one part of a yearlong focus on the importance of clean water for all God’s children, said Beth Kazlauskas.

A year ago, Kazlauskas, Webster Groves’ mission outreach coordinator for the past 11 years, shared over breakfast with the Rev. Rhonda Kruse the many missions that the church was engaged in.

As she talked about the projects, among them the congregation’s environmental and social justice work, it became clear to Kruse, who was then the PC(USA)’s mission engagement advisor for the Midwest, that Webster Groves was an example of a Matthew 25 church.



COURTESY OF WEBSTER GROVES PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Matthew 25’s focused message is creating more vitality among the Webster Groves Presbyterian congregation, as young and old are helping their St. Louis community. Here, members mark storm drain lids with “Drains to Streams” to raise awareness of the need to keep storm water systems clean.

At the time of their breakfast, Matthew 25 was just being launched as a denominational invitation for congregations to heed the words of Jesus to feed the hungry, visit the lonely, clothe the naked and release the prisoners. Kruse explained to Kazlauskas that congregations would be invited to commit to any or all three ministry focuses: building congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism and eradicating systemic poverty.

Kazlauskas took this invitation to

her pastors, the Rev. Ed Zumwinkel III, senior pastor, and the Rev. Dr. Susan Andrews, then parish associate.

“Becoming a Matthew 25 church felt like a perfect fit with what we were doing,” Kazlauskas said. Zumwinkel and Andrews agreed.

When the official Matthew 25 invitation was extended to the denomination on April 1, 2019, Webster Groves Presbyterian was among the first congregations to RSVP. It’s a decision that church leaders have

not regretted, especially Kazlauskas, who has noticed increased energy among its members over the past year. She credits this energy — and renewed excitement in missions — to the focused message of Matthew 25.

“Our hope was that it would help us better communicate to our congregation and our community how we are reaching out and engaging with those around us,” she said.

Matthew 25 has done just that — and much more.

Julie Wood, chair of Webster Groves’ missions, sees the Matthew 25 invitation as opening a space for conversations to take place about the diverse interests of Webster Groves’ members, which can then be turned into hands-on missions. After all, the key to success, she says, is to have “issues/efforts that are near and dear” to members.

“Matthew 25 has fit in well with the energy that was already growing in our congregation,” Wood said, adding that a “strong group of members” were ready for more engagement in mission work and social justice.

Out of the desire to do more came the creation of a new advocacy team, Kazlauskas says. The team is currently focusing on hosting events to elevate gun violence prevention and is seeking ways to alleviate poverty in the St. Louis area.

Along with better communications and a rediscovery of the gifts of those in the pew, Matthew 25 has helped the Webster Groves congregation learn how to “appreciate and celebrate all we are doing as a church,” says Sue Scott, co-chair of the newly formed advocacy team.

“By celebrating what we do, we build even more synergy around those efforts,” she said.

For Emmy McClelland, co-chair of Webster Groves’ advocacy team, Matthew 25 has provided “a way to answer the age-old question ‘What would Jesus do?’”

What would Jesus do if he saw

Becoming a mission-focused church

Beth Kazlauskas, Webster Groves Presbyterian Church’s mission outreach coordinator, offers these tips on how churches, no matter their size, can create more excitement around missions:

- **Go beyond the mission team** — Involve as many people from your congregation as possible.
- **Narrow your focus** — If your congregation supports many causes, prioritize and narrow the list.
- **Know what interests your members** — Make sure those missions connect with the interests and passions of the congregation.

someone naked?

Webster Groves answered that by collecting more than 150 pairs of socks for the homeless last October in a project called “Socktober.”

What would Jesus do if he saw someone hungry?

In November, members of Webster Groves created food kits for teens experiencing homelessness.

And what would Jesus do if he saw someone thirsty?

The congregation answered that Matthew 25 question in a big way.

Besides its Earth Day water-themed worship service, throughout 2018 and ’19 the congregation tied the water theme into education, worship and mission. Funds to build five wells for communities in Africa were contributed. Children learned about the need for clean water and raised money for water filters for families in Flint, Michigan. Speakers, including a staff member from the Missouri Botanical Garden’s EarthWays Center, a lawyer from the Great Rivers Environmental Law Center, and an artist who shared her work related to watersheds, were invited to share their passion and knowledge for clean water with the congregation. As the year of water came to

a close, 22 members rolled up their sleeves to do their part — traveling around their St. Louis neighborhood, marking storm drain lids with “Drains to Streams” to raise awareness of how important it is to keep trash and chemicals out of storm water systems.

Webster Groves will continue its environmental work as part of its Matthew 25 focus. But that is only a start. And with a clear focus on the words of Jesus to reach out to others, who knows what the next 12 months will bring?

“The people in our congregation all have different talents and interests ... and more and more members are involved in hands-on mission projects, from sorting and delivering donations at a local furniture bank to working on our annual mission weekend projects [a weekend in the fall when the church goes out and helps the community] to packing meals for Rise Against Hunger,” Kazlauskas said. “There is a job for everyone to help us meet our goal and fulfill our commitment in being a Matthew 25 church.”

Donna Frischknecht Jackson is the editor of Presbyterians Today.

LEARN MORE

For more information on Matthew 25, go to [pcusa.org/matthew 25](https://pcusa.org/matthew-25)

Revealing America's racist past and present

Church exhibit starts important conversation

BY MIKE GIVLER



COURTESY OF LAKE BURIEN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Lake Burien Presbyterian Church has become known as the church in the Burien, Wash., community that is not afraid to tackle — and talk about — racism. Last fall, the church held an exhibit, “In Our Shoes,” which traced slavery and racism in America. The exhibit attracted local organizations and schools.

Jackie Muchiri and her son Jordan, members of Lake Burien Presbyterian Church in Burien, Washington, were facing an uncertain future after receiving an eviction notice due to the sale of her apartment building. For the church's leadership, Muchiri's situation was one more reminder that the congregation needed to be at the forefront for a change in policies in its community.

The epiphany has resulted in Lake Burien Presbyterian becoming known as a place where conversations surrounding injustices like rental housing abuses can happen. It is also becoming known as the church in the greater Seattle area where tackling larger issues, such as unfair practices, injustices and racism, is encouraged.

The Rev. Tali Hairston, one of the worshiping pastors at Lake Burien,

credits senior pastor the Rev. Lina Thompson for the direction the church has taken.

“We’ve had real hard conversations. We’ve developed a Justice League group, which is a group of folks who are white, black, Asian, Pacific Islander and Hispanic who just want to understand how God sees the world outside of racism and white supremacy,” Hairston said. “It’s a big step for many in the

congregation, but we are continuing to learn how to live the gospel faithfully.”

Part of that education included 35 people from the congregation and Lake Burien community participating last year in anti-racism training led by “Pivot” — the church’s young adult ministry.

The training, held over the course of six months, built awareness about historic racism. It culminated in a trip last summer that included stops in Montgomery, Alabama; Memphis, Tennessee; and Ferguson, Missouri — and focused on the civil rights movement and the voices of African American women.

Hairston said that there were “messy, hard, ugly, beautiful, anointed and holy” moments for everyone on the trip.

Upon returning to Lake Burien, the group knew it needed to unpack what it had experienced. It did so by creating an exhibit called “In Our Shoes.”

Located in the entryway of the church, the exhibit ran from September to October and traced the history of African American life in America from the middle passage and enslavement till today. As word got out about the exhibit, people from the neighborhood as well as community organizations and schools came to the church. It is estimated that more than 800 people have experienced “In Our Shoes.”

“We did it as a part of our own journey to continue our own healing as a congregation, both individually and corporately, and to bring those from our community into the conversation,” Hairston said, adding that Seattle and its neighboring communities are a lot like other regions in the United States in that the condition of African American communities, graduation rates, housing and wealth disparity are everyday problems that many times go unnoticed.

LEARN MORE

Lake Burien Presbyterian’s young adult ministry, “Pivot,” invited Lisa Sharon Harper, the founder and president of Freedom Road, to discuss the “In Our Shoes” exhibit, the gospel and racial justice. Freedom Road is the organization that coordinated the Lake Burien Presbyterian pilgrimage. The podcast with Harper is available at lbpc.podbean.com/e/in-our-shoes-exhibit-talk-back-session-with-lisa-sharon-harper. The PC(USA)’s Matthew 25 vision also includes an anti-racism focus. Learn more at pcusa.org/matthew25

These injustices have not gone unnoticed by the Seattle Presbytery, Hairston says, and the presbytery is taking steps to address these situations.

