

THE EPISTLE



MARCH 2021

March 3rd, 10th, 17th & 24th - Wednesdays in Lent
5:30PM - Prayer Meeting
6:30PM - Mid-Week Service (2020 Vision)

March 7th - Lent 2: Holy Communion, 9 & 10:30AM



begins March 14th. Don't forget to "spring ahead" and turn your clocks forward!!

March 14th - Lent 3: Praise Worship (Nelson Randolph)
12 Noon - Shoe box Assembly

March 21st - Lent 4: Holy Communion
12 Noon - Easter Egg Hunt Workshop

March 28th - Palm/Passion Praise Service 9 & 10:30AM

March 31—Walk with Jesus, 6:30PM

INCLEMENT WEATHER - If inclement weather forces us to change our Sunday worship services, we will inform WFMZ TV to include our information on their weather closings (Channel 69 TV & WFMZ.com). We will also have a scrolling message on our website (HolyCrossBethlehem.com) and a message on the church phone (610 867-6231) indicating any changes.

2 WORDS FROM PASTOR DAVID

Prayer & Fasting (Part 2)

Last month I invited you to fast and pray during Lent. In studying about fasting, I have been convicted that fasting is an important key to effective prayer. There is spiritual power in fasting that we in the modern church have mostly neglected. Fasting was a spiritual discipline that Jesus used, that the early church used, and that we desperately need to rediscover.

Why does fasting work? How does my not eating affect whether God answers my prayer? I don't fully understand why it works, but I know that the act of self-denial can be purifying. It also frees us up to focus on God and prayer. The Bible is filled with stories of God dramatically answering prayer when people fasted. I think we could use that power today.

Fasting did not begin as a spiritual discipline. At its root fasting arises from a profound grief. When king Saul was killed in battle, the nation of Israel fasted seven days (1 Samuel 31; 2 Samuel 1; 1 Chronicles 10). When you fast as an expression of grief you are saying, "I am so upset about what happened, about the loss of a loved one or a key person in the life of the church or the nation, that I simply cannot eat."

Another reason people fasted was to mourn their sin and signify their repentance, seeking God's mercy and forgiveness (Nehemiah 8, 9; Daniel 9; Joel 2). There are numerous examples in scripture, not only of Israel, but of other nations, being called to fast as a nation, in response to a prophetic call to repent or face God's judgment. The amazing thing is that when even the most wicked individuals and nations heeded that call and fasted in repentance, God relented and showed mercy (1 Kings 21; Jonah 3). Perhaps there is sin in your life that if you don't turn from it, it could really mess up your life and hurt your loved ones. If so, fast and pray for forgiveness and deliverance.

Another occasion for fasting was for protection from a specific threat or danger or from national calamity (Ezra 8, Esther 4, 9). I submit to you that our nation is in grave danger. Our democracy is in danger. Our economy is in danger. How much more debt can we pile up without a financial meltdown? Our lives are in danger both from COVID-19 and the consequences of the shutdown. We are in danger morally. We continue to routinely kill about a third of all our babies.

The primary danger is spiritual. In the pledge of Allegiance, we say we are “one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” But I think we all realize that each of those statements is in serious jeopardy. Do we really have equality or are the scales of justice tilted in a particular direction, such that certain privileged people can get away with anything, while others are punished even for doing good? Are we really one, indivisible nation or have we become divided and polarized beyond repair. Are we still a nation that truly acknowledges, submits to and depends upon God? We have this promise in scripture, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 33:12). I think we have experienced that divine providence and blessing many times in our national history. But I fear that as a nation we have stepped out from under the protective wings of God. God help us. Considering all these perils, perhaps God is calling you to fast and pray for our nation.

Finally, people fasted when they needed a breakthrough, either militarily or spiritually (Matthew 17; Mark 9). There were times when Israel was commanded to go into battle, but kept experiencing defeat, until they fasted and prayed (Judges 20). In the New Testament people fasted and prayed to begin a new spiritual endeavor. Jesus fasted for 40 days at the beginning of his ministry (Matthew 4). The church fasted and prayed for guidance and before commissioning elders or missionaries (Acts 13, 14).

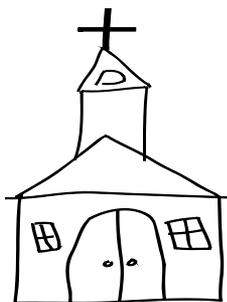
I believe our congregation needs to start now preparing for the day when things return to normal. Will we know what to do?

