

Oak Leaves

Vol. LXIII, Number 1

SEPTEMBER 2020

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A Contemplation (by Parson John)

Returning to Normal?

By Parson John

After nearly six months, we will open our doors for worshippers again on Sunday, September 13 at 9:45 AM. I have spelled out many details about our protocols for reopening in a recent email blast and we will share our protocols in this newsletter—our first since lockdown began in March. Understandably, many will feel a strong desire to return to normalcy after a lengthy period of quarantine and reduced mobility. Indeed, it will be good to see each other in person, after a half-year separation from worship in our beautiful sanctuary. All of us will find, however, that this fall will not be like what used to be in our church life.

No doubt, many will choose not to return physically and will continue to worship via Zoom. As a worshipping congregation which is in-person and virtual at the same time, we will be gathered in different modalities together. Think about that. I plan on conducting our service, which still focuses on virtual worshippers, even as people will be sitting in the sanctuary. Perhaps this, in some small way, is a metaphor for the communion of saints which the church has recognized. We believe that we are gathered in space and time while simultaneously being connected with a dimension outside of time and space which includes souls who are no longer in this material realm.

I share this as a way of stretching us to embrace a worship experience which will not make us feel like we are returning to normal. Masks, physical distancing, no touching, no congregational singing, no coffee hour, no bulletins, while I speak not only to those in the pews, but also to those whose faces and names appear on my computer screen. Remember that proverbial church complaint that “we have never

done it that way before?” Well, we are about to be forced into an experiment of doing church in a way that we never have before. This will be a test. This will go against the grain. It may not feel good to us. Or, it may awaken us to truly see the blessing of worship and community in ways we never have before. When things come easily to us, we often take them for granted. When things are taken away from us, we can see them in a new way—how precious they are. I believe that God is with us powerfully in these extraordinary times.

In our decision making about reopening, the Session has tried to strike a balance between strictness and trust. I have never felt so much like a parent. If you know me, you know how much this role is not one to which I gravitate naturally. God has a way of leading us into soul work that we might rather avoid. So, yes, I am taking on the role of an insistent parent. I am insisting on safety, even if it doesn't feel good, even if it goes against the grain. In the midst of this, I am hoping and holding the space for growth among us. I am challenging myself and all of you to commit to treating our reality as an opportunity for spiritual practice. Can we learn to bring presence and warmth and love to our new way of being together? I note that we have done exactly this, these past six months. You have shown up, even virtually, in powerful and loving ways which has created connection, encouragement and inspiration for others. You have for me and I thank you.

Some of you, I look forward to seeing in church once again. Some of you, I look forward to seeing you in virtual church as we have for many months now. For all of us, I pray for an ever-deepening realization of the infinite love of God which holds us all in every moment. Blessings all!



Worshipping Together in September

Sunday, September 6th, 2020 @ 9:15 AM

Sermon: "Which Side Does God Choose in Conflict?" by Rev. John W. Monroe, III

Scripture: Exodus 12:1-14 and Matthew 18:15-20

It is one thing to adopt a Christian ideal. It is another thing to put it into practice amid the brokenness which shows up in human communities and human history. How do we live out our Christian faith in times of conflict?

Sunday, September 13th, 2020 @ 9:45 AM

Sermon: "Mirroring Mercy" by Rev. John W. Monroe, III

Scripture: Romans 14:1-12 and Matthew 18:21-35

Perhaps the reason we have difficulty being gracious to others is that we have not understood the depths of God's love for us, nor how dependent upon God's grace we are. Until we see God's mercy for us it may be difficult for us to mirror God's mercy for others.

Sunday, September 20th, 2020 @ 9:45 AM

Sermon: "Grumbling and Gratitude" by Rev. John W. Monroe, III

Scripture: Exodus 16:2-15 and Matthew 20:1-16

Life is challenging. Often it does not go according to our desires. Frequently, it seems to us that others have an easier path than we do. We are tempted to grumble. When we are challenged, can we learn to practice gratitude?

Sunday, September 27th, 2020 @ 9:45 AM

Sermon: "Running on Empty" by Rev. John W. Monroe, III

Scripture: Philippians 2:1-13 and Matthew 21:23-32

The pattern of Christ is one of emptying and letting go of privilege. We see such a pattern as foolishness. It is the pattern, however, which leads to true life.