A study is underway that focuses on the communities that surround churches and the health of those churches. The data is being compared to that of other Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregations as well as other denominations.

“Some of the things we’re finding is that both the shifts in demographics and shifts in culture are particularly acute for Presbyterian congregations,” Hairston, who doubles as the presbytery’s director of community organizing, advocacy and development, said of the preliminary findings. “And we need to find out why that is. A place like Seattle is technologically innovative but yet the church itself is struggling to innovate with changes in demographics and culture.”

Seattle Presbytery is also doing an assessment of its congregations so a strategy can be put in place to combat issues of equity and inclusion that are affecting the churches.

As for Lake Burien Presbyterian, Hairston said the congregation will continue being a place where tough conversations can take place.

“The door is open for us to continue to be the kind of congregation that just doesn’t meet on Sunday,” he said. “We’ve seen people who didn’t want to talk about issues of race, who didn’t know how to talk about issues of race, become involved deeply in conversations, in relationships, in small groups and prayer circles with people they know they would never be in conversations with anywhere else around these issues.”

Mike Givler is the communications coordinator for the Synod of the Trinity in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania.



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A milestone reached for Living Waters for the World

1,000 water systems installed, and counting

BY EUGENIA JOHNSON-SMITH

Turning on the faucet for a glass of clean water to drink is something most people take for granted, only becoming an issue when the pipes freeze or there is a “boil water” advisory. However, clean water is not a given for billions of people worldwide. In a 2019 joint study released by UNICEF and the World Health Organization, 2 billion people still don’t have access to safely managed drinking water systems, and 3 billion lack basic sanitary facilities to wash their hands.

Living Waters for the World, though, has been on a mission for more than two decades to provide clean water for vulnerable communities. The brainchild of the Rev. Wil Howie, who, as a seminarian, was disturbed by learning how millions of children die yearly due to polluted water, brought the idea for supplying clean water systems throughout the world to the Synod of Living Waters in Spring Hill, Tennessee. The synod adopted Living Waters for the World as a mission project. That was in 1993. It would take more than two years, though, for the first water system to be installed.

“There was research and development to find the right technology,” said Steve Young, executive director of Living Waters for the World.

In 1996, the nonprofit celebrated as its first clean water system was installed in a health clinic in Empalme, Sonora, Mexico.

In September 2019, there was yet another celebration as Living Waters for the World installed its 1,000th system.



Living Waters for the World health instructor Joanie Lukins walks students through the water treatment process.

“It’s a miracle,” said Howie. “When our first community water treatment system was installed in Mexico in 1996, we couldn’t have dreamed where the Lord would take us.”

As water organizations go, Living Waters for the World is unique.

The organization trains volunteers, mostly from Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) churches, to form international water partnerships. Teams engage directly with communities and train them to purify contaminated water, providing health and hope to families they serve.

In 2004, the number of water partnerships grew exponentially. In response, Living Waters for the World developed on-the-ground support infrastructure termed “networks.”

Today, water teams and their partners receive logistical, technical and training support across 11

networked regions.

“Lives have been transformed among all involved,” said Young, “and the provision of sustainable clean water forever changes the trajectory of the lives of those who receive it.”

Over the past 15 years, Living Waters for the World has trained more than 2,300 volunteers. Many of the volunteers were trained at the Clean Water U campus held at Camp Hopewell in Oxford, Mississippi.

Hope Anderson is one such volunteer who dipped her toe into Living Waters for the World back in April 2010. Three months later her church, Pennington Presbyterian in Pennington, New Jersey, partnered with a community in the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico. Anderson, now a Clean Water U instructor, recently shared on the Living Waters website that Sandy LaCasse, one



COURTESY OF LIVING WATERS FOR THE WORLD

Living Waters for the World founder the Rev. Wil Howie speaks at the milestone celebration, saying, "We couldn't have dreamed where the Lord would take us."

of the Pennington congregation's health educators, and the leaders of the Christian education committee decided to make the partnerships with Living Waters for the World "real to the Pennington children by focusing on water awareness throughout the 2018–2019 program year."

"Each quarter, Sandy and her team asked church school students provocative questions like 'Do you know how many gallons of water it takes to produce one pound of hamburger?' The jaw-dropping answer is 1,799! They also played games like 'Take a Risk,' where participants receive a water drop, which may be safe or may be contaminated — who knows? Will you get sick or won't you? Our youngsters eagerly shared what they learned by writing on large water-drop posters placed around our building, and they invited members to ask them water questions," Anderson said.

A challenge was also issued during Lent to give up plastic bottles until Easter.

"Each one of us signed a pledge, and some of us purchased special

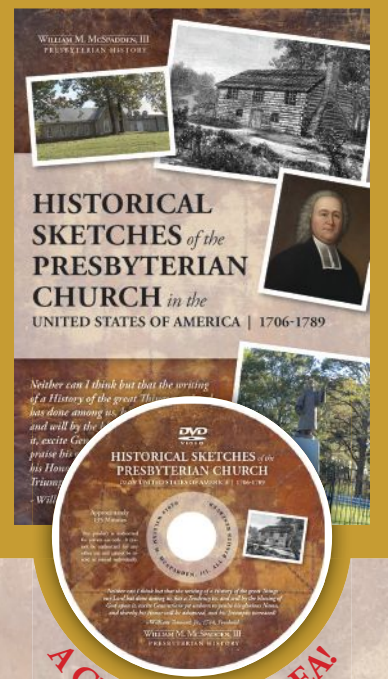
stainless-steel water bottles imprinted with the LWW logo and our church's own water symbol.

"Income earned from the bottle sales was designated for ongoing health education programs in Living Waters' Yucatán network," she said, adding, "I am honored to work with people in the Yucatán ... and to participate in a ministry that provides God's gifts of love and safe water to all."

Living Waters for the World's Clean Water U campuses will be expanding into the Northeast this June, offering classes and training at the Johnsonburg Camp and Retreat Center in Johnsonburg, New Jersey. The expansion, Young says, will meet Living Waters' next milestone of another 1,000 clean water installations by 2030.

"We anticipate building new partnerships in Africa and the Middle East and also expanding our reach to families without clean water here in the United States," he said.

Eugenia Johnson-Smith is an author, coach and motivational speaker who lives in Lexington, Kentucky.



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THE NECESSITY OF HOLY BREAKS

Sabbaticals are a must for healthy pastors and healthy congregations

BY ERIN DUNIGAN

The word “sabbatical” has its roots in the biblical concept of Sabbath — a rest. And yet, until recently, resting from one’s job for an extended period of time was a perk found mainly in the world of academia. It certainly wasn’t a common practice in corporate America or in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

But that appears to be changing. In 2017, nearly 17% of employers offered sabbaticals, according to the Harvard Business Review. And as the secular world wakes up to the benefits of rest and renewal for its workers, Presbyterians likewise are discovering that sabbaticals are not a costly luxury, but an affordable must for the health and vibrancy of ministry.

“We tell our churches and our pastors that the sabbatical is good for so many reasons, including that it teaches both the pastor and the congregation that the congregation can survive without the pastor,” said the Rev. Dr. Jan Edmiston. Edmiston is the general presbyter for the

Presbytery of Charlotte, where sabbaticals are required in the terms of call for any installed pastor.

A sabbatical, according to the Office of the General Assembly (OGA), is a “planned time of intensive enhancement for ministry and mission.” Different from a vacation, it is meant to be an opportunity for the pastor to strategically disengage from normal tasks so that mission and ministry might be viewed from a new perspective.

OGA recommends sabbaticals for all full-time pastors and educators serving churches, who have served in their current position for six continuous years. Commonly, sabbaticals are a three-month time away.

Learning together

The Rev. Shannon Meacham was in her 15th year of ordained ministry when she took a sabbatical for the first time last year. She was eight years into her current call at Ashland Presbyterian Church in Hunt Valley, Maryland.

After leaving her previous call, she took only two weeks off, which included moving across the country with two small children, before serving her current congregation. Meacham is the first pastor at Ashland Presbyterian Church to take a sabbatical in the congregation’s history.

“When I negotiated the contract, it was very helpful that the presbytery had a policy of sabbatical, and that the interim who came before me had already done the work to help educate the congregation about its importance,” Meacham said.

As many pastors choose to do, Meacham used her sabbatical to travel — visiting the Greek islands with her husband, going on a Disney cruise with their four children and attending the Newport Jazz Festival with her husband. All were amazing adventures, but Meacham found that “simply having the time” was the “most healing and most restful.”