Will we be ready to do it? Let's ask the Lord to guide us and prepare us for the future ministry he has in mind for us. I ask you to fast and pray about that.

Fasting is not a magic wand that always gets results. It must be done in sincerity, as Jesus and the prophet Isaiah made clear (Isaiah 58). In Isaiah's day the people fasted, expecting God to answer their prayers, but He didn't, because they were ignoring basic issues of justice. Acts of religious piety cannot make up for treating other people badly. Fasting is not a substitute for true repentance, it is meant to accompany repentance and it needs to be joined with acts of mercy and kindness.

Lent is a penitential journey with Jesus. We remember his 40-day fast in the wilderness enduring temptation without sin. We desire to be victorious like Him over temptation and sin. We remember, as well, Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem and the cross and His passover from death to life for our salvation. We seek to obey His command to take up our cross daily and follow Him. May God use the disciplines of Lent to draw us into a deeper love relationship with Christ.

-- Pastor David



PRE-SCHOOL NEWS

Enrollment is now underway for the 2021-2022 school year! Anyone interested in enrolling a 3 or 4 year old child, please call Karen Steiner at 610 868-4935. Brochures are available in the gathering place, if you would kindly share with someone you know.

Many thanks for continued prayers and support! We couldn't do it without you! God bless!

Last Chance!

We plan to provide you with next month's newsletter (Epistle) in the way you selected. If you haven't already made your choice this is your last chance. The options include the following:

1. We mail a paper copy as we are doing now,
2. You pick up a paper copy when you come to church or pick one up from the front porch 24/7,
3. We email you a copy to your personal address, or
4. You download a copy from the church's website (www.holycrossbethlehem.com).

Choice 4 would be the DEFAULT option. If we don't hear from you, we will assume that you want # 4.

Choices 1, 2 & 3 all require a response from you. To make it easy, you can respond by calling the church office (610) 867-6231 (leave a message), by emailing your response to holycrossoffice@rcn.com, or by bringing or sending in the enclosed response slip. Please take 2 minutes and give us your preference.

ATTENTION THRIVENT MEMBERS

You can still designate your Thrivent 2020 CHOICE DOLLARS to the church or Preschool until the end of March.

- Call 800 847-4836 and request "Thrivent Choice"
- Go to www.Thrivent.com/thrivent choice and follow the prompts. You will need your user ID and password.

If you don't designate your 2020 Choice Dollars by March 31, 2021 they will be lost.

COUNCIL ACTIONS

- Two services, at 9AM and 10:30AM, were previously approved for 3/7 and 3/28 (Palm Sunday).
- Three services will be held on Easter Sunday (4/4) at 6:30AM, 9AM, and 10:30AM.
- A task force to study our place in the ELCA is forming. The first meeting will be March 10 at 7:30PM (after the midweek service). Interested parties should let Bob Harwick know.
- 46 inactive members have been removed from church membership. They will be notified by letter.
- The church refrigerator is not working and should not be used. Social Ministry and Property committees will work on finding a replacement. In the meantime, we are hoping one or two people have an unused mini-fridge we could borrow.

Adult Sunday School Class Maturing in Faith

Holy Cross values Christian education for all ages, including adults. The adult Sunday School class has a new emphasis for the season of Lent, and welcomes you to stop in as often as you can to join the discussion.

We will be reflecting on Pastor Dave's sermons each week. We want to grow in faith and Christian living by spending this time together and finding practical ways to apply the lessons we hear in church.

There is no preparation required, but it will help if you take notes during the readings and sermon in church and bring them to class. Certainly, bring any questions you might have, and we will try to get those answered.

~ Karen Brown

Read for Lent 2021 Contest

Holy Cross is pleased to bring back our Read for Lent contest for children aged 15 and below. Non-church member participants are also welcome.

To enter the contest, simply read a book, and fill out our short form. For each book read, a circle will be placed on the library door to build a “bookworm” and show our reading progress. The forms are in the library sign-out binder, and can be returned to the contest entry box in the library.

Younger children may have books read to them, and we’d love to display any artwork they draw! Please see the Epistle insert for more details.

There is no limit to how many books you may sign out, but please be considerate of other readers. Books may be returned and reshelfed or placed in the bin inside the room. If our library doesn’t have your favorite book, please let us know!

Please call or text questions to Ruthann Kistler:
ruthannkistler@aol.com or 610-217-0397.

Read for Lent Challenge

Parlor Library Version

Though Lent is upon us, I recommend adding bacon to your regular diet - FRANCIS BACON, that is! This sixteenth century philosopher is credited with developing such things as the scientific method, and authored numerous culturally influential books. He penned this delightful morsel: “Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.”

