

~A Corona Christmas~

*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."*

~ Romans 15:13

Dear Members and Friends,

Hope. Peace. Joy. Love. These are our prayer in the Advent season, those four weeks leading up to the Christmastime. But let's be honest: Christmas isn't going to be quite the same this year, is it? I mean, some of us will be spending the holidays alone, locked away inside our homes. Some will join up with loved ones over FaceTime or Zoom. But however we go about it, there will be very little in the way of handshakes, and hugs, and long embraces. You've probably already endured a corona birthday, and a corona Easter, and all those corona-summer-ersatz-vacations. As I write this page, we are all preparing for a corona Thanksgiving, and that will be hard enough. But a corona Christmas?



And yet! And yet...let me confide to you a little secret. For the past 17 years, I've been longing to spend Christmas at home with no one but my little family of four. We've never done that before. We've always spent Christmas Day on the road, rushing around to visit all the grandparents. I would never wish this pandemic and its horrible toll on the world or on any individual. But it has given us a few unexpected treasures, hasn't it? I'm looking forward to a Christmas Day with nowhere to go, nothing to do, no one awaiting our arrival. It's something that only a pandemic could give.

Of course, not everyone is like me. Some people dread a silent Christmas Day. Some live alone; some look forward to leaving their houses. They love all the noise and the scurry of the season. I know. It's going to be hard. But let's do our best to go bravely into Advent and Christmastime this year. Let's tell ourselves from the start: It's only one year. This strange corona Christmas is just one time. Next year, God willing, our holiday traditions will return to normal. But this year we have a golden opportunity to celebrate Christmas in new and unaccustomed ways. What would you think about resurrecting the Christmas letter just for this year? Or at least returning to the tradition of sending out Christmas cards, handwritten, with a private note for every recipient? You might spend Christmas Day playing online checkers with an old friend. What might you think about writing down your favorite Christmas memories and sharing them with someone special? Might there not be a new joy in scaling it back, just for one year, and keeping it simple?

Hope. Peace. Joy. Love. Our souls have known to collect these things for us down through the good years, so that they can bear us through the bad. And they will! Let's go into this season meditating on the things that give us hope; seeking peace in our hearts and in our world; remembering life's joy, which is our strength. And let us always, always choose love. Join us online for our weekly Advent services each Sunday, and our Advent Bible Study on Wednesday evenings at 7:30 p.m. via Zoom beginning on December 2. (details in newsletter). Be sure to take part in our regular Christmas Eve candlelight service; the choir will be performing special pieces from Handel's Messiah. Merry corona Christmas to you!

In Christ's Peace
~Brian

Adult Education Committee -- Sarah Neusius, Chairperson

Join Us on Saturday Mornings!

Please consider joining other members and friends of BHCC for Saturday morning Adult Education sessions via Zoom. These are a great way to begin your Saturday with reflection and growth, as well as a chance to “see” people within our church community that we have otherwise been missing. Through the rest of this year, Adult Education will focus on the themes of Spiritual Self Care and Racial Justice -- two areas much on all of our minds these days.

We’ve already had thoughtful and helpful sessions on the first of these topics led by Pastor Brian Snyder and by Michelle Snyder. At this writing, we are looking forward to a session on guided meditation led by Karl Casey on November 28. Also in November, we have cooperated with BHCC’s Immigration, Refugee and Undocumented Persons (IRU) Discovery Team for two sessions: one by Immigration lawyer Kristin Schneck, Esquire, and another by Sandra Villarroel of Worth Manifesto. If you missed these last two sessions, they have been recorded, and the IRU Discovery Team will be providing

links in the near future. More importantly, you can still be part of upcoming sessions.

For the month of December, you are welcome to join in on the following sessions:

December 5 – *Talking About Race*, led by Pastor Brian Snyder

December 12 – Presentation by Elder Ralph Lowe, Director of Justice Ministries, Pittsburgh Presbytery

December 19 – Discussion of the book *White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* by Robin DiAngelo led by Michelle Snyder. (It’s not necessary to have read this book, but if you would like to, there are some copies available in the church office.)

