



# Oak Leaves



Vol. LXII, Number 5

JANUARY 2020

## *The Practice of the Better*

by Parson John

The turn of the calendar to a new year invites reflection on the past year and the setting of intentions for the year ahead. Perhaps this is even more the case as we move into a new decade. Many spiritual traditions observe a practice of pausing at the end of each day to reflect. There is a collective intuition that unless life is lived consciously it will not be lived well. Do we have the courage to examine our lives, to look at the gaps between our intentions and our reality? Do we have curiosity to explore why we have difficulty living into our ideals?

My sense is that the more we give ourselves to daily practices of resting in God's love and experience that love in the depths of our being, the more willing we become to take an honest look at ourselves. Love deepens our longing to align with love, and love can only grow as it moves toward honesty, transparency and vulnerability. It is no accident that it is the greatest of saints who are most aware of their failings and weaknesses. They can see their shortcomings clearly, because they have learned to trust the love that holds them at their core no matter what. They no longer have to hide or pretend or avoid taking responsibility for their lives, because they know that love is not dependent upon their perfection. They discover in their bones the truth about us all, that we are loved not so much because we are good, but because God is good.

This deep knowing of a reality which we call grace causes us to wonder as we look at ourselves. Jesus, when addressed as good by another, said that no one is good but God. Was that false modesty on Jesus' part or deep spiritual insight? Paul in Romans 7 lamented that he was unable to do the good that he wanted. Some energy in him, which he called sin, led him to do what he did not want. Only those who try to live consciously every day know how hard it is to align their lives with their ideals. They see daily how energies arise in them which are petty, self-justifying, judgmental, unloving. Aware of their struggles to be faithful, they have compassion for others in their own struggles and failures. As Jesus instructed, they pray for forgiveness and strive to offer it to others.

My counsel in this New Year and this new decade is to go deeper than making a list of resolutions. Our spiritual tradition would call us to develop a daily practice of re-

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## The Practice of the Better (...continued from previous page)

flection and humble resolution to give ourselves to Christ at our core, until the still, small voice of Christ's Spirit speaks to our receptive hearts in every moment. Our collected hearts will tell us when we are in tune with Christ and when we are not.

I think that most sensitive souls are telling us that our collective energy today is not at rest in God. We are on edge with each other. Many are willing to justify un-Christlike behavior because of others' supposed failings or blindness. On both sides of our ideological divide, we believe that the others' faults justify our lack of love.

One of the core values of The Center for Action and Contemplation is that the best critique of the bad is the practice of the better. It is not enough for us to rail at the other side and to point with anger at how awful they are. This may temporarily make us feel better, but it is not a transformational response. What might it mean for us to practice the better? I think it begins with our own daily practice of giving ourselves to God and welcoming others as a church into such mutual soulful practice. See you in church!



## *Worshipping Together January Services*

**JANUARY 5, 2020**

**John 1:1-18**

**"Seeing the Light"**

**JANUARY 12, 2020**

**Isaiah 42:1-9; Matthew 3:13-17**

**"What We Easily Miss"**

**JANUARY 19, 2020**

**Isaiah 49:1-7; John 1:29-42**

**"The Extraordinary Ordinary"**

**JANUARY 26, 2020**

**1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23**

**"When Good is Bad and Bad is Good"**

## **Sermons Online**

Please note that you can listen to our sermons online by visiting our website:

[www.rumsonpresbyterian.org](http://www.rumsonpresbyterian.org).

If you have difficulty with this please contact the church office for assistance.



## Church School News

Happy New Year! I hope everyone had a happy holiday season!

Feels extra special that we are not only beginning a new year, but a new decade. I hope this new decade is filled with love and joy for you and your families. Here's the lineup for this month:

### January Schedule

- January 5th: John 1:1-18; Art project - Focusing on what we will bring into the new year and the new decade through the power of words.
- January 12th: Matthew 3:13-17; Craft - Baptism, renewal and letting go.
- January 19th: John 1:29-42; Writing Headlines - How ordinary people do extraordinary things. Being the bearers of good news and uplifting others.
- December 26th: Family Worship

If anyone wishes to help out by supervising a stand at the Christmas party, please reach out to me at [mlegge210@gmail.com](mailto:mlegge210@gmail.com) or 917-456-6228.

