



currents

Nov. & Dec. 2020

GETTING READY FOR ADVENT

Our sanctuary Christmas tree has received a tremendous gift in the form of new Chrismons. For those of you who don't know what *Chrismons* are, they are Christmas decorations with Christian symbols on them, reminding us that our Advent and Christmas season centers around the celebration of the birth of Christ. As is the case in many other churches, we decorate our MPC Christmas tree each year with beautiful Chrismons. And this year, Beth Curtiss and Beth Keys have given us the gift of new Chrismons! Though we are not able to gather in our beautiful sanctuary this season to see them in-person, I hope you will still take the time to thank Beth & Beth for the gift of their time and talent. And fortunately, these Chrismons are a gift that can be used again and again for years to come. Thank you Beth & Beth, for adding to the beauty of our sanctuary, and for helping us to center our minds and hearts on Jesus Christ in this Advent & Christmas season! To find out more about Christmas Eve at MPC, please turn to page 5.





Pastor's Pen

Dear Church Family,

With all that we are navigating in our life together these days, it's hard to believe that the Advent season (a season of WAITING!) is upon us. And I don't know about you, but I feel like I've done my fair share of waiting these past eight months already. The idea of more waiting fills me with frustration and anger and disappointment and sadness. And yet, this season in the liturgical year calls us to wait again—to wait for the birth of the Messiah—our unfailing light. But perhaps this new season of waiting will be a balm to our impatient souls. Because in this season we are called to look beyond our own needs to seek a love that shoves away the shadows of night. In this season we follow a star and trust that it shows us the way. In this season we proclaim that God has the power to make us new each day.

And so my prayer for us this Advent, friends, is that we don't just see this liturgical season as one of more waiting, but one that brings with it a constant reminder to look for hope, peace, joy, and love, amidst all that might feel dark. In our worship in these Advent weeks, we will proclaim together, "Let there be HOPE"... "Let there be PEACE"... "Let there be JOY"... and "Let there be LOVE." And we will do this, so that when the time comes to proclaim the very best news, we are ready: "Let there be LIGHT."

For a light shines in the darkness and the darkness will never overcome it! (John 1:5)

Thank you for waiting with me awhile longer, friends. It's a gift to know that even as we wait, we do not wait alone. Thank you for your faithfulness, your patience, your grace, and your love. I miss you all and am so grateful for you.

With gratitude for our life together,
Rachel

WE'VE NEVER DONE IT THIS WAY BEFORE!

Submitted by MPC Deacons

Because we are not worshipping all together in church now in our usual manner, contributions to our Deacons' Fund and donations for the food baskets are quite low. We would ask that you prayerfully consider making a donation, remembering those who will be benefitting from these funds, especially with the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday baskets that will be provided to our community in the coming weeks.

If using the online giving portal, please indicate in the "Notes" section "Deacons' Fund" so donations are designated to the Deacons for this purpose.

This is a struggling time for all of us, and especially for those who are hungry. The Deacons are extremely grateful for all the ways you support us, but especially now in these difficult times.



New Member Class

Believing—Belonging—Becoming
January 10, 17 & 24, 2021

If you are not a member at MPC, we would love for you to consider joining us in ministry and mission. This three-week class, led by Pastor Rachel Rhodes and Pastor Alex Lester-Abdalla, will be an opportunity to explore church membership, whether you're ready to join or just curious about what that would mean. We will explore topics like, "What do we believe as Presbyterians?"; "How are we called to be the church in the world?"; "What does ministry and mission look like at MPC?"; "Who is it that God is calling me to be and how can I seek to pursue God's call more fully through membership at MPC?" This class will gather over Zoom at 9:00 a.m. for three consecutive Sundays and you'll be welcomed into membership during worship on Sunday, January 31, 2021. If you are interested in participating, please contact the church office at 215-295-4191 or office@mpcusa.net by Sunday, December 20, or speak directly with Pastor Rachel by emailing her at rachelrhodes@mpcusa.net.