Neither she nor the congregation could have imagined the



Out

of

office

benefits of the sabbatical prior to her actually entering into it. Ashland Presbyterian, as Meacham describes it, is a healthy congregation but also tends to be fairly pastor-centric, with her serving as the only full-time staff member. The sabbatical helped them see things differently.

"We love her, but this was really good for us. Within a week of her being gone, I realized that it was going to be OK," said Penny DeBoer, one of Ashland Presbyterian's deacons and a member of the sabbatical team that was created to oversee things in Meacham's absence.

"I am their leader," said Meacham, "but this is their church. And though I'm an integral part, they realized that I can be removed, and they can still be who they are."

Meacham and her congregation chose the theme of "Reclaiming Joy" for both her own sabbatical and the church's sabbatical without her.

"We chose that theme because we, like many churches, are struggling with the changing nature of what it means to be church, and it can be a really hard time. We wanted to intentionally choose joy in the midst of it," she said.

Now that Meacham is back, she tries to maintain healthy boundaries that both benefit her family and keep the congregation moving forward, away from a pastor-centric mindset.

"The time away let me see how out of balance my life was," she said. It also led to further conversations with the congregation about how "we need to rethink the entire 'pastor' thing."

The traditional job description and expectations that come with it, she said, "don't seem to be working for most folks."

Sabbatical funding

As the conversations continue, Meacham's congregation has found the sabbatical of their pastor so beneficial that they are now working on a plan to set aside funds yearly to cover the costs of future pastors' sabbaticals. A Lilly Endowment grant helped with the first sabbatical. However, before the grant was approved, the session vowed "to figure something out" to make their pastor's sabbatical happen with or without the grant, Meacham says.

The Rev. Dr. John McFayden, executive vice president and chief of church engagement for the Board of Pensions, says he cannot stress enough the importance of sabbaticals. He says they enable pastors to get away from the demands of their responsibilities for a long enough time for the pastors to reflect on their ministry.

He admits, though, that many congregations are reluctant to offer sabbaticals because they cannot see themselves doing without their pastor for an extended time. They are especially concerned with how to finance the pastor's leave and fill the pulpit, McFayden adds.

Recognizing that some congregations don't have the financial resources to pay for the redundant coverage while the pastor is away, the Board offers a grant of up to \$3,000 to help cover expenses. The grant, however, is not meant to replace other funding sources, but to supplement them.

"Assuming that pastors and congregations would begin to set aside some time for the pastor to be able to do this, and resources in order to do so, the grant is meant to come alongside those other sources," McFayden said.

Creative sabbatical scheduling

The Rev. Steve Melde has served Christ Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona, for over 20 years, and recently took his second sabbatical.

"The best part, in my perspective, was that it was the personnel committee and the session who noticed that it had been seven years since my last sabbatical and suggested that it was time I took one," said Melde.

Because the church's associate pastor was preparing to retire, it was more challenging for Melde to get away for three months. Melde and the session decided to break the sabbatical into two six-week increments.

"I have to say, it worked out wonderfully for me," said Melde. "Being gone for three months in a row has its own stress."

Dividing the sabbatical in two sections was helpful both to Melde, who could get work done in preparation for being gone, as well as for the congregation, which was able to more easily adjust to the pastor's absence.

For Melde, the sabbatical provided time to reconnect with his family.

"It allowed us to do family things over the weekends that we normally don't get to do on a pastor's schedule," he said.

The sabbatical also allowed Melde to dedicate time to a sermon series that he had long wanted to work on. The sermon series was titled "The Other 167."

"With 168 hours in a week, and one hour spent in worship, I wanted to take a look at what are we doing in the other 167 to grow in our relationship with God in other places — in nature, at home and in the world," Melde said. But he wanted to do more than preach about those places. He wanted to preach from them.

"What the sabbatical allowed me to do was to go into those places and to record myself preaching and then share that with the congregation when I returned," he said.

For example, the pastor went to



GETTY IMAGES

I am their leader, but this is their church. And though I'm an integral part, they realized that I can be removed, and they can still be who they are.

— Rev. Shannon Meachum

a beach, and even went to a location where a prickly pear cactus was growing out of a roof.

"I preached there, with that cactus up above me, about finding God even in the midst of our daily human life," he said.

For Melde, breaking the sabbatical into two segments worked beautifully for him and his congregation. One thought he has for his next sabbatical is to break it into three sections — one month a year for three years.

"That would give the time to do some of that long-term planning as well as some relaxing," he said.

After 17 years, 'a break'

In May the Rev. Dr. David Parker of Presbyterian Church of the Way in Shoreview, Minnesota, will have served his current congregation for seven years. Part of the terms of call includes taking a sabbatical after six years of service. Parker has been a pastor for 17 years, in three calls. This year he'll take his first sabbatical.

Though some pastors have the chance to take time off between calls, that hasn't been the case for Parker.

"After 17 straight years of ministry, I really am looking forward to a break," he said. His sabbatical will begin in July and run through September.

Parker applied for a Lilly grant and had big ideas for his sabbatical, including a visit to Scotland to participate in the Highland Games in a small town where his ancestors are buried. Although he did not receive

the grant, his personnel committee decided to move forward with his sabbatical, rather than waiting to reapply for a Lilly grant the following year. This means the congregation will not have outside financial assistance to pay for pastoral coverage during Parker's absence.

What Church of the Way does have is a commissioned ruling elder who grew up in the congregation and went to seminary, but decided not to get ordained. He oversees pastoral care, works with the deacons and has agreed to cover some of the responsibilities for the sabbatical period, including moderating session meetings and preaching occasionally. The church also has several members stepping up to fill the pulpit.

In preparation for being gone, Parker conducted a preaching class in which he taught seven members of the congregation how to look at Scripture, structure a sermon and generate ideas for preaching.

"We now have seven individuals who have a sermon ready to go while I'm on my sabbatical," he said.

Of the seven, three are immigrants — one from Cameroon and two from Ghana. Though the congregation has historically been predominantly white, about 20 years ago a couple, immigrants from

Ghana, joined the church. Slowly, other Ghanaian families began joining. When a local congregation closed, many of that church's Cameroonian members joined Church of the Way.

"So almost overnight we changed from 98% Caucasian to a congregation that now comprises about 15% African immigrants," said Parker.

This has led him to his new focus for the sabbatical time, and the question Parker will be asking is: "How can we be more than a white church with immigrants, and instead become a truly multicultural church?"

Parker sees his upcoming sabbatical as a growing time for the congregation as well. During his time away, Parker hopes the congregation will wrestle with such questions as: Who are we? Where are we going? Where does God want us to go?

These are exactly the types of questions that Edmiston hopes that both pastors and congregations will ask during a sabbatical time. Her hope is that pastors will be able to use the time to reevaluate their own pastoral identity — what God might be calling that pastor, in that context, to do next — and that congregations will do so as well.

"It is a time to step away, to look at where we have been and where we might be going," she said. "It is something that everyone needs, but especially when you are in a vocation where you depend on God speaking to you. It is a time to listen to what might be being said."

Erin Dunigan is a PC(USA)-ordained evangelist living in Baja California, Mexico, where she founded Not Church, a gathering of atheists and agnostics who wish to deepen their spiritual journey. She is also a freelance writer and photographer.

LEARN MORE

Learn more about grants and funding for sabbaticals at
presbyterianfoundation.org/sabbatical-support-for-pastors



An unsung program quietly changes lives

Self-Development of People celebrates 50 years of helping others be the best they can be

BY RICH COPLEY

Last November, when they gathered in a park near downtown Detroit, folks from the Dexter-Linwood Cordon neighborhood could see spring. They could see a butterfly garden, kids getting lost in a black-eyed Susan maze, people relaxing in a gazebo and gathering fresh vegetables in a garden. They could see a new season filled with hope for a Detroit block that had seen better days.

Once lined with more than 20 houses, the block now has only two habitable houses. Some were lost to decline and neglect, others to violence such as fire bombing. But with support from the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People (SDOP), this community is working to create revival.

"If it doesn't happen, what's going to happen to the neighborhood?" asked neighborhood resident Ron Matten. Matten belongs to the community group Demographic Inspirations, which is working to turn the block into a multifaceted community gathering area. The project is supported in part by a grant from SDOP, a ministry that supports community-generated and -led projects.

"There's a lot of people who have been here for years," Matten said. "We're trying to create that aesthetic view, so they can say the

neighborhood's getting better."

Stephanie Johnson-Cobb, another member of the project team, acknowledged that there are a lot of "vacant spaces in our communities."