For more services, visit rumsonpresbyterian.org/upcoming-services



Church School

Dear families,

I hope everyone had a wonderful summer.

After sending out feelers to get an idea of how families would like to proceed with church school, It has been decided to keep church school virtual. I'm currently researching and planning how to best facilitate this. Of course any ideas and suggestions are welcome as always.

I've missed the kids and am looking forward to seeing them on Sundays. First session begins September 13th at 9:45am.

Enjoy the rest of summer!

Marie

Church School Director



Music Program

Dear Church Family,

I wish you all a beautiful start to the fall season. While we are not currently hosting rehearsals for Adult choir or Children's choir, I do hope that everyone can continue making music in their own way at home and enjoying their creative time.

In the meantime, I'd love to send the youth some songs that they may enjoy singing along with. Some of my favorites are the following:

- [1. "We Are" By Kari Jobe](#)
- [2. "Come And Sing" by Mike Burn](#) (this link has MP3's they can sing along with)
- [3. I Will Lift Up The Name of the Lord by Mike Burn](#)
- [4. I'm Singing Your Praises by Mike Burn](#)

Please let me know if the kids would ever enjoy a short zoom singing session, maybe even weekly. If so, I'd be happy to set one up. Feel free to email me directly at andreeafegan@gmail.com.

I will continue to stay in touch as the weeks go, to see if there are any updates. Thank you!

Andreea Fegan
Music Director



Adult Nurture Gatherings

Wisdom Wednesdays: Our practice of contemplative Christianity has continued virtually since the onset of COVID-19. We completed a study of Joan Chittister's book on The Rule of Benedict and have engaged in the practice of a few awareness exercises from G. I. Gurdjieff. Chanting, silent meditation and contemplative conversation will continue to be the heart of these virtual gatherings. You are welcome to join us Wednesday evenings at 7:00 PM.




Church Mission

Our Mission Commission has been supporting local, frontline ministries in recent months in response to the hardships caused by COVID-19 for many people. We identified purchasing laptops for economically disadvantaged students as a priority.

We have discovered a local effort to put laptops into the hands of people who need them the most. If you would like to make a special donation to help purchase laptops, please send a check to the church with a clear designation that the check be used for the purchase of laptops. We thank those who are already committing to this effort.

In addition, you can see in this flyer, that various school supplies are being requested. You may make contributions by leaving items in the church foyer or by having them shipped to the church. We are grateful for the opportunity to make a difference for people in our area in this challenging time.



Back-To-School Supply Drive

ASTEP
Second Baptist Church of
Long Branch
Jacob's Ladder
Fidelity Lounge #42
MainFrame Mentors

August 12-27

Items needed include:

- Backpacks
- Glue sticks
- No. 2 pencils
- Composition books
- 3-prong folders
- Black/blue pens
- Color pencils
- Spiral note paper
- Crayons
- 12" rulers
- Laptops
- Hand sanitizer
- Tissues
- Wipes
- Face masks
- Forehead thermometers
- Hygiene packs
- School uniforms
- Undergarments/socks



Church News

Protocols for Reopening at Rumson Presbyterian Church

As our church leadership discerns how and when to allow in-person gatherings, we affirm our commitment to every person's safety and to the service and wellbeing of the community of which we are a part. We acknowledge that we are part of a church and community in which different needs and perspectives exist side-by-side. Just as we believe that Christ sees and values all, so we affirm our conviction that, as Christ's body, we are called to see and value all in this challenging time of global pandemic. Our commitment as Presbyterians is to seek the mind of Christ in all that we do and in creating and administering these protocols for in-person gatherings on church property.

Virtual worship will continue to be offered for the foreseeable future.