FAITH FORMATION UPDATE FROM PASTOR ALEX

Dear Priesthood of All Believers,

Advent at MPC this year will be guided by our sermon series titled “Let There Be Light.” Each week the church will gather around four topics that will culminate in light. First will be “Let there be...hope” then the next week will be “Let there be...peace” followed by joy, love, and finally ending with the bright light that is Christ’s birth on Christmas eve. I think it is fitting that our Advent this year will be centered around the phrase “Let There Be Light.” In this simple phrase there is a culmination of what Advent represents generally, as well as specifically in our time. In this phrase, there is waiting. In its plea for hope, peace, joy, love, and light there is the Advent recognition that we are waiting for something much greater that the Christ Child will bring. For much of this year we have become experts in waiting, so we are seasoned veterans heading into a Christmas season that looks much different than years past. And in this phrase, there is a recognition of what will come when this waiting is over. It is a speaking into existence the hope, peace, joy, love, and light that Jesus invites us to be a part of as partners in ministry with him. It is the audacity to believe that there will be...light...even this year, or maybe more appropriately, *especially* this year.



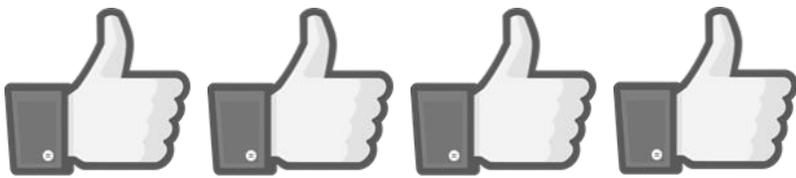
So faith formation at MPC continues in this vein through November and into the Advent season. Even though things are difficult and barriers continue to be placed before us, we speak into existence the hope, peace, joy, love, and light that the Christ child represents for us as Christians. For instance, Adult Education continues to gather each Sunday morning over zoom from 9 to 10:00 a.m. We have had and will be having an array of interesting topics and talented teachers leading us in faith formation. Drew Hunger continued our summer race conversation with the Morrisville United Methodist Church with his class *Living Unwarily in a Racist Society*. Zachary Mahon, the Executive Director for the Solid Rock Youth Center, led a Bible study and shared about his work empowering youth in Morrisville. And finally, through December 20, Ruth Workman will be teaching a course on the kingdom of God as we wait and prepare for the coming Lord in the season of Advent. If you are interested in joining, please contact me at alexlester-abdalla@mpcusa.net so I can add you to the email chain with the Zoom link for each session.

Our pre-kindergarten to fifth grade Sunday School teachers continue to make Sunday school care packages for our young disciples. I am amazed by the creativity and care that go into the crafts, prayers, and activities being sent to our families of young children. Parents and students be on the lookout for another round of faith-formation coming in the mail!

Also, Youth Club continues to gather on Wednesday nights from 6 to 7:00 p.m. The darkness will not deter the light emanating from this group...literally! As day lights savings has made us adapt, leaders and youth alike have found ways to gather over Zoom, around fire pits, and on Saturday mission opportunities to maintain connection with one another and with God through our youth programing.

Friends, there is no question that this season will be different and challenging. However, this is the season of waiting, the season of expectation. So join us as we wait and expect together for the coming light of the Lord that will undoubtedly shine brightly from Morrisville Presbyterian Church.

Grace and Peace,
Alex



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UPDATE FROM COVID-19 TASK FORCE

Submitted by Pastor Rachel Rhodes, Senior Pastor

You recently received a message from the MPC COVID-19 Task Force highlighting the rise in COVID-19 case counts here in Bucks County and in our surrounding municipalities. The metrics have continued to move in the wrong direction at an alarming rate, and the purpose of this letter is to let you know that the Session has approved a recommendation from the Task Force to stop indoor, in-person worship services until mid-January, when we will reassess the situation. This decision is aligned to the plan approved by the Session in July.

As case counts in Bucks County and surrounding areas continue to rise, they have reached levels not seen since May. As you can see in the table below, most of the metrics we monitor have surpassed levels we set for our church family. But please know that we continue to monitor the validity and helpfulness of each individual metric, knowing that we learn more about this virus with each passing month. We have made adjustments when needed and acted when needed. Now is the time to act in response to a very frightening situation at our doorstep.