"How do you develop it into something beautiful? How do you develop it into something that is environmentally sustainable, that will give back and impact not just the space but the people?" she asked. "This [park] is visionary. This is pointing toward the future of the community."

Improving lives for 50 years

As SDOP looks to the future, it is also celebrating its past. This year, SDOP is celebrating its 50th anniversary. The ministry was conceived in the late 1960s and early '70s as the church's unique response to poverty and racism in the United States and around the world.

From the beginning of the ministry, the term "self-development" was key. In 1970 the 182nd General Assembly of the then-United Presbyterian Church called for the creation of a program to assist "deprived, impoverished or handicapped people, anywhere in the world, in their development," according to the book "From Dream to Reality: A Contextual History of Twenty Years of the Presbyterian Self-Development Program" by James A. Gittings.

Gittings' book, which was published in 1993, details the formation of SDOP, along with trials and triumphs during its first 20 years. Since its inception, SDOP has been supported by the One Great Hour of Sharing special offering, and each

year a Sunday during Lent is designated Self-Development of People Sunday. This year, that is March 15, and the ministry is creating a special edition of its annual SDOP Sunday resource, which details many of the programs SDOP supports. The resource also includes worship materials related to combating poverty and racism.

"One of the powerful things about Self-Development of People that is really noteworthy is that it has been a ministry that teaches the church about the intersectional issues of poverty," said the Rev. Dr. Alonzo Johnson, coordinator of SDOP. "And we do that because our teachers are the community. Our teachers are the projects that we fund and the connections we make in the community. And that's something that's incredibly, powerfully relevant about this ... that we hear from the communities."

Helping communities organize

As it enters its sixth decade, the program remains close to its original concept: SDOP invites people in communities impacted by poverty to apply for grants, telling SDOP how they will use the funds to improve the community and what the expected benefit of the project will be to the community. SDOP does not fund organizations. Rather, it wants people in communities to organize, though an organization often will act as the fiduciary agent of the grants, which can be as high as \$25,000.

That approach was a new concept for participants in an SDOP grant-writing workshop in Atlanta in

RICH COPLEY

Zenaba Bello (left), a refugee from Central African Republic, shows SDOP staff member Clara Nunez some of the baked goods at Just Bakery in Atlanta.

September, many of whom seemed to expect a more typical model of organizations receiving funds and then setting up programs for a community.

"I have not heard of anyone funding like this before," said Tonisha Corporal, program manager for the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta. "A lot of the time people tell you they think they know what's best for you." That's not the case with SDOP, she said. "They want the people being served to control the project."

The workshop was conducted by members of the SDOP national committee, which meets throughout the year to discuss potential grantees and to explore issues in the areas where the committee meets.

"God's children should not be unable to be what God intended because of poverty," Pat Osoinach, a member of SDOP's national committee, said. "One of the interesting things about [SDOP] is that people develop themselves, and we aid that."

The national committee is drawn from across the country, with racial, ethnic, gender and geographic diversity in mind. The latter is important as site visits by committee members or local Presbyterian representatives are part of the SDOP application process.

Funding projects

Congregations can work with SDOP through referring people to the group and working with projects it funds. In Lansing, Michigan, for example, First Presbyterian Church provides office space to Advocacy, Reentry, Resources, and Outreach, a group that helps people who have served prison sentences reintegrate into their communities. The program has had three projects funded by SDOP, including one that enabled clients to learn skills needed in construction jobs.

"SDOP has the ability to support groups of people who are trying to better their lives in one way or another, and as an individual

congregation, we don't have funding to be able to provide for those kinds of things," said Sallie Campbell, director of congregational life and community outreach for First Presbyterian. "So SDOP is a place that we can network with and connect people to, for them to be able to pursue their own objectives and their own goals, without the church necessarily being involved in those goals, but making that introduction and connecting local people to SDOP so that they can advocate for their own peace and justice issues."

Lansing is just 1½ hours northwest of Detroit, and that region is a microcosm of the work that SDOP has done. It is also home to an active local SDOP committee.

Local SDOP committees are based in synods and presbyteries and make grants at the local level.

"It's important for groups to be validated and given resources that will help them to improve their lives," said Kayla Perrin, a member of the Detroit SDOP committee. "It's a way to make sure the ones that are in the most need are the ones getting the help."

Detroit is home to a group that got a big boost from an early SDOP grant.

We the People of Detroit initially launched as a short-term effort to help provide water to people during a city water crisis. It has since grown into a well-established water advocacy organization, and directors say an early SDOP grant was key to establishing the organization.

"If not for SDOP, we don't know where we would have been in terms

of the work that was so critical to the citizens here," said Monica Lewis-Patrick, president and CEO of We the People.

SDOP's work has crossed borders too, with significant projects in Africa, Central and South America and other regions.

As 2020 unfolds, SDOP plans to commemorate its 50-year legacy with an anniversary celebration Sept. 18–20 in Rochester, New York, where the ministry was launched.

To Phyllis Edwards, a national committee member from Detroit, SDOP will continue to play a vital role in the next half century as society is transformed by factors such as automation and climate change.

"Organizations like SDOP — as an outlet for people to decide how they can build their wealth in an ever-changing world — are a necessity," she said.

Johnson sees the ministry in line with the Presbyterian Mission Agency's Matthew 25 invitation goals of addressing structural racism and systemic poverty.

"The 50th year is about celebration, but it's also about education," Johnson said. "And it's about connecting with our SDOP folks who've been involved in this ministry for a long time, but also creating awareness for the church for a new generation to take hold and understand the great and continuous work that has yet to be done."

Rich Copley is a communications strategist in the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

LEARN MORE

Visit pcusa.org/sdop to find out more about the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People, including:

- How to get involved in SDOP
- Grant criteria and how to apply
- SDOP Sunday (March 15) and the Sunday resource
- Videos about SDOP work
- 50th anniversary celebration plans



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West Plano Presbyterian Church's Easter Vigil begins outside at sundown with the lighting of a bonfire and the Paschal candle.

COURTESY OF WEST PLANO PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



CELEBRATING TRIDUUM AND THE EASTER VIGIL

**Ancient liturgy deepens faith
and builds community**

BY DONNA FRISCHKNECHT JACKSON

The sun was setting as cars pulled into the church parking lot. I walked toward the glowing embers that were being coaxed into flames in a rusty fire pit outside the church doors. It was a welcome sight on a chilly spring night.

As much as I wanted to stay close to the fire's warmth, as more people gathered, I edged to the back of the circle that was forming. I felt awkward and shy. I was not a member of the church. I was a stranger to them as they were to me. But the biggest "stranger" of all was the worship service itself at this Episcopal church. I was a Presbyterian at a Paschal Vigil, and I had no idea what to expect.

The Paschal Vigil, also known as the Easter Vigil or the Great Vigil of Easter, is an ancient liturgy celebrated on the night before Easter Sunday. Initially, it started in the middle of the night, ending with the break of dawn on Sunday. It was also a service in the early church when new Christians were welcomed into the faith through the waters of baptism followed by the celebration of the Eucharist.

And for centuries to come, the vigil has been a time for Christians to celebrate the Resurrection with the rising of a new day, when



COURTESY OF WEST PLANO PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Easter Vigil continues inside the church with Scripture readings. Those attending the West Plano Presbyterian Easter Vigil gather in the church's library to listen, pray and reflect on God's creation and God's love for the world.

the darkness of night fills with the light of hope.

I stood on the outer edge of the circle, watching the priest light the Christ candle from the flames that were dancing in the breeze. From that light, the candles we held were lit. The priest sang words of praise, and after their Lenten break, the "Alleluias" returned and were sung. They never sounded so beautiful as they did that night in the dark, cold air. I found myself being drawn into the mystery of the Saturday before Easter that I had never known, until I became an adult, was called "Holy Saturday."

When I was growing up, the Saturday before Easter was anything but holy. It was a day to dye Easter eggs and make last-minute trips to the store for the holiday

meal we would have after Easter Sunday worship.

Yet even as a child I wondered what happened in between Good Friday's crucifixion and Easter morning's shouts of "He is risen!" What was this space Saturday was offering to the world? A space that was inviting us to ponder death and grieve losses — to be comfortable sitting with the uncomfortable — all with the knowledge that tomorrow joy would return, as promised.

The Easter Vigil was answering my childhood questions. Saturday was a holy space where I needed to be reminded of the depths of God's love that was shown on the cross. I needed to be on the journey from dark to light with others. I needed to remember that the God of creation is always redeeming us, washing us

anew in the waters of baptism, showering us with light, and inviting us to sit at the table and break bread together.