Marie Van Cleve, Director of Christian Education

## Music Program News



Dear friends,

Thank you: I wanted to take a moment and reflect on the Advent and Christmas Seasons, and to thank all the people that made the music so beautiful and heartfelt. Also, there are also so many of you who dedicated your precious time, talents, made important details take place, and so much more. I'd like to show my appreciation to you all: the adult choir, guest soloists, Andy Kirkpatrick, Hope Richardson, the youth choir, all of the parents, Josie Schneider, John Monroe, Steve Buchanan, Marie Van Cleve, Worship Committee, Session, Betty Ann Berube and Pat Wallace. Thank you all so much for all that you do.

Attention all of you who love to sing! The invitation still stands: if you would like to come and sing with the Adult Choir, even for a short period of time to try it out, please let me know. We'd love to have you visit a rehearsal to enjoy a fun and uplifting experience!

One date to mark on your calendars: On Jan 26th, the Youth Choir performs in worship.

Wishing you all a happy and healthy New Year! Thank you, and looking forward to connecting in church!

Andreea Fegan, Director of Music



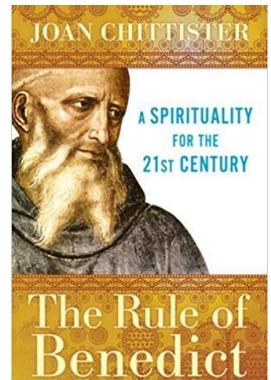
## Mission News

To all those who donated winter coats, gloves and scarfs - thank you. This year's drive was a great success. Your generosity is truly appreciated.

Sue Bostic, Mission Commission

## Adult Nurture Gathering

**Wisdom Wednesdays:** With the New Year, our Wednesday wisdom meetings will begin to explore The Rule of Benedict as a long-tested source for our spiritual awakening in daily life. We will begin by using Joan Chittister's book, *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century*. Benedict's Rule seeks to create a balance and rhythm to support a life of continual turning to God. God is to be found in every task and in every encounter. We need intention and support to become more deeply present to the God who is always with us. Our Wednesday meetings will follow a pattern of a brief body prayer, chanting, silent meditation and contemplative conversation around Chittister's book. All are welcome .



## Memorial Garden



A new display for plaques in our Memorial Garden is in motion. We have noticed that the plaques weather better when they are mounted on a slant than when they are flat. We have ordered three small granite blocks, each of which can hold twenty-eight plaques. The blocks will be placed in appropriate areas of the garden, with an eye to maintaining the natural beauty of it. The cost will be about \$5000.

We have received several generous gifts to support this improvement and are asking for others. Any gifts which bring us above the cost of the new displays will go into a fund for the maintenance of the garden. This is very important for the garden. These past two years, especially, have created an environment conducive to weeds. We need a fund to support regular weeding, mulch and trimming of plants.

The Memorial Garden is a much used and appreciated part of our church grounds. Thank you for your support which will enable us to maintain its beauty.

## Stewardship Drive

Thank you to all members who have taken the time to support this year's Stewardship Drive. Your support is greatly appreciated.

## Ushers Needed!!!



We are in need of a few more volunteers to be ushers or alternate ushers. We try to maintain around 10 usher teams, and each

team usually ushers 5-6 weeks each year. Thank you for very much for your support.

*Contact Rosanne Monroe at  
[rosannecanore@gmail.com](mailto:rosannecanore@gmail.com)  
if you are interested.*

## Nursery Volunteers

Please keep in mind that we will still be looking for nursery school volunteers for the summer months! Please reach out if you are interested or know someone that may be! Pay is \$25 for the hour.



*Contact Maria Van Cleve at  
[mlegge210@gmail.com](mailto:mlegge210@gmail.com)  
if you are interested.*

## Coffee Hour Volunteers



We all enjoy the coffee and delicious treats served Wilson Hall after Sunday's church service. Congregational Life is looking for volunteers for next September and beyond to keep this WONDERFUL program running.