December 26 – No Adult Education

All sessions will be held from 9:00 – 10:00 a.m. on Saturday mornings. Stay tuned for more details and Zoom invites in E-Blasts and make a plan to participate. All are welcome!

Director of Christian Education and Youth Programs -- Amy Grella

Children’s Worship **(Preschool through Second Grade)**

We kicked off the advent season on November 22 with a live zoom call where we learned about Advent. Each child assembled their very own Advent wreath banner. This would not have been possible without Carolyn Boisvert, who dedicated hours to pre-cutting felt pieces, plus sewing and assembling everything needed for this craft. Please be sure to thank Carolyn for making this wonderful craft possible. If you were unable to join us for the live call when we covered how to assemble it, you can find a link to the recording on the church’s website.

Children’s worship stories will continue to be pre-recorded and posted on the church website each week. During advent, children will participate in a special project and experience the joy of giving. Supply bags with materials to complete the advent activities have been provided. Please contact Amy if you did not receive yours or need additional materials.

Save the date for our eighth annual Sunday-After-Christmas Pajama Party and a Movie.

The event will happen via Zoom on Sunday, Dec. 27, at 9:30 a.m. Wear your pajamas, and have a blanket and

pillow ready to get comfy while we watch a short movie together. Full details will be shared with families via email.

Combined Programming **(Third through Eighth Grade)**

Our combined class for kids in 3rd - 8th grade will return to being remote only. On November 22, we began to meet Sunday mornings at 9:30 a.m. live via Zoom. Lessons are based off of the Sparkhouse curriculum, *Whirl All Kids*. Check your email for the Zoom meeting link.

The Pie Place Fundraiser Results

We are pleased to report that the youth group raised \$805 from the pie sale! The money will be used for materials to build an outdoor seating area in the church playground. The seating area will include a portable fire pit and will be a useful meeting place for groups for years to come. Thank you for supporting Bower Hill Youth!

Senior High Youth Group Meetups

We will continue to schedule outdoor meetups for youth in grades 9-12. Look for more information from Amy once schedules are set.



WORSHIP PLANS

Decem-

ber 6:

2nd Sunday of Advent

Communion

* Please have bread & grape juice available.

Isaiah 40:1-11; Mark 1:1-8

December 13: 3rd Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; John 1:6-8, 19-28

Rev. Fred Leasure preaches

December 20: 4th Sunday of Advent

Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

December 24: Christmas Eve

Candlelight Service

Available online all day

December 27: 1st Sunday of Christmastime

Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40

PASTORAL PONDERINGS



What Do You Want for Christmas? This has been a question that has often been asked of us and that we have asked over and over again. I am old enough to remember with great anticipation the massive toy catalogues that were sent out close to Thanksgiving by department

stores. Every night before I fell asleep, I would page through them and dream of a toy that would be the perfect gift for which to ask.

Toy catalogues have long been abandoned. We have been warned that this year delivery services will be overloaded and gifts may not arrive on time. Some staples for baking may be hard to find. Some seats around the Christmas table will remain empty. So, "what do you want for Christmas?"

It may be safe to say that almost all of us can answer with one word, "NORMAL!" However much that may be our desire, it is a want that likely will remain unfulfilled. Instead, let us remember that the gospel account of the birth of Jesus was filled with hardship and the lack of any semblance of normalcy. Perhaps a better answer this year is to find the inner peace of accepting the things we cannot change and to heighten our discovery of ways that we can share the love of the Christ.

Rev. Dr. Fred Leasure, Parish Associate

--COVID 19 MITIGATION CONCERNS ALTER WORSHIP PLANS--

At the beginning of the pandemic, Session appointed a task force to advise on mitigation issues. This task force is composed of medical professionals as well as those from the research community and those that are active in various community issues. The task force has had its guidelines approved by Session and has modified them regularly as we have been able to receive updated information from both governmental and independent sources. The goal has been to balance safety with the congregational desire to gather and retain some semblance of normality.

In spite of these mitigation activities, a risk of infection does exist if an infected individual attends a worship service. Given the rise in positive rates, the coming holiday season, and students returning from college, the task force met on November 15 to evaluate current conditions. As a result of their deliberations, **the in-person worship service is now suspended at least through the remainder of this calendar year. Likewise, the building is closed to all groups.**

Though the church office will remain open, we urge you to only visit the office if absolutely necessary. Wearing a mask is required and if your visit is only to pick up an item, please call ahead so that it can be placed in the hallway.