| Metrics For Keeping the Sanctuary Open | Metric Currently Satisfied As of Nov. 8, 2020 | Latest Metric |
|---|---|---------------|
| Metric #1: All of the appropriate government leaders in Bucks County, Mercer County, Burlington County, and Trenton must have reopened their respective jurisdictions . | YES | YES |
| Metric #2: Total New Cases - Bucks County, Mercer County, Burlington County, and Trenton must have 50 or fewer new cases each day, calculated on a three-day rolling average – over the course of a 14-day period. | NO | 85.2 |
| Metric #3: Trend in Total New Cases - Bucks County, Mercer County, Burlington County, and Trenton must experience a sustained decline in new cases each day, calculated on a three-day rolling average – over the course of a 14-day period. | NO | +8% |
| Metric #4: Contact Tracing Capacity - Bucks County, Mercer County, Burlington County, and Trenton must have in place contact tracers, either locally or state-wide. | YES | YES |
| Metric #5: MPC COVID-19 Case - No one who has recently attended church develops COVID-19. | YES | |
| Metric #6: PCR Testing Positivity Rate - The fraction of tests that come back positive divided by the total number of tests performed in Bucks County remains under 5 percent. | NO | 6.2% |
| Metric #7: New Cases per 100K - The number of new positive COVID cases per 100,000 population should be less than 10. | NO | 13.6 |
| Metric #8: Hospitalization Rate - Number of COVID-19 Patients Hospitalized in Bucks County less than 10 (Moving Average Past 14 days) | YES | 8.5 |

Health experts predict that the onset of cold weather, and increased frequency of family gatherings with the approaching holidays, are likely to drive a continued surge in cases. Recent situations at MPC have also reminded us that people don't always know when they have been exposed to COVID-19. We expect this reality to only increase as metrics surge. So, we are making the difficult decision to temporarily stop indoor, in-person worship in order to protect the MPC family the best way we know how. The decision to reassess in January gives us time to understand the severity of this winter surge, as well as gives our staff time to plan for robust alternatives through Advent and Christmas.

I can certainly appreciate the disappointment here, friends, and I share it. This is not how any of us wanted to navigate the Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas seasons. But I believe it is the right and safest decision we can make. And I continue to hold onto the gratitude I feel for this church family and for all the ways we have continued to bear witness to Christ's love in this challenging season. Every week we are feeding the hungry through our Food Center and the Ivins Outreach Center. Every week we are meeting for Bible Study, Fellowship, Youth Club, and Adult Education over Zoom. Every week we are gathering for the worship of God! Thank you for the ways you have embraced new technology and our unofficial 2020 church motto, "we've never done it this way before!" I am confident that though the sanctuary will be closed for awhile, the church will remain open! Because you have, and will continue to be, so faithful. And through your love for God and for God's people, we can continue to remind the world of the light of God's love amidst all that might feel dark. Thank you for being the church! I love you all.

CHRISTMAS EVE AT MPC

Submitted by MPC Worship Committee

We can appreciate that the suspension of in-person worship brings up particular sadness about worship on Christmas Eve, which we typically enjoy within the beauty of our sanctuary. However, given the sheer volume of attendees we often see on Christmas Eve, the assumption was that even if we had continued to worship in-person on Sunday mornings, Christmas Eve wasn't going to be possible in our sanctuary this year. And so, for some time now, your staff has been making preparations to celebrate this sacred night in other ways. We are hoping to be able to offer the following three options for Christmas Eve Worship:

“Christmas Eve On-Demand” — A Christmas Eve service of worship pre-recorded from our beautiful sanctuary. This service will be available online, on our website, starting the morning of December 24. You may view it at any time on Christmas Eve or in the days following. This service will be the closest thing we have to a “Traditional” Christmas Eve service this year. It will include traditional Scripture readings, Christmas Eve hymns, and anthems offered by both our Bell Choir and Chancel Choir. Our sanctuary will be decorated for Christmas Eve and our organ will be played magnificently for the glory of God. We hope you will set aside some time to worship God alongside us in this way. If you are unable to access the internet and would like a DVD copy of the service, please be in touch with the Church Office by December 10 so we can provide one for you.

“Christmas Eve Around the Crèche” at 4:00 p.m. — For those who don't know, the “Crèche” is the Nativity scene that is placed outside each year off the church parking lot. During this 20-30 minute service of worship on Christmas Eve, we will gather outside, masked, and socially distant around the crèche. We will sing hymns, hear the story of Christmas in scripture, and share the light of Christ with one another. Families with young children are encouraged to attend, as we will ensure a safe and family friendly service. Attendees will be asked to bring their own candle. As you might imagine, this service is weather dependent and also depends upon our ability to still gather in large groups at that time. We are hopeful, but we will keep you informed.

