



~“Will the Circle Be Unbroken?”~

““It is God who sits above the circle of the earth...who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in.”

~Isaiah 40:22

Dear Members and Friends,

At the close of Nina Helbling’s funeral, we all stood in a circle, held hands, and sang “Will the Circle Be Unbroken”? It was maybe the most inspiring ending I have ever seen for a funeral—and perhaps for a life! It was upbeat and hopeful, and it spoke to something deep in the human spirit: the circularity of life. Life runs in circles, doesn’t it? The earth is a circle. The sun is a circle. Moons, and stars, and planets, too. The great journey that the earth makes around the sun—at 67,000 miles per hour!—is a nearly perfect circle. We can’t feel the spinning motion, but we observe it in seasons of warmth and cold, as days grow shorter or longer. Light yields to darkness; darkness yields to light. At the dawn of 2023, we’re completing yet another one of those great spherical journeys known as a year. It’s strange to think that “time” is nothing more than our circle (the earth) making a circle (its orbit) around another circle (the sun). It can be dizzying, all this spinning in circles. The New Year makes me think about the circles we travel.

Have you ever walked a prayer labyrinth? It’s a circle. In my doctoral program at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, one of the professors took our class outside and made us walk a labyrinth. I had always resisted labyrinths up to that point because I saw them as a spiritual fad—and I’m allergic to fads. The class was huge, about thirty pastors of many denominations, but mainly black Baptists. Most were uncertain about the labyrinth, myself included. For me, the labyrinth was just a little too public, too. It sat close to a busy street. Surely we’d be a spectacle to passersby—thirty middle-aged oddballs just inside the walls of the seminary, walking in a circle and staring at their toes.

But it was June in upstate New York. The stately campus was abloom with lilacs. We started walking the labyrinth uncertainly, just wanting to get it over with. But blame it on the lilacs, or the birdsong, or the open air, or the constant circular motion of walking the labyrinth. By the time we finished, every last one of us was deeply moved. A tough, sarcastic pastor, who led a large urban congregation, became unexpectedly emotional. He said, “The labyrinth showed me how to forgive someone I’ve needed to forgive for a long time.” Isn’t forgiveness a kind of circle, too?

Wedding bands, prayer beads, mandalas, labyrinths. There’s something sacred about a circle. Resurrection, too, is the old eternal circle of life, death, and new life—repeated forever in every individual in every age. Our lives tend to run in circles. We keep re-encountering the same lessons, experiences, ideas, and truths. But somehow the repetition is not rote; it’s familiar and yet fresh each time. We keep returning to certain people, and places, and events. What are some of circles in your life? (Cameroon keeps coming back to me, though I’ve tried to let it go.) If our individual lives run in circles, it makes sense that our shared life does, too. I grieve the decreased participation at church since the pandemic. And yet, I trust those ever-moving circles to bring us back around to a new day. Those circles revive music and hairstyles that the world forgot. They send fresh-but-familiar blessings into our personal lives. The darkest day, like the brightest, does not last forever. Things can come full circle. In this New Year, God give us the wisdom to entrust it all to the One who makes and moves in all these many circles.

In Christ's Peace,

~Brian



WORSHIP PLANS

January 1
New Year's Day
1st Sunday of Christmas
Advent & Christmas Carol Sing
 (no sermon)

January 8
Epiphany Observed
Communion
 Isaiah 60:1-6
 Matthew 2:1-12

January 15
Second Sunday after Epiphany
 I Corinthians 1:1-9
 John 1:29-42

January 22
Third Sunday after Epiphany
 I Corinthians 1:10-18
 Matthew 4:12-23

January 29
Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
 Micah 6:1-8
 Matthew 5:1-12

The church office will be closed for the holiday on January 2, and for Martin Luther King Day on January 16.

Upcoming Deadlines - Article submissions for the February newsletter and Session reports for the January Session meeting are due into the church office by Sunday, January 15.



Thank you so much for sharing your child's musical gifts in worship on December 18th and 24th. It was phenomenal!