This has been a difficult decision, but one we feel is absolutely necessary for the well-being of all concerned.



- December 3:** Katie Philson
- December 6:** Steve Boisvert
Joan McAnulty
- December 7:** Richard Salvante
- December 8:** Sophie Hicks
- December 10:** Christine Henney
Kathy Philson
Estelle Smith
Laura Swedler
- December 11:** Jason Robosky
- December 14:** Leo Geis
Tim May
Betsy Prine
- December 15:** Morgan Kohler
- December 16:** Cynthia Kelley
- December 18:** Rob Mackey, Jr.
- December 19:** Richard Headley
- December 21:** Abigail Boisvert
- December 22:** Beth Gardner
- December 23:** Kemp Carter
- December 28:** Catherine Ventura
- December 31:** Betsy Hohlfelder
Sarah Neusius

THE BIRTHDAY BLESSING

Please take a moment to read through the names, pray for them, and offer them your best wishes! If your name is not listed, it is because the church office does not have your information. Please call 412-561-4114 or email office@bhccml.com.

PREPARING TO CELEBRATE

As we approach Thanksgiving, Advent and Christmas, we will all be seeking new ways to celebrate in this era of COVID 19. At Bower Hill, we are trying to get creative as well.

ADVENT BIBLE STUDY:

"Making Room: Sharing the Love of Christmas" -- A four session Advent Bible study will be led by our Parish Associate, Rev. Dr. Frederick Leasure, **beginning Wednesday, December 2, at 7:30 p.m.** This will be via ZOOM and limited to 12 participants.



Please register in advance by emailing: [mail-to:fhlea97@gmail.com](mailto:fhlea97@gmail.com)

This is a small-group offering that will explore the warmth of welcome at Christmas following interactions with Mary and Joseph, the Shepherds and the Magi. Just as Jesus made room in God's kingdom for those on the margins of society, we too should be asking ourselves who we can make room for this Christmas season.

TRADITION SHARING:

In an attempt to bridge the gap from distancing to community fellowship, our Parish Associate (aka. Fred) is seeking to gather a compendium of family stories, traditions and experiences that have punctuated your holiday season over the years. It may be a recollection of a toy you received, a scripture you always read, a special meal that was shared or something else. You are asked to take a few minutes to write it down, or video it and send it to Fred Leasure at fhlea97@gmail.com. He will attempt to collate it with others and have it available on the church website to be shared. In our isolation, this has the potential to enliven our thoughts and share some oft-forgotten joys of the community. Please take a few moments to make our celebration more special this year.



Christmas
Traditions

2020 Advent Devotionals



Advent begins on Sunday, November 29. This year, our Advent daily devotionals are provided courtesy of the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary alumni.

I've attached a pdf of the entire Advent season devotionals (if you'd like to print it), but you can also go directly to the website, www.pts.edu/devotional and scroll down to get the direct links to view the entire Advent devotional or to read it daily online and listen to the audio if you wish.

If you do not have access to a printer and would like to have a paper copy, please call the office to arrange a time to stop by and pick one up. Office hours will be limited due to the pandemic, so please call ahead. Thank you.

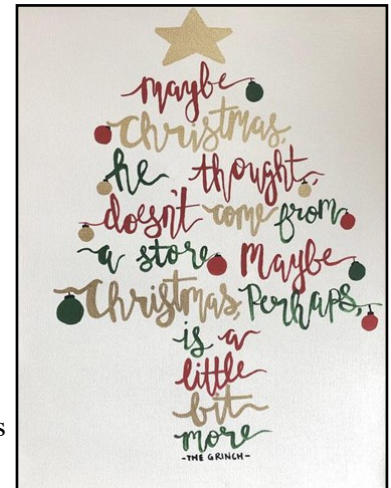
Karen Reynolds

BHCC Office Administrator
412-561-4114

ECO-JUSTICE TEAM NEWS

This will be a very different Christmas for us in our merchandise-driven Western society. Less entertaining and small gatherings will free us up from some of our accustomed spending. Months of a slower pace have led many of us to consider what is truly important and how to simplify our lives. Along with that, it is easy to add climate and environmental decisions into our planning.