I think Bacon would be pleased with Holy Cross and the veritable FEAST of books in our parlor library, all just waiting for us to “dig in!” The books cover a variety of genres from Christian Living to Biography to Theology and, of course, fiction. Though we often gravitate towards just one type of book, the challenge this Lent is for us to read VARIOUS types. For example, read your favorite type of book (Christian historical romance, for instance) but then read a biography or autobiography from someone who lived at that same time period.

Then read a Christian living book about the struggle that one of the characters faced. Then maybe read a classical novel written around that time period. Then repeat.

In addition, as we read through these books, let us share with one another some notes about why we liked or didn't like a particular book. Wouldn't it be great to pick up a book and find a note in there from a beloved friend who has since gone on to glory? We can help pass on our Christian legacy to other generations by making such notes ourselves. Write a simple note and slip that into the basket on the library counter. Please include the book title & author, and a few lines about why you liked the book and would recommend it, and/or what you did NOT like about the book. Adding your name is optional (but encouraged).

I'm afraid some of our books might have gone "stale," being no longer relevant, and have lost their "taste." If you find such a book, there's no need to struggle through it: simply leave a note about that and pick up a different title.

For example, recently I wanted to learn more about prayer. I read a title by someone involved in an intercessory ministry, but it was full of strange lingo and practices. There was another book by the renowned preacher Charles Spurgeon, which had little jewels sprinkled throughout it (he refers to tears as "liquid prayers"), but it required more concentration than I could give it. A third title was a list of EVERY prayer in the Bible. It took me time to wade through these for a couple weeks each to find what I was really looking for, which was something simple and practical.

We will take a moment in our midweek Lenten services to share book recommendations, so if you have a title you found and really liked, please let Ruthann Kistler know.

I hope you are willing to take this Read for Lent challenge this year, and may we encourage one another, in the spirit of Francis Bacon, to stretch our tastes!

~ Karen Brown

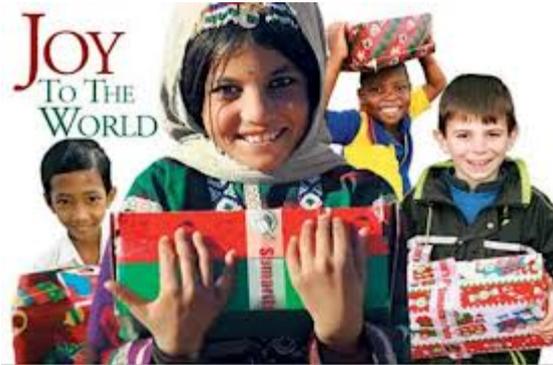
WORSHIP & MUSIC UPDATE

This past month we welcomed several new members to our church family. Nancy Porambo and Mike Zyskowski joined as full members while Richard and Barbara Mathisen joined as associate members. Congratulations to all of you and WELCOME!!

Lent is here! Join us Wednesday evenings at 6:30 for our unique Midweek Lenten Services. You can attend in-person or by live stream. There's also opportunity to participate by being a secret witness (call Sally Stein: 610-867-6599), by giving a book report (call Ruthann Kistler: 610-217-0397) or by being in one of the skits (call Jan Stryker: 610-868-9781). The theme for this year is *"Faith in God's Promises Conquers Fear."*

It's also almost time for Holy Week. We'll have two services on Palm Sunday (3/28), at 9AM and 10:30AM. We hope to offer Walk with Jesus that Wednesday (3/31), but our Maundy Thursday (4/1) service will need reservations. The service is at 6:30PM in Fellowship Hall and in order to set it up to maintain social distancing and a sanitary way to serve Communion, we need to know how many in your family will attend. Seating will be arranged according to family groupings. RSVP to the church office: 610-867-6231. We will also have two Good Friday (4/2) services at noon and 7PM. Easter services (4/4) will be at 6:30AM, 9AM, and 10:30AM. Hopefully Easter Breakfast will return NEXT year. Slowly but surely we're getting back to normal.

~Jan Stryker, Chair



Holy Cross will participate in
“Shoe Box Sunday”
for Samaritan’s Purse’s
Operation Christmas Child
with missionary Nelson
Randolph

Sunday, March 14
following the Sunday School hour.



Calling all volunteers...

**Easter Egg Hunt
Workshop**
Sunday, March 21
Following the 10:30
Sunday School hour



Everyone is welcome!
Thank You! Thank You!