To help us continue the music-making in 2023, please visit our [website](#) to complete an availability form for the winter and spring seasons. I hope to have groups of musicians perform two or three more times before the summer. The exact dates of rehearsals and performances will depend on everyone's availability.

If your musician would rather not participate, that's ok too!

If you have multiple musicians in your household, please complete a form for each one.

Here's to a fantastic Christmas and a musical 2023!

PASTORAL PONDERINGS

What is a sanctuary? One definition has it as a safe place or a place of refuge. Throughout the ages it has also been known as a holy place. A place where on occasion the Almighty revealed himself. As we enter the Sanctuary on a Sunday morning, do we feel that sense of awe and tranquility?

Most often we encounter people running from person to person to greet them. Sometimes it has become an opportunity to enlist someone to be part of a committee or take charge of an event. For others, it is a time to find the hymns and mark their place. Does this really give us time to reflect and experience the opportunity for encountering a holy place?

I would like to suggest that in the 5 to 10 minutes before the worship starts we seek to have a quiet time. To acknowledge others, but save our fellowship time to passing the peace or the fellowship hour. See what listening to the prelude and experiencing the quiet voice of God brings to our worship experience. Let's try it!

~ Rev. Dr. Fred Leasure, Parish Associate

*De-Deck
the Halls*



De-Deck the Halls

Many hands make light work! All are invited to stay after worship on Sunday, January 8, to help un-decorate the church.

Regular second-hour classes will resume January 15.

Sanctuary Flowers/Donation Dedications

If you are interested in purchasing flowers or making a donation to the charity of your choice as a dedication in memory/honor of a loved one, please contact the church office to request a form or information.



Lighting the Steeple

Requests should include; the date(s) you would like to sponsor, the reason you want to sponsor (in honor, in memory, etc.), the name of the person(s) or the event as you want it to appear in the bulletin, and your name. Email your request to: Amy Leasure at amlea97@hotmail.com. MULTIPLE sponsors can share the SAME DATE.



Adult Education Classes in January

As we enter the new year, our Adult Education classes are still exploring service and servanthood. We are meeting during BHCC's second hour between 11:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. in the Friendship Room and online via Zoom for those who cannot join us in-person. All adults and youth are welcome to participate in these sessions, and the Zoom link will be sent in the Friday E-Blasts.

January sessions will be as follows:

On January 8, we will be "De-decking the Halls" so there will be no Adult Education class.

On January 15, BHCC member Debbie Boisvert will be leading us in an exploration of "Service Through Song."

On January 22, Ralph Lowe, Director of the Pittsburgh Presbytery's Justice Ministries, will visit again and introduce us to what it means to be a Matthew 25 church as part of the PCUSA's Matthew 25 Initiative.

On January 29, BHCC member Sally Child will present "Experiencing the Presence of God in the Midst of Suffering" based on her experiences.

Other interesting and informative sessions are being planned for February and throughout the Spring. Don't miss these chances to grow in knowledge and understanding of Christian servanthood. Please plan to join us.

~Sarah Neusius, Chair Adult Education Committee

UPDATE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION MINISTRIES -- AMY GRELLA - 412-801-3723

New Dates for Youth Group beginning in January

Beginning in January, the 3rd-8th grade group will increase meetings to twice a month, typically on the first and third Sunday evenings. The senior high youth group will move their after-church meetings to the second Sunday of the month, mainly to avoid meetups on holiday weekends, when many families are not in town. These dates for the rest of the school year will be: 2/12, 3/12, and 4/16. Kids are welcome to bring friends or neighbors to join in the fun on any activity.

Upcoming Youth Group Meetups

January 1 – (No meeting for 3rd-8th due to the holiday... Happy New Year!)

January 8 – 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Senior high White Elephant party in room 105. Bring a gift no more than \$10 in value and a brunch snack to share.

January 15 – 4:00 – 7:30 p.m. (Open to all youth and adults) Meal prep for Hot Metal Bridge Faith Community Church. We will meet in the kitchen. A pizza dinner will be provided for volunteers.