*A sign-up sheet is located on the bulletin board.*

*Please contact Rosanne Monroe at  
[rosannecanore@gmail.com](mailto:rosannecanore@gmail.com)  
with any questions.*

## Rumson Senior Citizens Club

**2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Monday of each month at  
11:00 am**

This month we will meet on **January 13th** and **January 27th**.



We meet at the Rumson Presbyterian Church. Any questions or for more information, please contact **Sharon Cook** at **732-570-3787** (cell) or **[mygemini671@comcast.net](mailto:mygemini671@comcast.net)**.

*All seniors are welcome.  
It's not just for Rumson residents.*



## Neighbor to Neighbor

We request and continue to accept donations of the following items: CANNED GOODS, TOMATO PRODUCTS, PASTA, RICE, BEANS and FRESH GARLIC. Many thanks for your ongoing support!

*Nan Hosna*

## Per Capita Update for 2019

The Per Capita envelope found just before your first Sunday in February Stewardship Envelope is used in a special way. Each year every member of the Presbyterian Church (USA) is assessed a certain amount that is paid by the local congregation to the National Church. In turn, that money is divided among the General Assembly, the Synod of the Northeast and the Presbytery



of Monmouth according to a set formula. Per Capita money is used by those governing bodies to pay for administrative costs such as salaries of staff persons, office expenses, program materials, etc. In 2018, the Per Capita amount for the Rumson Presbyterian Church is **\$40.00** per person. By using this special envelope and including an amount equal to three and a half weeks of your regular pledge, we can avoid using scarce operating dollars. We thank you in advance for your support.

## Congregational Meeting Sunday, January 27th

There will be a Congregational Meeting that Sunday immediately following worship for the purpose of receiving the 2019 Annual Report (including the 2020 budget) and voting on the 2020 Terms of Call for Pastor John.



## Please see the upcoming events with Waterspirit

### Meditation for Earth

Tuesdays 12:15-12:45 PM

Quiet meditation and contemplative prayer for Earth

### Drumming for Water is Life

Tuesdays 6:30-8:30 PM (re-starting November 5th)

Praying and drumming for the "Water is Life" movement. Join in solidarity, prayer and drumming for all who are actively trying to stop new destructive fossil fuel infrastructure and who are advocating for a just transition to renewable energy sources. Drums and instruments provided.

### Climate Anxiety Support Group

Thursdays 6:00-8:00 PM

Waterspirit presents Good Grief Network's 10-week program for creating personal resilience in the face of climate change. Until December 11th.

Unless noted, All events are at Waterspirit

(co-located at the First Presbyterian Church of Rumson)

4 East River Road, Rumson, NJ 07760

Call or email for registration and more information:

732-923-9788 or [water@waterspirit.org](mailto:water@waterspirit.org)





## Caring for God's Creation

Submitted by Diane Burke and Sue Smith

*We share these articles to honor God's earth as part of Rumson Presbyterian's participation as an Earth Care Congregation.*

### ***Anti-Creation Narrative***

***by Lauren Wright Pittman***

*Originally published by Presbyterians for Earth Care at:*

*<http://presbyearthcare.blogspot.com/2019/10/anti-creation-narrative-by-wright.html>*

"It's really easy for me to focus on the beauty of creation in my artwork. I love painting the intricate feather pattern of a pelican, or the various shades of glittering greens in wetlands grasses. More recently I've realized, however, that my sole focus on beauty and the heartening, breathtaking facets of this wonder-filled world has been a sort of numbing practice. If I focus on what is good and remarkable in the world, I don't have to think about the ways in which it's being torn apart—the ways in which I'm tearing the Creation apart. I can build protective walls around my heart with the roses bordering my front porch and the squirrels that scamper about gathering acorns. I can insulate myself to the point of calm as fires burn brighter, hurricanes grow stronger, and water levels reach higher.

Although I want my artwork to elicit positive feelings about the gift of Creation, and I certainly hope it will continue to do so, I have been increasingly challenged by the boldness of young climate activists who have not sugar coated their words. Autumn Peltier, Greta Thunburg, and many others have stared into the eyes of power and have demanded hardened hearts to soften.