“Silent Night, Holy Night: Christmas Eve Over Zoom” at 7:00 p.m. — This service of worship will take place over Zoom, similar to our Maundy Thursday service or our weekly Virtual Fellowship. This will be an opportunity to gather together even though we are apart, and celebrate the sacred gift of this night. We will sing hymns (led by individual families—everyone else on mute!), hear the story of Christmas in scripture, and share the light of Christ. Everyone will be asked to bring their own candle or Advent wreath as we celebrate a light that the darkness can never overcome. Families with young children are encouraged to attend. A portion of the service will be geared specifically toward children.

We hope that you will join us for this sacred, holy night of worship, in whatever way you are able. As always, thank you for your patience, understanding, and grace. We are so thankful for YOU!

IN LOVING MEMORY

Our sympathy goes out to the families of those who recently passed away:

- George Davenport, on Saturday, October 17, 2020.
- Janice L. Mendrey, on Friday, October 23, 2020.
- Will Thompson II, on Saturday, October 24, 2020.
- Dorothy E. Brambley, on Wednesday, November 11, 2020.
- Sandra E. Foster, on Monday, November 16, 2020.
- Barbara Jane Demech, on Sunday, May 17, 2020.



Let us continue to remember these individuals and all members of their families in our prayers at this time.

A LOOK INTO THE FOOD CENTER

Submitted by Molly Ramsey, Pastoral Intern

I say, "Good morning! How are you doing today?" The responses come,...

"This is the only time I leave my home all week."

"I'm here to pick up groceries for my family. I'm going to drop them at home so they have something to eat while I'm gone. Then I'm headed to the hospital for a procedure."

"I'm so frustrated! I've been on hold with unemployment for 8 hours a day for the last two days. I still can't get through. I've been unemployed for six months and no one will help me."

"Those two kiddos in the back, Grandpa and I are taking care of them while their parents work."

"Not good, I just found out I have Stage Four cancer."

"Do you have any diapers today?"

"Are you going to vote, Pastor?"

"You know, no white person has stood this close to me in six months."

"Well, I used to have a job, in a nursing home, but when Corona hit, everyone on my floor died, all except four residents. I got it too and so I lost my job."

"Pretty good. I'm here to pick up my neighbor, she has MS. I don't need food right now so I'm sure not going to take it from those who do, because someday soon that might be me."

Sometimes we simply exchange a greeting, or talk about the weather. If the drive through line is moving quickly, I might just wave. But you might be surprised how often people choose to share their stories, and it is an honor and a privilege to receive them.

I began chatting with clients of The Food Center as a pastoral presence in September 2019. I remember feeling surprised that people even wanted to talk with me. I had this assumption, that those who came wouldn't want to talk to a Pastor, they would simply want to get their food and leave. It turns out that my assumption was more about me than it was about them. I was shocked the first time I sat down next to someone and they told me of their terminal diagnosis right at the very beginning of the conversation. I remember vividly a conversation with a mom who was too afraid to let her children play on the first floor of their home because stray bullets had come through the first-floor windows. Her two children sat on the folding chairs next to me, reading books they'd picked up from the free book cart, as she shared her concerns and her fears. It wasn't that I was surprised by how much trauma everyone is carrying around, but people's willingness to share it with a stranger titled Pastor.

This fall, I'm back at The Food Center providing pastoral care once again. It's different. There is a drive through line and the vehicles snake around the parking lot before the 9:00 a.m. start time. There is a new system in place to ensure the safety of everyone. All are wearing masks. I greet people at their car window, six feet apart.

I often find myself in a state of prayerful wondering as I'm driving to MPC on Wednesday mornings. Who will I meet today? What are they going through? How might I care for them? How might they shape me? How might I embody the Church and our congregation to them? While I was driving to MPC one Wednesday morning this fall, far on the NJ side of the "Trenton Makes, The World Takes" bridge, I passed a mom and her middle school age son walking along the sidewalk. I didn't think much of it - the boy had a bright neon backpack that caught my eye. Forty-five minutes later, the mom and her son walked up to the drive-through line. The volunteers knew and greeted the pair by name, checked them in, and helped them load their food into the backpack and walking cart. Then the pair set out on the return trip, on the journey back home. There are theological reflections to be made here...reflections on what it means for someone to know your name, just as God knows our names...reflections about the life and mission of the church as the body of Christ...reflections about how it is God's grace that calls us into a posture of hospitality. These are all true and beautiful reflections.

(Continued on next page.)