January 17 – 4:30-6:30 p.m. (Open to all youth and adults) Serve dinner at Hot Metal Bridge Faith Community Church on the Southside.

February 5 – 6:30-8:00 p.m. 3rd-8th grade youth group. First Annual Pre-Superbowl Event (details forthcoming)!

February 12 – 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Senior high brunch out; bring money to cover your meal at a local (TBD) eatery.

Youth Group mission work at The Table at Hot Metal Bridge

We invite you to join Bower Hill Youth Groups as they host The Table at the Hot Metal Bridge Faith Community on the Southside on January 17. We will meet on Sunday night (January 15) to cook the meal including dessert. We will prepare homemade beef stew, bread, and bake cookies. There are lots of ways to support this effort. We need specific food donations, one or two adults to assist our youth in the church kitchen to prepare the meal that night, and volunteers to serve the meal that day. [Click here to sign-up](#) to volunteer for bringing food, prepping the meal, and serving at the Hot Metal Bridge. Check your email for additional details on how to participate in this service opportunity alongside our youth.

SAVE THE DATE for these Upcoming Awesome Events!

March 25-26 - Tweener Retreat at Camp Crestfield

We are thrilled to get back on campus at Crestfield for a fun-filled overnight, specifically designed for students in grades 3-6. The Next Generation Team of the Pittsburgh Presbytery is hosting this shortened retreat. We will leave early on Saturday morning and return by lunchtime on Sunday. Look for registration details in January.

High School Summer Mission Trip

A team of high school youth and adult leaders will be traveling to Puerto Rico for a mission trip leaving July 1, 2023. Check your email for further details and information. **The first deadline to register for this trip is Sunday, January 8.**



January 8 - After-Christmas Pajama Party

Join us for the ninth annual **Sunday-after-Christmas Pajama Party!** All Sunday school classes will participate on **Sunday, January 8**. Please report directly to room 110 at the beginning of worship. There will be no children's sermon in worship, but the nursery will be open that day. **Wear your PJ's and bring a pillow and blanket.** We will watch a fun holiday DVD. Donut holes, fruit, juice, and milk will be provided. Plan to stick around afterward to help de-deck the halls.



UPCOMING

Fellowship Events



Senior Men's Breakfast Tuesday, January 3 8:00 a.m.

Join us at Denny's restaurant at 2180 Greentree Road, near Swallow Hill Road. No reservation is required, and conversation is spontaneous. The regular meeting date is on the first Tuesday of each month. **All men are welcome.** Any questions or comments, contact Glenn Child at gstchild@yahoo.com.

Hooks & Needles January 7 & 21 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Hooks and needles continue to meet on the 1st and 3rd Saturday of each month. We will meet in Room 110 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

New Members and needle workers of all skills welcome! Hope to see you there!

Koinonia Wednesdays 9:00 a.m.

All women are welcome to join Koinonia, BHCC's women's Bible study group, and to explore and share in faith and fellowship with other women. This group meets on Wednesdays, fully in-person at 9:00 a.m. in the lounge (Room 110). Contact Sarah Neusius (sraahneusius@gmail.com) for more information or just come and join us.

Get Outdoors Saturday, January 7

Keep your eye out for the BHCC's E-Blast with more details on our January Get Outdoors hike.

Bookworms Tuesday, January 24 1:30 p.m. via Zoom

This is an open invitation to anyone attending Bower Hill Community Church, friends and family members, to join Bookworms, the Church Book Club. Reading and discussing books since 2001, members have enjoyed the variety of perspectives readers bring: from 'loved it', to 'yuk', to everything in between.

The group reads fiction, non-fiction, memoirs, biographies, really anything the group suggests. The conversation is assisted by online reader guides. Different perspectives create great discussions. All opinions are welcome. A list of the books read by the group is available on the church website. (<https://www.bowerhillchurch.org/books-read>). Check out the variety!

The group currently meets by Zoom on the fourth Tuesday, January through November, at 1:30 p.m. We met in the evening at the church until Covid made meeting in-person impossible. Virtual contact is still comfortable for most attendees, although that could change in the future.