I am a Founding Creative Partner and Director of Branding for a collaborative, creative arts ministry, called Sanctified Art. Through this ministry I am able to create Biblically inspired images and reflections that reach congregations across the country and abroad, who represent various denominations and world views. Patrons who engage with this image and reflection might deny climate change exists, might be immobilized by fear and hopelessness, or might be climate activists who need inspiration and help in enlisting others. Below is my artist reflection accompanying the graphic art image,



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## **Anti-Creation Narrative (...continued)**

"Anti-Creation Narrative" inspired by Exodus 5:1-2; 7:8-23. This image is included in Sanctified Art's customizable worship series resource bundle called, "Unraveled".

As I sketched this image of Pharaoh, I realized how cartoonish and irrelevant this character had become in my mind. I asked myself, "What would Pharaoh look like today?" [Of course the obvious images came to mind, world leaders who turn a blind eye to climate change and heads of corporations clinging tightly to the almighty dollar.] I continued to sit with this question as a creeping sense of irony came over my body. I would argue, to my surprise, that a modern Pharaoh might look a bit like the reflection in my mirror, and maybe in yours.

This story of Pharaoh's hardening heart leads to a kind of anti-creation narrative—one where the world is coming undone and actively being destroyed. Sound familiar?

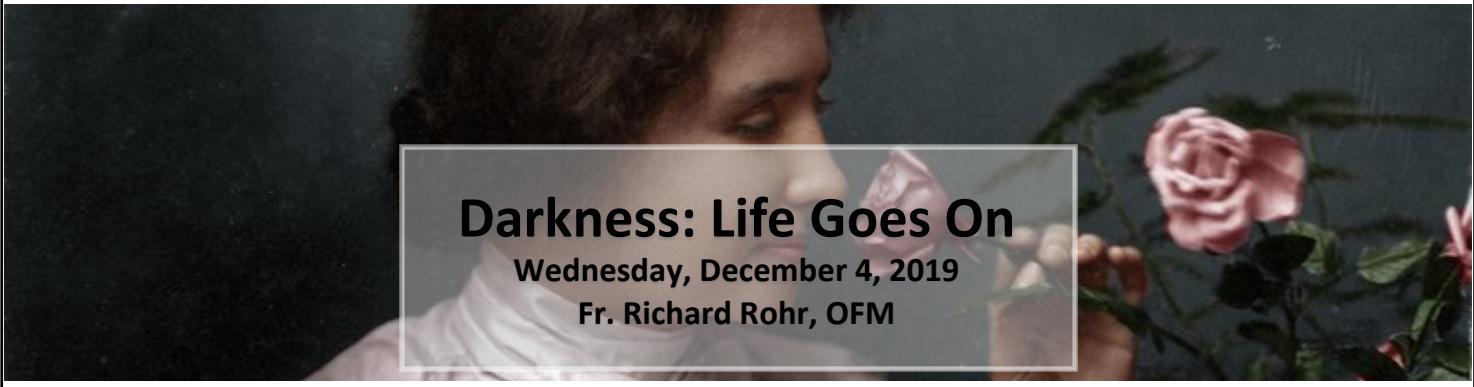
As a society, we are actively undoing God's creation through our consumption while clinging to ease, convenience, and our power over our environment. We harden our hearts to the ways our actions cause harm. We value our comfort over the health of our coastlines while the first climate refugees flee their homes due to rising tides and sinking land. As water becomes scarce, violence will increase. Many will have to fight for their basic needs. I believe Pharaoh's hardening heart is prophetic. This narrative reveals to us how a person's clinging to power can literally unravel creation. We often undo the threads of creation, while God entreats us to become co-creators. We have seam rippers in our hands when God wants us to have needle and thread. There is a difficult hope in the narrative, however. Our own unraveling of God's dream for creation is not strong enough to thwart God's plan. Ultimately the Israelites find liberation. In this image, the waters of the parted Red Sea frame the chaos of the plagues. We will succeed, with God's help, in healing the earth. We just need to allow God to soften our hearts, to take initiative in changing our perspective, and to welcome the challenge of restoring creation."