The vigil moved from outdoors to inside the church. As the front doors opened, I noticed that it was completely dark inside. I was also hit with the overwhelming smell of Easter lilies and hyacinths. I inhaled deeply. I thought about the dank tomb where Jesus' body lay and wondered if there was also the scent of hope rather than the stench of death. I wondered, too, about the times in my dank tomb, no matter what situation brought me there, when I had forgotten to smell the roses; that is, awaken my senses to the new life around me.

As the service progressed to another room and the lights slowly

A CLOSE-UP LOOK AT THE EASTER VIGIL

The Easter Vigil is a worship service that features four parts. Here's a look at how West Plano Presbyterian Church celebrates the vigil.

THE LITURGY OF LIGHT

The Easter Vigil begins with the Liturgy of Light. Inside, the church is shrouded in darkness as a fire is lit outside.

At West Plano Presbyterian, "we begin with a mini-bonfire at the far edge of our parking lot," says the Rev. Dr. David B. Batchelder. In his previous congregation, the Easter Vigil fire was lit in the church cemetery.

THE EASTER PROCLAMATION

From the fire, Batchelder lights the Paschal candle and then the individual candles held by the worshipers. The "Exultet" is sung — "exultet" is the opening word in Latin of "The Easter Proclamation," which is an ancient hymn that is said to have been used in the Roman Catholic Easter liturgy from between the fifth and seventh centuries.

"We then begin walking the outside property, stopping at various places for Scripture readings that tell of the stories of God's saving deeds," Batchelder said.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Eventually, the vigil moves inside the church for more Scripture storytelling, often acted out by children and youth, before

arriving in the church library.

"It's a large room well-suited for the gospel reading, a brief sermon and the 'Litany of the Saints,' that remembrance of who we belong to and who belongs to us as the great company of all united in Christ," Batchelder said.

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

From there, the West Plano congregation follows the Paschal candle and arrives at the font to baptize those who are ready to enter the faith, and to celebrate the reaffirmation of baptism for all attending.

THE CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

"By now in the service we are famished, and it is time for the holy meal, the Eucharist," Batchelder said.

"This is the great celebration." West Plano Presbyterian's bread is often a 7-pound loaf specially prepared by a local bakery, Batchelder says.

"For the fruit of the vine, we have sometimes popped champagne. Other times it has been a fine cabernet sauvignon," he added.

TRIDUUM REFLECTIONS

West Plano Presbyterian worshippers share their experience

The Saturday Easter Vigil is deeply meaningful for me as darkness, fire, light, water, Scripture and music take me on a journey that retells the story of my faith.
—Nancy Batchelder, 65

I've come to consider attending the Paschal Vigil an essential part of my Easter celebration. It is absolutely wonderful — long, yes, but meaningful and even fun.
—Linda Robinson, 50-ish

Acting out the stories in the Bible makes us part of the story.
—Erik Barnes, 11

During my baptism at the vigil I felt safe, surrounded by friends and family. —Sophia Barnes, 10

The Easter Vigil provides a multigenerational, multisensory experience of excitement building upon our faith journey from Genesis' creation story culminating in the Eucharist celebration of Christ's resurrection. Awesome bread!
—Joyce Jones, mid-60s

For me, the three days of Triduum really are one complete act in three stages. In the Maundy Thursday liturgy, I see the model of leadership played out in the bodily service of washing feet. On Good Friday, we are astounded by the love that suffered the depths of pain, but also gives the last ounce of blood for forgiveness. All culminates in the family reunion with stories, songs and an extravagant Resurrection feast of celebration! Even recovering from surgery, I could not miss these three days.
—Priscilla Kimery, mid-70s

Participating in the rituals, remembering our baptism and hearing the voices of the youngest children are God moments for me. The lavish symbols, including the enormous loaf we consume at the vigil, take my breath away.
—Becki Williams, early 70s

Lent feels like an eternity leading up to the rush of Easter. Then Easter flies by if we don't pay attention and focus on the moments. Triduum is that focus moment. The Easter Vigil is a reflection on the Christian journey. Walked through, literally, with the congregation, it is another reminder that we are all in this together.
—Sami Mikhail, late 50s

came on, becoming brighter with each song, prayer and reading, I discovered I was no longer a stranger in the crowd. And this strange service known as the Easter Vigil became my new best friend, one that has deepened for me what it means to live out the promise of the Resurrection.

As a minister in the PC(USA), I have always wanted to hold an Easter Vigil. I admit, though, it has been a hard sale. It has been my experience that it is difficult to get people to return after Palm Sunday for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. I have heard the comments from many a worship committee that attending church two nights in a row is asking a lot of people, and oftentimes I would have to condense the liturgy of the Last Supper and Jesus' last words from the cross into one service.

Would I, could I, dare ask for a third night of worship for an Easter Vigil?

Three days of worship

The Rev. Dr. David B. Batchelder of West Plano Presbyterian Church in Plano, Texas, has dared and continues to do so during Holy Week, asking his congregation to make the commitment to not only experience an Easter Vigil, but to participate in an ancient liturgy known as the "Triduum."

Triduum, Latin for the Great Three Days, celebrates the mystery of Christ's dying and rising spread out over three days beginning at sundown on Maundy Thursday. The liturgy continues through Good Friday and Holy Saturday, concluding at sundown at the end of Easter day.

"It may seem that I've gotten my math wrong in adding up the days. Not so," Batchelder said, explaining that Triduum is calculated



COURTESY OF WEST PLANO PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Easter Vigil culminates in the celebration of the Eucharist, where the star of the Lord's Supper is the 7-pound loaf of challah bread made especially for the service, says the Rev. Dr. David Batchelder, pictured here.

according to the Genesis creation story: "and there was evening and there was morning."

"Liturgical time follows the Jewish calculation of the 24-hour day moving from sunset to sunset rather than midnight to midnight," he said.

For Batchelder, Triduum has been an important spiritual practice for him, but he realizes it is not something Presbyterians are accustomed to and it takes easing into and perhaps adapting the liturgy to work with where a congregation is.

"To bring the liturgy of the Great Three Days to Presbyterian congregations not familiar with this tradition involves some adaptation," Batchelder said, noting that most congregations will have a Maundy Thursday service of some kind, focusing on Jesus' last meal with his disciples. Some congregations, too, will have their own version of a Good Friday service, perhaps an ecumenical gathering to hear the last words of Jesus spoken from the cross or to

experience a Tenebrae service, in which candles are extinguished as the service progresses.

"But rare is the Presbyterian congregation that has an after-sundown Saturday Easter (Paschal) Vigil," Batchelder said.

Over the years, Batchelder has incorporated more sensory and tactile elements to the Holy Week services, to bring the ancient liturgy to life and deepen the meaning of the Easter message.

Elements such as foot washing and stripping the chancel, as they are offered in the 2018 Book of Common Worship, have been introduced to his congregation with much success.

For many years, Deb Vermie, a member of West Plano Presbyterian Church, "resisted" participating in the foot washing. Last year, though, she was surprised by the reading she heard from John 13, instructing "me to do as Jesus did."

"I felt moved to action by the Spirit as I removed my shoes and



Baptisms are part of the Easter Vigil, recalling how in the early church, the vigil was a time to welcome new Christians into the faith.

took a towel in my hands,” Vermie said.

Vermie’s response is exactly what Batchelder hopes will happen to worshipers participating in Triduum.

“The three days of Triduum intend to engage worshipers as active participants in the meaning of Christ’s self-giving. In Triduum, we do not watch something performed by others, like a Last Supper tableau or readings at a Tenebrae. We participate in the mystery,” he said.

That participation has also opened the doors to West Plano Presbyterian’s Holy Week worship being more intergenerational.

“The Easter Vigil service with the location changes inside and outside the church and moving from room to room keep your senses alert,” said Eric Sughrue, a parent of three young girls. “The mixture of participation and silence allows space for everyone, especially the children, to learn and have reverence for this special service and time of year.”

Sughrue’s 8-year-old daughter,



The Easter Vigil table is not a somber remembrance of Jesus’ last meal as it is on Maundy Thursday. On this night, it is a joyous feast, complete with champagne corks popping.

Lucy, especially likes participating in Maundy Thursday worship.

“Washing other people’s feet makes me happy,” she said.

Still, Triduum is not a “convenient” liturgy, Batchelder says.

“It requires commitment from a congregation — a commitment to attend worship on consecutive nights, with each night’s service lasting more than an hour,” he said.

And that can be difficult.