Please consider joining the group to discuss any book that interests you. Reading every book and attending all the discussions is not mandatory to be a member. Come try us out. We may 'worm our way' into your reading routine.

January 24: Of One Blood All Nations: John Bingham: Ohio Congressman's Diplomatic Career in Meiji, Japan (1873 – 1885) ~By Sam Kidder

WESTERN PA DIAPER BANK

Remember to save coupons for disposable diapers and feminine hygiene products that you collect. You can drop them off at the church office during regular business hours or send them with your weekly offering.

UNITY FOOD PANTRY Collection Date - January 8

Unity Food Pantry's greatest needs are for boxed cereal, macaroni and cheese, and spaghetti sauce, although all non-perishable food items and paper products are welcome.



FROM THE ECO-JUSTICE TEAM

Happy New Year! We hope you've all had a wonderful Christmas, with your sustainable decorating, wrapping, and gifts. Our sanctuary was less decorated than in previous years, with wonderful results. We were more able to concentrate on the banners, the Advent paraments, the Advent wreath and candles, and the beautiful time of waiting.

As we enter 2023, we can continue to live a conscious life, respecting all of God's creation. A new year is often the time we consider making improvements in our lives, of changing things for the better. There are certainly many ways to do so. Our efforts to tread lightly on the planet often revolve around how we commute, what we eat and where we set our thermostats, all of which are useful and important. But the way we furnish our homes has a surprising effect, as well. The National Wildlife Federation reports that furniture manufacturers are the third largest consumers of wood, behind the construction and paper industries. The EPA estimates that Americans disposed of about 12 million tons of furniture in 2018, of which about 80% ends up in a landfill, up from 2.15 million tons in 1960. Some ideas to consider? Repurpose your old furniture. A table could work as a desk; a stool could become a nightstand. Wooden furniture can be refinished or painted, and upholstered furniture can be reupholstered or covered. Metal items can be placed outdoors for a weathered, vintage look. If you need more, buy vintage or antique furniture. Much of it is better-made than newer items, and often has built-in character. If you decide to buy new, look for companies that make things that last. Do your homework when considering materials. Experts recommend fast-growing trees, as well as plants such as bamboo, cane, rattan, reed and seagrass. Avoid slow-growing trees like Brazilian mahogany, Canadian white cedar, cherry, maple and oak, which take decades to mature. Look into wool, recycled polyester and Ultrasuede for fabrics, and linseed oil or beeswax for furniture finishes. Pay attention to the presence of toxic chemicals. With some research and thought, you can have a safe, beautiful home!

"And now let us believe in a long year that is given to us, new, untouched, full of things that have never been, full of work that has never been done, full of tasks, claims, and demands; and let us see that we learn to take it without letting fall too much of what it has to bestow upon those who demand of it necessary, serious, and great things." Rainier Maria Wilke





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Please pray
for Our Care List

Bower Hill Church Members

Jeff Carper, Georgia Gallo
Joan McNulty, Dottie Post



January 2: Amy Leasure

January 3: Eric Lansbery
Emma Marsteller
Lynn Sirinek
Sharon Suritsky

January 5: Erik Johnson

January 7: Drake Robbins

January 8: Colleen Marsteller

January 9: Eloise Grier
Mary Ann Scott

January 10: Carol Martin

January 13: Sydney Saba

January 14: Phyllis Madden

January 15: Matthew Kocher
Richard Rothrock

January 21: Beverly Burke
Ellie Marcovsky
Claira McElroy

January 22: Lee Ferrero
Dave Hicks

January 24: Lindsay Bruder
Julian Salvante

January 26: Brian Snyder
Inese Baumhammers

January 27: Adam Andrews
Anne Smith

January 28: Sally Child

January 31: Nathan Rising
Julia Snead

THE BIRTHDAY BLESSING:

Please take a moment to read through the names, pray for them, and offer them your best wishes!

Have we missed YOUR birthday? If your name is not listed, it is because the church office does not have your information. Please call the office administrator at 412-561-4114 with updated information.