Thank you for all the cards I received since the passing of my husband Chuck. I truly felt the love and kindness you all expressed. Thanks too for the delicious soups and bread from the Prayer Group.

In Jesus Love,

Sharon Branigan and Family

GREETING CARD MINISTRY

The OUTREACH COMMITTEE is beginning a new card ministry (using "snail mail") and we would like your assistance, please. We will be sending cards to shut-ins/nursing homes, hospitalizations/surgeries, military, college students, widows, new babies, visitors, etc. IF you have any cards, stationery, stickers, envelopes, inserts (like tracts, bookmarks, puzzle sheets, coloring pages, etc), would you kindly put them in the "mailbox" in the Gathering Place. Postage stamps would be appreciated as well.

P.S. We are also interested in "used" greeting cards-- we recycle those!!!! Thank you!

Nancy Porambo



MARCH BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

MARCH BIRTHDAYS

- 2 - Christopher Chmela / Randi Perrett/ Harriett Reilly
- 3 - Jim Steiner
- 5 - Karen Steiner / Karlyn Hottenstein
- 7 - Hunter Pillar
- 9 - Marilyn B. Harding
- 10 - Darlene Treisner
- 12 - Caroline Harwick
- 13 - Mary Fernandez
- 17 - Pat Davis / Earl Zeiner
- 19 - Robin Foster
- 24 - Rodney Brown
- 25 - Ashley Hercik
- 26 - Marie Eshbach
- 27 - Betty Tkacik
- 30 - Alexis Yeakel
- 31 - Joseph Reeser / Anthony Sciarra

MARCH ANNIVERSARIES

- Keaton & Lori Westwood - March 12, 2011
- Eric & Leah Quan - March 15, 2003
- Terry & Judy Iasiello - March 28, 1958
- Anthony & Michele Sciarra - March 28

NOTE: If you have been missed on the above list, please call the church office at 867-6231.

Member Changes and Updates

This new section will provide address changes and other updates of our church family in an effort to keep you connected and up to date. Feel free to make contributions by contacting the church office by phone (610 867-6237) or email holycrossoffice@rcn.com.

Sandy and Mikayla Bickert's new address is:
704 S. Bergen Street
Bethlehem, PA 18015

New Members:
The Rev. Richard & Barbara Mathisen
3417 Park Place
Bethlehem, PA 18017
610-265-8999

Nancy Porambo
2750 Belaire Road
Bethlehem, PA 18017
610-868-3568

Mike Zyskowski
737 High St
Bethlehem, PA 18018
484-895-5109



ADOPT A PLOT

The "Adopt a Plot" Team needs some new members to help keep the church grounds beautiful. We are continuing this program to share the sizeable task of caring for our church grounds. The plan is to have individuals or families "adopt" a small portion of the non-mowing areas (flower beds) around the church and provide maintenance for that plot. This would involve weeding, pruning, planting annuals and perennials, watering, fertilizing, mulching, edging, etc. Veteran or new gardeners are welcome. Won't you help? Sign up on the bulletin board across from the office.

BITS & PIECES

2021 ALTAR FLOWER CHART - There are still many openings on the Altar Flower Chart. The price per vase is \$31.00. Each Sunday is set up for two (2) sponsors. If you want both vases, please sign on both lines. Also, please indicate any special reason for sponsoring. Any questions, call the Church Office at 610-867-6231.

BULLETINS - weekly bulletins can be sponsored for only \$10. Sign-up sheet is located on the bulletin board.

Building Our Immune System

It has bothered me that during this intense health crisis, little if anything is being said about God's amazing creation within us...our immune system. God created us with an inbuilt ability for disease prevention if we care for it correctly. We hear about washing our hands, sanitation, mask-wearing and social distancing...all ways to prevent spreading the corona virus. But how do we strengthen our God-given gift, the immune system, enabling us to keep from getting any kind of communicable illness? Dead silence.

Recently, I came upon an interesting article by a naturopathic doctor, Mark Sherwood, in a Christian magazine, Charisma. He writes that we can live a life of fullness and completeness in God. Dr. Sherwood writes, "Our immune system is one of the most extraordinary defense mechanisms ever created. Straight from the hand of God, this effective war machine has the power to defend our bodies from threats both inside and outside."