“Sometimes the Triduum coincides with spring break, when the kids are out of school. Other times it falls on the sacred weekend of NCAA basketball’s Final Four. And always, there are many things for families to do getting ready for hosting family and friends on a weekend that also functions as a cultural holiday,”

Batchelder said.

In spite of obstacles, Batchelder has found in his more than 30 years of celebrating Triduum liturgy that “I, and the people I serve, need what Triduum offers.”

“We need to be brought from death to life again and again. We need to be renewed in the meaning of our baptisms, so that we can wisely and courageously fulfill our calling in a broken and fearful world,” he said, adding, “Triduum is central to our ongoing formation in faith. And we should observe it and be grateful that each year the Lenten wilderness journey leading to the Easter fire comes just in time in our lives.”

Donna Frischknecht Jackson is the editor of *Presbyterians Today*.

LEARN MORE

For help in planning Triduum worship or holding an Easter Vigil, go to pcusa.org/triduum



A ministry of belonging

Community ID cards help immigrants feel welcomed

BY RICHARD LORD

When refugees and other immigrants arrive in a new community, they often lack drivers' licenses or other forms of identification that can help them get established in that community. And that lack of identification can compound the sense of isolation that the new arrivals already feel.

Ana Wells remembers that feeling. When Wells arrived in the United States from her native Argentina more than two decades ago, she carried all of her possessions in two suitcases. She had no friends or family living near Raleigh, North Carolina, which she would call home. She felt alone and isolated. She felt no connection to the people in her adopted country. And she didn't like how that felt.

It was then that she vowed to make sure those who came after her would not feel what she felt.

For 22 years, Wells has worked with immigrants and migrants to help them become a part of their new home. "I've tried to help new immigrants surpass these negative feelings," said Wells.

One way she has done that is through a program offered through her church, Sedgefield Presbyterian in Greensboro, North Carolina, that provides community identification cards to immigrants and others who lack conventional forms of identification.

Similar community ID programs have sprung up nationwide, with municipalities issuing the identification cards. The cards can help new arrivals with matters such as enrolling their children in school or picking them up from school, getting prescription drugs and receiving services from health clinics.

The cards also can help new immigrants feel safer in their dealings with police.

The Sedgefield Presbyterian program, called Faith ID Drive, operates in conjunction with FaithAction International House, a nonprofit that provides community identification cards for immigrants and others in Greensboro who lack conventional ID cards.

According to FaithAction, community identification cards do not allow the holder to vote or to drive, but they are practical — not only showing that immigrants belong in the United States, but also giving immigrants a sense of belonging.

"When I speak to immigrants to help them with the adjustment process, I tell them that they must remember that native-born Americans don't know what our lives were about. They can't put themselves in our shoes, because they don't know what the shoe is made of," Wells said. But the ID cards, she adds, help.

Listening to the community

Sedgefield Presbyterian became involved in community IDs "because we wanted to make serious bonds in our neighborhood," said the Rev. Kim Priddy.

Priddy says that most of the church's congregants come from within five miles of the church. Within the congregation, the majority are over 40 years of age and many of them are retired. There are only three people of color and very few young families in the congregation, which is not representative of the greater community.

In June 2017, a community dinner was held at the church. Forty people came. Half were from the church and half were from the neighborhood. After the dinner, Priddy says, a panel discussion was held where the question was asked of Sedgefield Presbyterian's neighbors, "What can we do to improve our relationship?"

The answer was revealing.

"We learned that many of the people were very lonely, and that many were afraid of the police," Priddy said. "Once we realized this, we asked, 'How can we build bridges?' We found the answer in the community ID cards."

Later that year, Sedgefield Presbyterian began hosting its community ID program, which is sponsored by FaithAction International. The church provides the building as



well as the publicity, provides hospitality and invites organizations such as health clinics and law enforcement agencies. FaithAction International is also there, processing and issuing the cards.

Over the years, the FaithAction ID Network has seen a demand for community IDs. FaithAction currently operates in North and South Carolina, Florida, Virginia, Iowa, Ohio and Oregon.

According to the Rev. Neil Dunnivant, executive pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Greensboro, the impetus for FaithAction's community ID program occurred when North Carolina stopped issuing drivers' licenses to undocumented people. If the unlicensed drivers were confronted by police, the police would be less harsh with people who could establish their identity, he explains.

"The community ID card gives people dignity," said Dunnivant. "It is a way of accepting them and it helps them to feel safe. As a Presbyterian, it impressed me as a demonstration that everyone is welcome. Participating in this program is a way for me to put my faith into action."

To receive an ID card, one must attend a mandatory orientation that explains the benefits and limitations of the card and provide a passport, embassy ID or national ID card. Even if someone has a government-issued ID, they often need a second ID to obtain some benefits. This can be the community ID.

Helping with law enforcement

The Rev. David Fraccaro, an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ and executive director of FaithAction International, says there are many reasons why a person may not have a photo ID. They may have lost it. They may not know how to obtain one or they may hesitate to get one because of distrust of those in power, such as police.

"Initially, the newly arrived



COURTESY OF FAITHACTION INTERNATIONAL

Thanks to FaithAction's community ID program, men and women in North Carolina are able to obtain valid ID cards.

told us that they felt that they are not trusted by law enforcement," Fraccaro said. "This led to them revealing that they do not trust law enforcement. Our goal is to build trust between the newly arrived and law enforcement. The ID card allows them to feel that they are respected as a person. The ID card is a very important tool in this struggle."

The need for photo IDs is not just a need among immigrants. According to a 2012 study conducted by Stanford University and the University of Michigan, 12% of adults living in a household with less than \$25,000 annual income lack photo IDs, compared with just 2% in households with over \$150,000 annual income.

A much-needed ministry

John and Charlotte Stone have dedicated their retirement years to volunteering with agencies dealing with social justice issues.

They often spend 40 hours per week volunteering.

"These volunteer experiences have opened my eyes regarding how much more needs to be done," Charlotte Stone said. "It is not just a matter of us putting money in [an offering]

basket, but also going one step further to be the hands and feet of Jesus."

Among the beneficiaries of their time is the community ID program at Sedgefield Presbyterian, where they are members.

"I'm not satisfied by going to church and hearing sermons," John Stone said. "Assisting in the community IDs helps me to grow as a person and as a Presbyterian."

Charlotte Stone recalls getting a recent phone call at home from a 9-year-old immigrant girl who was afraid that her mother would be deported. Stone promised the girl she would get help and, because of the community ID program, she was familiar with the work of FaithAction International and was able to reach out to the organization for help.

"It felt so good to help her — that I could do something to lessen her pain," she said. The incident made Stone realize something about her faith.

"It's not just what you believe," she said, "but it's about how you act as a result of your Presbyterian beliefs."

Richard Lord lives in Ivy, Virginia.



Where do 25% of young children live in poverty?

A. India B. Syria C. Kenya D. United States

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Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)



MATTHEW 25

One Great Hour of Sharing



COURTESY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN MISSION AGENCY

In Jersey City, New Jersey, One Great Hour of Sharing is helping people in vulnerable housing situations.



COURTESY OF KAALMO RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT

Five million people in Somalia are food insecure, and more than 2 million people have been internally displaced. Here, Somalians gather for water.

Gifts provide essentials for living

BY PAT COLE

Before famine struck Somalia, Hawo Abdi and her husband were successful herders near their country's border with Kenya. However, two years of intensive drought parched the land to the point that they could no longer raise the camels, cattle, sheep and goats that supported their pastoralist lifestyle. The country's civil war further complicated the situation. As her family faced economic ruin, Abdi's husband died. She was two months pregnant with the couple's fifth child.

Desperate to feed her children, Abdi, 29, left her home in El Wak, Somalia, for the Tulia-Anin Camp for displaced people. She felt she had no choice but to make the risky, two-day journey. People who make this trek often face the possibility of attack

from armed groups, and food and water are scarce.

"We had nothing to take with us. We had to beg for water," she said.

Now safely at the camp, located outside Belet Hawa, Somalia, the family has found refuge, water and food. Abdi and her children also receive a monthly allocation of rice, beans, cooking oil and sugar that One Great Hour of Sharing gifts — often received on Palm Sunday or Easter in congregations throughout the U.S. — helped provide.

"The food aid has improved the living conditions of my family," she said.

Making a long-term commitment

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) partners with Kaalmo Relief and Development to provide food aid to people in the camp. Gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing enable the Presbyterian Hunger Program to respond to this need. Gifts to the

offering also support the work of the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA).