JANUARY 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 9:30am Children's Worship (PreK-5th gr.) 9:30am Worship 10:30am Fellowship (Coffee) 11:00am First Baptist Worship	2 Holiday - Office Closed Montessori - Winter Break	3 8:00am Men's Breakfast Group - Denny's 8:00am Montessori School 7:00pm BS Troop 28 (FH)	4 8:00am Montessori School 9:00am Koinonia (110) 7:00pm Mayfair on Moffett (110, 105)	5 8:00am Montessori School 10:00am Worship & Music (101) 6:00pm Bells 6:30pm Cub Scout Pack 28 (FH, 105, 110) 7:00pm Choir	6 8:00am Montessori School	7 Get Outdoors - See the weekly church announcements for details 10:00am Hooks & Needles (RM 110) 5:00pm Epiphany Party (Rm 110)
8 De-Deck the Halls Unity Food Pantry Collection 9:30am "Sunday after Christmas" Movie and PJ Party (Rm 110) pre-k - 5th grade 9:30am Worship 10:30am Fellowship (Coffee) 10:30am - 11:30am Sr. High White Elephant Party (Rm 105) 11:00am First Baptist Worship	9 8:00am Montessori School 7:00pm Building & Grounds (101) 7:30pm Mission Comm. (Google Meet)	10 8:00am Montessori School 10:00am Adult Ed Committee (Google Meet) 11:00am Staff (101) 7:00pm BS Troop 28 (FH) 7:00pm Communication Committee - (Rm 101 & Google Meet)	11 8:00am Montessori School 9:00am Koinonia (110) 7:00pm Mayfair on Moffett (110, 105)	12 8:00am Montessori School 6:00pm Bells 6:30pm Cub Scout Pack 28 (FH, 105, 110) 7:00pm Choir	13 8:00am Montessori School	14 1:00pm Eagle Court of Honor (FH)
15 Newsletter and Session Report Deadline 9:30am Children's Worship (PreK-5th gr.) 9:30am Worship 10:30am Fellowship (Coffee) 11:00am Adult Education (FR & Online) 11:00am First Baptist Worship 4:00pm Youth Group Meal Prep (FH & K)	16 Montessori - No School Office Closed - Holiday	17 Hot Metal Bridge 8:00am Montessori School 11:00am Staff (101) 4:00pm Montessori (FH) 7:00pm BS Troop 28 (FH) 7:30pm Finance Meeting (Virtual)	18 8:00am Montessori School 9:00am Koinonia (110) 7:00pm Mayfair on Moffett (110, 105)	19 8:00am Montessori School 4:00pm Montessori (FH) 6:00pm Bells 6:30pm Cub Scout Pack 28 (FH, 105, 110) 7:00pm Choir 8:00pm Eco-Justice Team (Hybrid/FR)	20 8:00am Montessori School	21 10:00am Hooks & Needles (RM 110)
22 9:30am Children's Worship (PreK-5th gr.) 9:30am Worship 10:30am Fellowship (Coffee) 11:00am Adult Education (FR & Online) 11:00am First Baptist Worship	23 8:00am Montessori School 7:00pm Session Mtg. (ZOOM)	24 8:00am Montessori School 11:00am Staff (101) 1:30pm Bookworms (Zoom) 4:00pm Montessori (FH) 7:00pm BS Troop 28 (FH)	25 8:00am Montessori School 9:00am Koinonia (110) 7:00pm Mayfair on Moffett (110, 105)	26 8:00am Montessori School 4:00pm Montessori (FH) 6:00pm Bells 6:30pm Cub Scout Pack 28 (FH, 105, 110) 7:00pm Choir	27 8:00am Montessori School	28
29 9:30am Children's Worship (PreK-5th gr.) 9:30am Worship 10:30am Fellowship (Coffee) 11:00am Adult Education (FR & Online) 11:00am First Baptist Worship 2:30pm Compassionate Friends (101, 105, 110, FR)	30 8:00am Montessori School	31 8:00am Montessori School 11:00am Staff (101) 4:00pm Montessori (FH) 7:00pm BS Troop 28 (FH)				