Here are five measures that will prepare our immune system to do the amazing job God designed it to do:

1. Consume real foods...such as well-sourced quality fats and organic (when possible) fruits and vegetables.

2. Get sufficient sleep...human bodies require seven to nine hours every night.
3. Manage stress effectively...balance stress-inducing events and relaxation-inducing events.
4. Take time for adequate exercise...150 minutes a week of dedicated activity...can start with walking.
5. Add appropriate supplements...a good starting point includes zinc, vitamin C, vitamin D, omega three fatty acids, colostrum, sulforaphane-yielding broccoli sprouts and magnesium.

Here are some factors that weaken the immune system or even destroy it:

1. Consuming any processed foods, sugars, soda, fried foods and MSG.
2. Failing to allow time for sufficient sleep. The average adult gets only $6 \frac{1}{2}$ hours sleep per night.
3. Living in an environment of chronic stress, anxiety or fear.
4. Failing to move. Unfortunately, we are becoming increasingly obesogenic and sedentary.
5. Failing or refusing to take necessary supplements.

There is so much more to learn about this amazing chemistry lab we carry within us, but I hope this inspires you (as it did me) to learn more and to make adjustments for a healthier life.

Calendar Update!

Are you filling in your 2021 calendar? Let us help.
Here are some dates we hope you will save for Holy Cross:

Next Month:

- Thur, April 1 - Maundy Thursday, 6:30PM Holy Communion
- Fri, April 2 - Good Friday, 12noon & 7PM service
- Sat, April 3 - Community Easter Egg Hunt, 10AM
- Sun, April 4 - Easter Celebration, 6:30AM, 9AM & 10:30AM

Next Nine Months:

- Wed, May 5 - Teacher Appreciation Day
- Sun, May 9 - Mother's Day
- Thur, May 13 - Ascension Day
- Sun, May 23 - Pentecost
- Wed, May 26 - VBS Kickoff
- Sun, May 30 - Trinity/Memorial Day/5th Sunday Praise
- Sun, June 20 - "Dads and Grads"
- Sun, July 19 thru Fri, July 18 - 23, VBS
- Tue, August 3 - National Night Out
- Tue, August 10 - Sight and Sound Bus Trip, "Queen Esther"
- Fri, August 6 - Game Night
- Sun, August 22 - Backpack Blessing Sunday
- Sun, August - 5th Sunday Praise
- Sun, September 12 - Rally Day/VBS Reunion/Grandparent Day
- Sun, September 19 - Church Picnic
- Sat, October 30 - Trunk or Treat/Family Fall Fest
- Sun, October 31—Reformation/Confirmation/Brunch
- Wed, November 24--Community Thanksgiving Eve
- Sun, November 28—Advent Workshop
- Sat, December 11—Luminaria Night & Caroling
- December 19—Birthday Party for Jesus
- December 24--Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

More events and details to come. Let's make 2021 great!!

HOMELESS MINISTRY

Friends,

The Benevolence Committee is continuing to support the Homeless Ministry by collecting the following items:

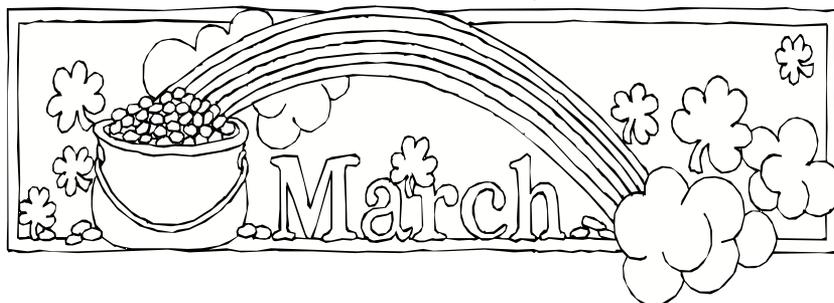
men's socks
disposable razors
toothpicks/flossers
bandaids
emory boards

We are functioning as a very small piece in a very large puzzle. These donations are collected and given to the St. Luke's UCC Church in Ottsville. This group makes a monthly trip to Philadelphia to disperse their collections. They benefit the homeless men at Old First Church Ministries in Philadelphia.

This ministry and many others have suffered greatly during the covid. I ask that you pray that our congregation would have both the means and the desire to return to the level of generous giving that had become a Holy Cross tradition.

Look for the "house" sitting on the table in the Gathering Place for your donations. Thank you.

THE EPISTLE



Holy Cross Lutheran Church

Pastor David L. Brown

2700 Jacksonville Road

Bethlehem, PA 18017

610-867-6231

Holycrossoffice@rcn.com

Holycrosspastor@rcn.com

Holycrossfin@rcn.com

Website: HolyCrossBethlehem.com

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