First of all, consider banning glitter this year (actually aluminum metalized polyethylene terephthalate, or PET), which breaks down into microplastic beads when washed into rivers, lakes, and oceans. Tinsel and shiny wrapping paper are not recyclable, and end up in landfills, the "gift" that keeps on giving. Plain brown paper or newsprint can be decorated to make them both safe and attractive. In addition, seek out fabric gift bags, make your own, or use recycled scarves. Some of the links at the end of this article offer many suggestions for a green Christmas. Make this year's holiday season not only joyful, but creative and healthy!



<https://www.countryliving.com/uk/homes-interiors/interiors/g25329535/eco-friendly-christmas-ideas-green-christmas/>

<https://learn.eartheasy.com/guides/how-to-have-a-green-christmas/>

<https://friendsoftheearth.uk/lifestyle/21-ecofriendly-christmas-tips>

We would like to point out that our own Rich Salvante has started a business collecting food waste from Mt. Lebanon homes. He and his partner are profiled in the following article:

https://thealmanac.net/news/the-compost-people-mt-lebanon-service-provides-residential-pickup-of-food-waste/article_27407d8e-1701-11eb-aa4a-4397ec086415.html

This is a valuable service and one that might interest you.

The Eco-Justice Team wishes you a meaningful and fulfilling holiday season!



The church office will be closed on the following dates for the holidays:

CHRISTMAS EVE AND DAY
December 24-25

NEW YEAR'S EVE AND DAY De-
cember 31 and January 1

UPCOMING DEADLINES

Article submissions for the January newsletter are due into the church office by Tuesday, December 15.

There is no Session meeting in December.



Bookworms

The group continues to meet on the fourth Tuesday of the month at 1:00 p.m. via ZOOM.

December -- no meeting

January -- *American Dirt*, by Jeanne Cummins

BHCC Information

Rev. Dr. Brian Snyder, Pastor

Parish Associate, Rev. Dr. Fred Leasure

Company of Pastors

Rev. Tami Hooker

Rev. Phil Jamison

Rev. Dr. Fred Leasure

Rev. Dr. Betty Sykes

Amy Grella, Director

Christian Education and Youth Programs

Anne Smith

Director of Music Ministries

Philip Engel

Financial Secretary

Karen Reynolds

Office Administrator

THE CHURCH OFFICE

(412) 561-4114

office@bhccml.com

Monday - Friday, 9:00 a.m.— 2:30 p.m.

www.BowerHillChurch.org

LIGHTING THE STEEPLE

Dedication for December 7

*In memory of **Bill Andrews**
on his 80th birthday.*



The opportunity to light the steeple of Bower Hill Community Church continues to be successful. Many have sponsored a night in memory or in honor of a person or a special occasion. Notice of the lighting and the person, event, or date that it commemorates, will appear in the weekly bulletin. The cost of this is \$10 a day and can be sent directly to the church.

Requests should include: 1) the date(s) you would like to sponsor; 2) the reason you want to sponsor (in honor, in memory, etc.); 3) the name of the person(s) or the event as you want it to appear in the bulletin; 4) your name. Email your request to: Amy Leasure at amlea97@hotmail.com.

MULTIPLE SPONSORS can share the SAME DATE.

LUCILLE AUDREY (BLUME) HECKMAN

March 21, 1927 - November 20, 2020

Lucille passed away peacefully of natural causes.

Arrangements were private and entrusted to

William Slater II Funeral Service, where a full obituary can be found by accessing their website: <https://www.slaterfuneral.com/> or via the Post-Gazette: <https://obituaries.post-gazette.com/>.



Individual cards to the family may be addressed to Lynn, Loreen, and Lee, c/o Lee Heckman, 1086 Lakemont Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15243.

BHCC Care List

**Jeff Carper, Dennis Geis, Sr., Nancy Geis,
Dave and Nancy Green, Jim McAnulty**

**Rev. Glenn Loper, 1st Baptist Church
LuAnne Pattison, former member**