Protocols

1. We will not allow more than 30 people in the sanctuary for worship.
 2. The date of our first in-person worship service will be September 13, 2020 at 9:45 AM.
 3. All participants will be required to wear masks and abide by social distancing recommendations, at least six feet apart, with the exception of immediate family.
 4. There will be no congregational singing. All hymnals, Bibles, cards, pencils and cushions will be removed from the sanctuary. Music may be provided by our Music Director and/or designated soloist, who will be at a safe distance from worshippers.
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5. At least two trained ushers will be required for any in-person worship. Doors to the buildings will be locked until ushers are in place. Worshippers will be allowed to enter through one of two doors into the foyer from the parking lot or the door facing River Road. Worshippers will exit through the door leading to the porte cochere. One usher will be in the foyer, the other at the door leading to the porte cochere. Ushers will assist people in finding seating in places that are marked for seating. There will be no bulletins.
 6. Offering plates will be set at the two entrance doors and the one exit door. They will not be passed around in worship.
 7. On Communion Sundays, there will be no sharing of elements. Worshippers will either bring their own elements or partake symbolically.
 8. There will be no fellowship gathering and no coffee hour after worship. If weather allows, worshippers may speak with each other outdoors after worship, observing social distancing and the wearing of masks.
 9. Physical greetings such as handshakes and hugs will not be allowed. Thorough cleaning protocols will take place before and after every worship service.
 10. The Sunday worship service will continue to focus on those participating by virtual mode.
 11. Signed waivers will not be required for members or for Sunday worship.
 12. Names of all worshippers will be recorded.
 13. Downstairs bathrooms will be open and use encouraged only as necessary.
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Racial Equity Challenge : Exploring White Privilege and Anti-Racism

The world is changing but racism in the United States continues to be evident. There is a lot of talk that it is different now – there will be change and there will be equity. We are starting a group to educate ourselves about white privilege and racism, and to discern next steps we might take to help make that change happen. We will start by each participant taking the 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge. Beginning September 8th, for 21 days, we will each do one action to further our understanding of power, privilege, supremacy, oppression, and equity. The plan includes daily suggestions for readings, podcasts, videos, observations, and ways to form and deepen community connections, which will be posted to our Facebook page (facebook.com/RumsonPresbyterian) early each morning of the 21 days. We will be using a version of the plan suggested by the Presbyterian Church USA. We will have three zoom check-in sessions on Mondays at 7pm, from September 14-28. We will use this time to process what we have been experiencing during the challenge.

After finishing the challenge, we plan to read *Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race* by Debbie Irving. This book was suggested reading by the co-moderators of the 222nd General Assembly, Reverends Denise Anderson and Jan Edmiston. In the book, Irving tells how she stumbled into troubling and even shocking revelations about racial inequities after what she describes as “a blissfully sheltered, upper-middle-class suburban childhood.” Irving believed herself to be a good person and even tried to use her career to help people of color. But the book describes her gradual discovery of her own “white privilege,” which led to the realization that good intentions alone cannot overcome centuries of racial injustice. “Her story resonates with a lot of Presbyterians,” Edmiston said. “Our hope is that it

would start conversations. But it's not just about reading the book. My hope is that we would be somewhat changed."

If you are interested in participating, please let the church office know by contacting us in the office (732-842-0429 or admin@rumsonpresbyterian.org).

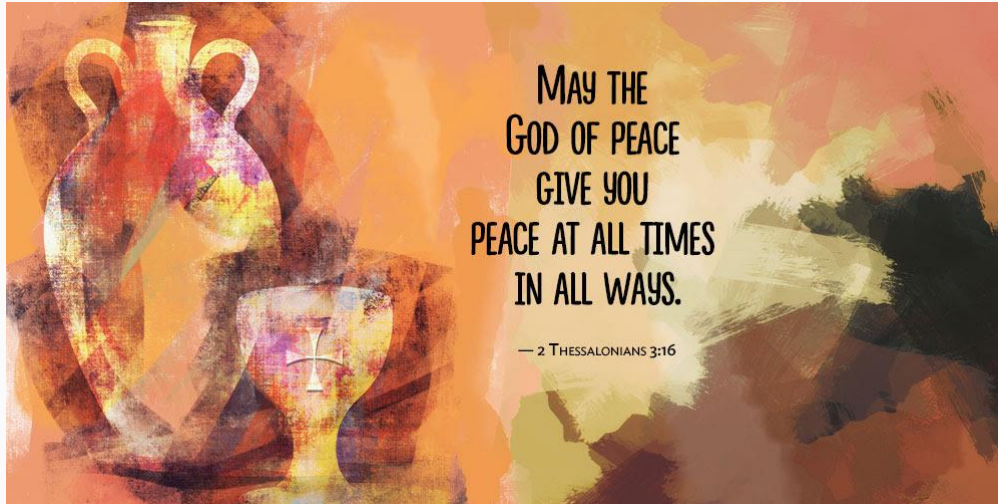


Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbyterian Mission



PEACE & GLOBAL WITNESS
SPECIAL OFFERINGS
PEACEMAKING AND RECONCILIATION

PC(USA) Mission News



Together We Are Building God's Household Of Peace

Our work of peace and reconciliation is supported by gifts to the Peace & Global Witness Offering. These gifts also unite us with Presbyterian peacemakers across the country and the world who are active, not passive; who are doing, not waiting.