*Lauren Wright Pittman is Founding Creative Partner and Director of Branding for the collaborative arts ministry called Sanctified Art. Sanctified Art works collaboratively to bring scripture and theological themes to life through film, visual art, curriculum, coloring pages, liturgy, graphic designs, and more. Lauren lives in Anderson, SC with her husband Chad and their dog Rumi, where they spend their days traveling, hiking, and kayaking.*



## **Notice to Commission Chairs**

Annual Reports are due on January 13, 2020. Please email final copies to Steve Buchanan at [atsbuchanan@rumsonpresbyterian.org](mailto:atsbuchanan@rumsonpresbyterian.org).



## Darkness: Life Goes On

Wednesday, December 4, 2019

Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM

*Sister Joan Chittister continues to reflect on what it means to suffer through times of doubt or unknowing when it comes to our faith:*

The sense of being stranded in the midst of life . . . is enough to drain a person's very personality until there is little left to recognize. Where did the joy go all of a sudden? Where did the feeling of self-confidence disappear to in the midst of this emptiness? Just yesterday life was clear and vibrant. Today it is endlessly bleak. The darkness is unyielding. Nothing helps; nothing takes it away.

There is no light here, we think. But we think wrong.

There is a light in us that only darkness itself can illuminate. It is the glowing calm that comes over us when we finally surrender to the ultimate truth of creation: that there is a God and we are not it. . . . Then the clarity of it all is startling. Life is not about us; we are about the project of finding Life. At that moment, spiritual vision illuminates all the rest of life. And it is that light that shines in darkness.

Only the experience of our own darkness gives us the light we need to be of help to others whose journey into the dark spots of life is only just beginning. It's then that our own taste of darkness qualifies us to be an illuminating part of the human expedition. Without that, we are only words, only false witnesses to the truth of what it means to be pressed to the ground and rise again.

The light we gain in darkness is the awareness that, however bleak the place of darkness was for us, we did not die there. We know now that life begins again on the other side of the darkness. Another life. A new life. After the death, the loss, the rejection, the failure, life does go on. Differently, but on. Having been sunk into the cold night of . . . despair—and having survived it—we rise to new light, calm and clear and confident that what will be, will be enough for us.

*And I, Richard, believe that even when we or someone we love does die, life has not ended; it is merely transformed. It takes great humility to admit we have suffered through this kind of darkness, because it often sounds like a loss of faith to those who have not*

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## **Darkness: Life Goes On (...continued)**

*endured it. But when everything we thought we knew has turned to “nada,” in the language of John of the Cross, we actually become more loving and compassionate human beings, for we no longer rely on our own light but upon the Light of the world living within us.*

### **Reference:**

Joan Chittister, *Between the Dark and the Daylight: Embracing the Contradictions of Life* (Image: 2015), 19-20.

**Image credit:** *Helen Keller, no. 8 (detail)*, 1904, Whitman Studio, The Helen Keller Foundation; colorist, Jared Enos.

**Inspiration for this week's banner image:** *Not knowing or uncertainty is a kind of darkness that many people find unbearable. . . . The very meaning of faith stands in stark contrast to this mindset. We have to live in exquisite, terrible humility before reality. In this space, God gives us a spirit of questing, a desire for understanding. In some ways it is like learning to “see in the dark.”* —Richard Rohr

## FEMALE WINTER QIGONG SERIES

WITH JOYCE VIRANI

TUESDAY AFTERNOON 1 - 2:30



AT RUMSON PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
4 E RIVER RD, RUMSON, NJ 07760

# Time for Reflection

## Begin Anew



Every morning lean thine arms awhile  
Upon the windowsill of heaven  
And gaze upon thy Lord.  
Then, with the vision in thy heart,  
Turn strong to meet thy day.

—Thomas Blake

## A Sacred Partnership

Bible scholar William Barclay notes that John the Baptist was “startled and unwilling” when Jesus asked to be baptized. The evangelist thought he needed what Jesus could give, not the reverse!