"We are very grateful for the contribution," said Mohamed Ahmed Iriri, Kaalmo's director. "It helps us a lot in fighting the hunger and poverty affecting our people in Somalia."

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, more than 5 million people in Somalia are food insecure, and more than 2 million people have been internally displaced.

Somalia and three other countries, Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen, have experienced famine in recent years, according to the United Nations. The causes of famine include political strife, extreme weather conditions — especially flooding — and a dearth of agricultural infrastructure from years of little to no investment. A famine declaration means that at

changes lives worldwide



COURTESY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN MISSION AGENCY

When Hurricane Maria struck, it wrecked the electrical grid across Puerto Rico. Here, residents work to rebuild after the hurricane.



COURTESY OF ACT ALLIANCE

A Somali woman is grateful for the food received in the refugee camp.

least 20% of people in an area face extreme food shortages and that large numbers of people are dying from hunger.

One Great Hour of Sharing gifts address this crisis through PC(USA) partners in each of the famine-stricken countries. These partners help with emergency food assistance and work on the underlying causes of hunger. Investments in infrastructure, advocacy efforts and training in growing food are aiding communities in their journey toward food security.

That commitment to long-term recovery continues to direct One Great Hour of Sharing gifts to earthquake relief and hurricane relief in Puerto Rico.

When a series of earthquakes and tremors struck the island earlier this year, two PDA officials were in Puerto Rico to review ongoing projects in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, which struck Puerto Rico in 2017. The officials, Jim Kirk, associate

for national disaster response, and the Rev. Edwin González-Castillo, associate for Latin America and the Caribbean, suddenly faced a much broader assessment than they had anticipated. They suddenly found themselves doing initial assessments of earthquake damage. They also encountered widespread anxiety.

"There's a lot of anxiety. We heard that all over the place," Kirk said.

Mimita Nieves had already experienced 18 months of anxiety. Eighteen months after Hurricane Maria swept across Puerto Rico, Nieves was still living without electricity. She ate canned food and drank powdered milk, and when she was fortunate enough to get fresh vegetables, she had to eat them the same day. She cooked on a small propane stove and lit her home with solar lights. A friend lent her a battery-powered radio that served as a source of information and entertainment. Her situation did not change until the day

Presbyterian volunteers, supported by the One Great Hour of Sharing offering, knocked on her door.

When Hurricane Maria struck, it wrecked the electrical grid across Puerto Rico. However, the restoration of electricity to Nieves' neighborhood did not immediately help her. The storm had ruined her home's electrical wiring. Presbyterian volunteers replaced her electrical system with one much safer and more durable. As a senior citizen with limited income, Nieves might never have had the financial means to hire a contractor to do the work. When her lights came on, Nieves was overcome with gratitude.

"I cried," she said. "I got down on my knees and I cried."

Nieves lives on Vieques, a small island eight miles east of the Puerto Rico mainland. Since no highway connects the mainland and Vieques, most people and cargo travel to the island via ferry boat or airplane.

The slow pace of recovery efforts in Puerto Rico has been a frequent subject of media coverage, and Vieques, because of its lack of accessibility, lags the main island in the restoration of housing, infrastructure and basic services.

In addition to restoring Nieves' electricity, Presbyterian volunteers also hauled away debris that had been stacked in her backyard for months. In Vieques, and in other places across Puerto Rico, hurricane survivors have been able to pick up the pieces of their lives thanks in part to One Great Hour of Sharing gifts.

Gifts help fight unjust systems

In Jersey City, New Jersey, One Great Hour of Sharing is helping the grassroots group Jersey City Together stand with people in vulnerable housing situations.

Jersey City Together has come to the aid of tenants like Monica Jones, who for more than a decade enjoyed her apartment and a good relationship with her landlord. However, things began to change a few years ago when a new landlord acquired her building. She began getting court summonses that claimed that she had been late with a rent payment, had failed to pay an increased rent charge and had failed to make a rent payment. Other longtime residents of her 18-unit building had similar experiences.

Jones made repeated trips to court. Each time the allegations were dismissed, but Jones grew weary of the hassle. She was tired of having to take time off from her job with New York City's government. She felt alone in her battle and was concerned that one day the landlord might find a way to prevail.

Diane Maxon, who chairs Jersey City Together's Tenants' Rights and Protection Group, said Jones' landlord owns about 4,000 housing units in Jersey City and has a history of forcing people from their building,

renovating the structure and raising the rent significantly.

Maxon said these actions ran afoul of rent control and other housing regulations in Jersey City. However, she said local enforcement officials had largely ignored the violations.

"People were being illegally evicted, and rent was being raised up to three times what the original tenant had paid," Maxon said.

In 2018, Jersey City Together pressed the city's government to enforce housing regulations more aggressively. The mayor responded by restructuring the board that governs relations between landlords and tenants and by instituting other reforms related to tenant protection. Maxon is hopeful these moves will make a difference.

Jersey City has seen a dramatic increase in high-income families moving in from New York. They are attracted to Jersey City's newly renovated apartments, which are pricey but still much less expensive than comparable units across the Hudson River in Manhattan. Maxon said this has created a housing shortage for middle- and low-income people, which makes the threat of eviction even more worrisome.

When Jones made her most recent court appearance, after receiving notice that she was to vacate her

apartment in three days, Jersey City Together organized a group to accompany her and helped her find reasonably priced legal representation. Previously, she had had to face the legal system alone, but this time she came armed with more knowledge of the law and the presence of Jersey City Together. She was vindicated once again.

"The judge didn't even spend five minutes on it," Maxon observed. "It was so ridiculous."

One Great Hour of Sharing gifts are helping Jersey City Together pay the partial salary of a second organizer, which Maxon said is greatly needed.

"There are so many things to do and so little time and money," she said. "This grant has really facilitated us moving forward and making a difference, and we are eternally grateful for that."

Pat Cole was a communications specialist with the Presbyterian Mission Agency. He retired in 2019.



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Gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing not only help Puerto Ricans to rebuild after Hurricane Maria, but also help its residents to repair damage from earthquakes that struck the island early this year.

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FPC of Donalsonville, Ga. (SW corner) is praying for a **Solo Pastor** to help us be faithful to our new mission statement: To worship God in Spirit and in truth; to grow as followers of Jesus; and to be led by the Holy Spirit as we seek to share the Gospel with all! For inquiries/MIF/to send PIF, contact marshabondpnc@gmail.com.

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NorthPark Presbyterian Church is searching for its next Pastor/Head of Staff. NorthPark Presbyterian, founded in 1867, has and continues to play a vital role in the faith community of Dallas. A diverse church with a membership of just under 400, the church serves a wide range of mission programs and community outreach. We span a wide theological and political spectrum, celebrating differing points of view while finding our unity in Christ. Our mission statement, "NorthPark is a Christian community welcoming Seekers, Thinkers, and Doers," is taken seriously in the work and daily life of the church. We are seeking a pastor who wants to engage actively in mission, teach and inspire the membership, and support the church as it enters the next chapter of growth. For more information about us, we invite you to visit our church website at northparkpres.org, our MIF # 08673, or contact us directly at pnc4np_pif@googlegroups.com.

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El Dorado County Federated Church Placerville, CA

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Located in Placerville, CA, a vibrant historical gold rush town in the beautiful Sierra foothills, El Dorado County Federated Church is a progressive oasis in a largely conservative community. This inclusive, approximately 300-member blended Presbyterian-United Methodist congregation attracts worshipers from diverse faith backgrounds, and is a member of both More Light Presbyterians and Reconciling Ministries Network (UMC). With an emphasis on social justice, Federated Church is known for its mission and service work both locally and farther afield. We seek an inspired spiritual leader who will articulate and model a progressive perspective of the Christian faith and lead us in practicing radical hospitality so that it permeates all aspects of congregational life and work. We seek a strong communicator who will challenge us spiritually and intellectually with stimulating sermons and new ideas and forms of worship; who will ignite our compassionate hearts, rock us out of our complacency and move us toward revitalization. Please review our MIF #00737.AB. For more information, visit eldoradofederatedchurch.org, and contact federated.pst@gmail.com.

SOLO PASTOR

Hopkinsville, KY, First PCUSA seeks a pastor who will motivate our 150 members to continue and to expand our diverse mission and member care activities. Hopkinsville, a small and growing city of 30,000, is located near Nashville, TN, and the western Kentucky lakes region. For more information, see CLC MIF #03074.ADO or email 1preshtownPNC@gmail.com.