FOOD CENTER (CONTINUED)

Reflections are a necessary part of our life as followers of Jesus Christ, but perhaps they miss the rawness of what I encounter each Wednesday. At least one moment of real human connection, of authentic relationship. Those who come to The Food Center, through their stories, teach me so much about my own assumptions, the many forms authentic love takes, and the reality of pain and hunger. Spiritual hunger, yes, but there is physical hunger, too. Jesus says, “I was hungry and you fed me when you provided for the least of these” (Matt 25 paraphrase). People are hungry and Morrisville Presbyterian Church, you are supporting a ministry that feeds. Family of faith, if there’s anything I’m convinced of in these uncertain days, it’s that the work and ministry of The Food Center matters. The work and ministry of The Food Center is meaningful.

In a non-COVID world, I would end this article by inviting you to volunteer. Come help, come meet the people, come be part of the work. Come serve those in our community who are hungry. Come discover how your faith and understanding of the gospel and the Church might be deconstructed and reconstructed by the stories you encounter. It saddens me deeply that I cannot do that, so I end by offering this reflection...

Every Wednesday, as the cars pull up to the serving station to pick up their groceries, I hear some version of, “Thank you.” “I’m so thankful you all are here.” “I don’t know what we would be doing without you.” And I have the privilege of responding with, “You’re welcome. It’s good to see you. We’re glad to be of some help in this time.” And Morrisville Presbyterian Church, when I say “You’re welcome,” it is with the fullness of and on behalf of you, the volunteers, and all those in our community who make it possible for those who need food to be fed. My heart swells with gratitude for you who support this ministry, for the leadership of The Food Center, and for all of the volunteers from the community who make it possible. I say it and I know, this is meaningful. This is a meaningful relationship, for all the parties involved. And just in case my words have failed at what I hope to communicate, please re-read again, a brief selection of the beginnings of conversations I’ve had in just the past two weeks. Read them and hear the truth, the hope of our community rests in relationship and connection.

FOOD CENTER THANKS YOU!

Submitted by Carol Romano

The Food Center would like to thank the MPC congregation, and the greater Morrisville community, for their amazing show of support during this pandemic. Donations of food, money and gift cards have allowed us to serve our neighbors without interruption. We continue to provide groceries, meats, produce and bread to about 65-70 families each and every week. Folks are so appreciative and often share their struggles with us, which is why we’re extra happy to have Pastor Alex and Molly on site each week for some pastoral care and connection. The Food Center continues to be a strong ministry in a crazy time. Thank you for your support and please continue to pray for our clients, who remain so vulnerable during this ongoing time of uncertainty. Please check out the Sign Up Genius on the MPC website for volunteer opportunities.



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2020 Christmas Memorials & Honorariums

The following opportunities are available for people desiring to make memorial/honorarium/celebration contributions during the Christmas season:

Please fill in the tear-off below and return it with your check in the total amount of your option(s)

POINSETTIAS

Please note changes to the Memorial donation form for Poinsettias.

Poinsettias purchased will be for Deacons to deliver to homebound members during the Advent season.

MUSIC FUND

Memorial contributions to this fund help to supplement the music ministry program via the Memorial Committee's oversight. In the past, these funds have been used to invest in handbell equipment, guest musicians, and additional musicians for special musical offerings.

DEACONS' FOOD BASKET PROGRAM

In addition to free-will donations received by the Deacons, you are welcome to contribute to the Food Basket Program as a gift or memorial to loved ones by using the form below.



CHRISTMAS MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

*Please do not add the memorial contribution amount to your pledge payment!
Make checks payable to MPC with the type of memorial noted on the memo line.*

I (we) wish to make the following contribution(s) to:

_____ **Poinsettia(s)** Number of Plants: _____ Amount attached: _____

_____ I would like to purchase a poinsettia for the Deacons to deliver to a homebound member during the Advent season. The cost is \$8.00 per plant.

Please note: There will be no poinsettias to be picked up after the Christmas Eve service.

_____ **Music Fund** Please find \$ _____ attached for this fund.

_____ **Deacons' Food Basket Program.** Please find \$ _____ attached for this fund.

Given by: _____

Phone: _____ +

"In loving memory of" "In celebration of" "To give thanks for" (circle one)

Please print your submission exactly as you wish it to appear in the bulletin and return this form to the Church Office.

Deadlines for submissions

All Contributions Due - Sunday, December 6, 2020