We are pros at taking our needs to God — indeed he invites this: “Call on me in the day of trouble” (Psalm 50:15). But God also comes to us with needs: “Mortal, I am sending you” (Ezekiel 2:3, NRSV); “Go ... make disciples” (Matthew 28:19); “Carry each other’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2, NIV).

Apparently, God prefers partnership to acting solo. From the beginning, God has invited people to name the animals, tend the garden, welcome strangers, build the tabernacle, proclaim his word, ensure justice and mercy, share his love.

What does God need from you, as Jesus needed baptism from John? Salvation is God’s alone to accomplish, but then he calls us to share work with him, for the world’s sake. So we echo Jesus: “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this” (Matthew 3:15, NIV).

—Heidi Mann

## The Living Present

There are two ways of remembering. One is to make an excursion from the living present back into the dead past. The other way is to summon the dead past back into the living present. ...

When Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me,” (1 Corinthians 11:24), he was not prescribing a periodic slug of nostalgia.

—Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*

## Words of Wisdom

“Our hope is not in the new year, but in the One who makes all things new.”

—Unknown

“What a wonderful thought it is that some of the best days of our lives haven’t even happened yet.”

—Anne Frank

“We should work for a world not simply that hates hatred, but that loves love.”

—Fr. James Martin, S.J.

“No one is useless in this world who lightens the burdens of another.”

—Charles Dickens

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**P.O. Box 399**  
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**~Please check our website at [www.rumsonpresbyterian.org](http://www.rumsonpresbyterian.org) for calendar updates~**

**JANUARY 2020**

Jan 1	Wed	<b>New Year's Day</b>
Jan 6	Mon	<b>Epiphany</b>
Jan 7	Tue	Meditation*
Jan 7	Tue	Drum Circle*
Jan 8	Wed	Wisdom Group
Jan 12	Sun	<b>Baptism of the Lord</b>
Jan 13	Mon	Rumson Seniors Meeting
Jan 14	Tue	Meditation*
Jan 14	Tue	Drum Circle*
Jan 15	Wed	Wisdom Group
Jan 18-25		<b>Week of Prayer for Christian Unity</b>
Jan 20	Mon	<b>Martin Luther King Jr. Day</b>
Jan 21	Tue	Meditation*
Jan 21	Tue	Drum Circle*
Jan 21	Tue	Session
Jan 22	Wed	Wisdom Group
Jan 24	Fri	Climate Anxiety Group*
Jan 26	Sun	<b>Congregational Meeting</b>
Jan 27	Mon	Rumson Seniors Meeting
Jan 28	Tue	Meditation*
Jan 28	Tue	Drum Circle*
Jan 29	Wed	Wisdom Group
Jan 31	Fri	Climate Anxiety Group*

**FEBRUARY 2020**

<b>African-American History Month</b>		
Feb 1-29	Tue	Meditation*
Feb 4	Tue	Drum Circle*
Feb 5	Wed	Wisdom Group
Feb 7	Fri	Climate Anxiety Group*
Feb 10	Mon	Rumson Seniors Meeting
Feb 11	Tue	Meditation*
Feb 11	Tue	Drum Circle*
Feb 12	Wed	Wisdom Group
Feb 14	Fri	<b>Valentine's Day</b>
Feb 14	Fri	Climate Anxiety Group*
Feb 17	Mon	<b>Presidents' Day</b>
Feb 18	Tue	Meditation*
Feb 18	Tue	Drum Circle*
Feb 18	Tue	Session
Feb 19	Wed	Wisdom Group
Feb 21	Fri	Climate Anxiety Group*
Feb 23	Sun	<b>Transfiguration of the Lord</b>
Feb 24	Mon	Rumson Seniors Meeting
Feb 25	Tue	Meditation*
Feb 25	Tue	Drum Circle*
Feb 26	Wed	<b>Ash Wednesday</b>
Feb 26	Wed	Wisdom Group
Feb 28	Fri	Climate Anxiety Group*
Feb 29	Sat	<b>Leap Day</b>

\*WATERSPIRIT sponsored event. All are welcome.



**[www.rumsonprebyterian.org](http://www.rumsonprebyterian.org)**