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2019–2020 Presbyterian Planning Calendar



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Writing your own money autobiography

Understanding why you give changes how you give

The most common way a sermon about money goes wrong is when people hear guilt and shame rather than grace and gratitude. These emotions are not helpful. But like weeds in spring, guilt and shame seem to always emerge when talking about money. The antidote is to be clear that everything that is good in our life springs from the well of grace — God’s undeserved and unmerited favor — and the only appropriate response to grace is gratitude. Theologian Karl Barth said it beautifully when he wrote, “Gratitude follows grace as thunder follows lightning.”

Barth borrowed from the apostle Paul, who is emphatic about God’s goodness toward us. In 2 Corinthians 8, verses 1–15, Paul says, “God has given grace to the churches of Macedonia.” As a result of that grace, the churches — even though they were suffering what Paul described as “extreme poverty” — were overflowing with generosity. They were begging to give to others. What’s most remarkable is the absence of talk about how much money was available to give. That was beside the point. And it can be beside the point for us today, too.

Giving out of joy begins with a change in how we decide what to give. What most of us do is measure our resources against our expenses. We then determine what we can do when we are faced with invitations to give. When measuring our resources against our expenses, we often conclude that we have little to give. We then hold back in sharing what we have.

A Haitian farmer told me this proverb: “The one who never eats alone will never go hungry.” It was his way of saying that when you share what little you have, you will always have enough for yourself. And when we share what we have with others, it creates a groundswell of gratitude in the hearts of many, who in turn share what they have with others. Our sharing becomes part of a much larger work of God in the world.

To get to this generosity that comes from a place of joy — not from measuring our resources against our expenses — I suggest writing your money autobiography. A money autobiography has been one of the most helpful exercises I have ever done. Developed by the Faith and

Money Network, a nonprofit equipping people to transform their relationship with money, the money autobiography can be used individually, with sessions and committees, or with an entire congregation. It’s simple, but the effects are enormous.

The money autobiography helps you understand your relationship to money, uncovering attitudes that formed as early as childhood. It’s a simple journaling exercise with writing prompts that ask you to focus on your relationship with money. As you begin to observe patterns, you may find clues to how you might change your giving patterns to ones that are more joyful and more generous. Remember, it’s not about the amount you have. It’s about the joy of giving.

Roy W. Howard is a leadership coach and consultant in North Potomac, Maryland. He most recently served for 18 years as pastor of Saint Mark Presbyterian Church in North Bethesda, Maryland.

CREATING YOUR OWN MONEY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The following are some examples of the writing prompts from Faith and Money Network’s “Creating a Money Autobiography.” There are no right or wrong answers. If you don’t like to write, put your thoughts down in brief notes or an outline or a drawing.

- What is your happiest memory in connection with money?
- What event has brought you the greatest pain around money?
- How does money — having it or not having it — affect your self-esteem?
- How balanced are your giving and receiving?
- Do you think charity can ever get in the way of justice? If so, why? If not, why?

To learn more about money autobiographies, go to faithandmoneynetwork.org



Learning from those we ignore

Our table-turning God reveals true sources of wisdom

1 Samuel 16:1–13 is a lectionary text for March 22, the fourth Sunday in Lent.

Wisdom comes from unexpected places. We might expect the best dressed, the most educated, or the tallest and fittest to be the one to turn to for leadership and guidance. God, though, often surprises us with a great reversal, revealing to us that the people who can open our eyes most fully are those we would have least expected.

We get an example of that in 1 Samuel 16:1–13. The New Revised Standard Version summarizes this selection as “David Anointed as King,” but that doesn’t quite capture the thrust of the story. A better title would be “God Sees Differently from Samuel.”

God has rejected Saul from being king over the budding country of Israel, and so these verses begin with God’s telling the prophet Samuel to stop grieving and start anointing — specifically, to mark one of Jesse’s sons to be the new king. After Samuel’s fears about retribution from Saul are answered, the prophet starts to meet the parade of Jesse’s eight sons. God’s challenge to Samuel is to identify which one Israel needs as the next king.

“Surely it’s Eliab!” Samuel proclaims when he sees Jesse’s oldest boy — Mr. Tall and Handsome. God cautions that it’s foolish to go by outside appearances when figuring out who God’s chosen might be. Son after son walks by until the youngest, David, is brought in from the fields. In a characteristic move of our table-turning God, David — rather than any of his presumably more qualified brothers — is anointed as king.

God has been turning tables like this for millennia. We see it when Abel is preferred to his older brother, Cain; when Jacob is blessed over Esau; and when Joseph — rather than any of his more impressive older brothers — receives the coat of many colors. It comes around when God chooses Israel not because they are the most impressive group, but because they are the least of all peoples. Of course, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, born in a backwater village and nestled in an animal trough, is the biggest reversal of all.

Throughout the Scriptures, God’s people learn to listen to surprising sources of wisdom. As they do, knowledge grows and understanding broadens. When God’s people realize that the Spirit chooses unlikely people to speak truth, more faithful lives begin to be lived.

I recently had a reminder of this when I served at a

soup kitchen. After dinner, I had the chance to spend time with “Joe,” an articulate man around 40 whose story tumbled out over chocolate peanut brittle and lemonade. Joe told me he had been struggling with depression and that he had been living on the streets for some time before his big break came: His brother bought a new home and offered Joe a place to stay.

He stayed there a while, he said, until “things just didn’t work out.” He didn’t give more information, and after a pause, I said, “Sometimes it’s hard to live with family.” After an even longer pause, he replied, “Yeah, but it’s even harder to live on the streets.”

God equipped Joe to be an unexpected carrier of truth to me. In my privileged world, living with family is a preference, one choice among many. Depending on the personalities involved, it might not be too pleasant. But to Joe, the chance to live with his brother was the difference between a warm sofa bed and being forced to look for a safe place to sleep when the wind is whipping around a 22-degree night. It’s the difference between security and fear, and between daily hygiene and a once-a-week shower (on good weeks).

I’m trying to listen to Joe as God chose him to be the one this time to shatter once again the comfort of my life. I pray I will see the world more as God sees it because of my conversation with Joe, whose eyes have been opened in ways that mine have not. Even more importantly, I pray that I will be part of a church whose eyes are open to new ways of fighting for the homeless and disempowered, again and again and again.

Chip Hardwick is interim associate pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Lake Forest, Illinois.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Who have been surprising sources of wisdom for you?
- What might you do to be more open to insights from people you would not normally turn to or listen to?
- How do your eyes need to be opened to the plight of the homeless and the impoverished?



JUSTICE AND ONLY JUSTICE, YOU SHALL PURSUE (DEUT. 16:20)

Demanding a just economy

Easter hope lives in meeting the needs of all

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

— Revelation 22:1–5

We live in a messed-up world. The strong still dominate the weak. The wealthy do whatever is necessary to protect their wealth. Those in positions of political power, regardless of their party, have been unwilling to support any major movement that would spread wealth — including the provision of adequate health care, affordable housing and education — in ways that are fair to all citizens.

The most prominent aspect of this is the struggle for significant increases in compensation for workers that would provide genuine living wages for those who toil at the bottom of the pyramid of wealth. Efforts to raise the minimum wage to what is truly a living wage bring outcries of “socialism” or “communism,” ... even though what is required to live and raise a family on in the United States is far above the legal minimum wage.

And there is a reason for that. Classical definitions of

“capitalism” usually describe three critical components — capital goods, natural resources and labor. For this kind of economic system to function properly, these components must be obtained at the lowest possible cost. Thus, it is perfectly logical for every enterprise that involves human labor to obtain that labor at the lowest possible financial cost.

When will we demand of our leaders an economic

When will we demand of our leaders an economic system that truly embodies God’s vision of hope — a system marked by justice and compassion for all?

system that truly embodies God’s vision of hope — a system marked by justice and compassion for all? If it is not the church of Jesus Christ, the Risen One, that leads in the world of political action, then where will we turn for hope of a better life for all of God’s children?

In this season of Easter — of new life — let us cry out, “He is risen! He is risen indeed!” Let us live and act as if that were true, and let us seek justice for all.

Vernon S. Broyles III is a volunteer for public witness in the PC(USA)’s Office of the General Assembly.

Looking Ahead Resources to learn more, do more and engage in God’s work.

March 8 — Celebrate the Gifts of Women/International Women’s Day

International Women’s Day addresses the challenges unique to women and girls. For more information and resources for worship, go to internationalwomensday.com or visit pcusa.org/women

March 29 — Justice Advocacy Sunday

Download “Holy Discontentment: Lifting Your Voice for Effective Advocacy” at pcusa.org/discontentment

April 17 — International Day of Farmers’ Struggles

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