25% of this Offering stays with individual congregations to support local peacemaking and reconciliation efforts and ministries.

25% of this Offering will go to mid councils to join congregations in support of peacemaking throughout presbyteries and synods.

50% of this Offering supports the work for peace and reconciliation being done by Presbyterians across the globe.

We are the peacemakers. We are the Church, Together.

When we all do a little, it adds up to a lot.

The Peace & Global Witness Offering enables the church to promote the peace of Christ by addressing systems of injustice in our own communities and around the

world. Together we are building God's household of peace where everyone is welcome; where all can find compassion, peace and justice.

Many congregations receive this offering throughout *A Season of Peace*—beginning on September 6, and culminating on World Communion Sunday, October 4. Sign up to receive a daily email during A Season of Peace on the Practices of Building Peace at pcusa.org/subscribe (look under Advocacy and Social Justice).



Caring for God's Earth

Submitted by **Diane Burke** and **Sue Smith**

We are running a series of articles from [Mission Crossroads](#) on the impact of climate change around the world.

A Rising Tide of Urgency

Churches help islanders respond to environmental challenges

by **Kathy Melvin** | **Mission Crossroads**

LOUISVILLE — When discussing the issue of forced migration, we see images in the U.S. of violence and economic inequality in Central America, South America and parts of the Middle East.

But in Asia and the Pacific, the Rev. James Bhagwan, general secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, said some areas are facing the extinction of entire cultures by rising sea levels, increasing ocean temperatures and extreme weather.

[The Pacific Conference of Churches](#), a PC(USA) global partner, follows the mandate to speak truth to power on issues of justice. One of the most impactful is caring for God's Creation.

“The sense of justice, the sense of providing sacred space, safe space, hospitality and helping people to be accompanied in that journey, where they are actually for the first time having to uproot themselves from generations of embedment in the land and the sea and come to somewhere else,” Bhagwan said.

More than 2,000 languages are spoken in the Pacific and on an atlas, the islands look like tiny dots spread across the page. That presents its own challenges.

“We understand the ocean does not separate us,” Bhagwan said. “It’s what connects us. So, we recognize that the ocean is our home and part of who we are, part of our identity.”

Pacific island nations are located in the Pacific Ocean, east of both Australia and the Philippines, as far west as Papua New Guinea, and as far east as Easter Island. The region is also referred to as Oceania — which also includes the Australian continent.

These people being forced from their homes are often referred to as climate refugees, environmental refugees or climate change migrants.

Natural disasters like droughts, bushfires and cyclones have become increasingly common in the Pacific island nations and many other countries as well. According to a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released at the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Paris, if the sea continues to rise at its current rate, some islands will be completely under water by 2050.

Because of excessive carbon emissions, the world's oceans are absorbing the extra heat in the atmosphere, but the effects are far beyond just rising waters. Pacific islanders are watching many types of marine life struggle and often die trying to adapt to the warmer water. This struggle has devastated coral reefs and fishing, resources that many depend on for their livelihood. The warmer waters are also causing storms around the world to be more intense.

At an international climate conference, former Kiribati President Anote Tong said his nation, with a population of about 105,000 people in the central Pacific, could be completely submerged in the next 50 years. Kiribati is a sovereign state in Micronesia made up of more than 30 islands. However, the current president, Taneti Maamau, believes that while climate change is real it is not man-made, so his administration has put aside the pessimistic image of a sinking nation and is focusing on building luxury resorts and attracting investors.

In Fiji, a haven for tourists for its natural beauty, coastal homes are flooding at high tide and the island's sugar cane is being destroyed by the sea water. The Marshall Islands declared a state of emergency in 2013 after a crippling drought that caused water shortages and crop damage. A year later, the islands were hit by a massive high tide that caused hundreds to evacuate.

In May 2019, the Pacific Conference of Churches hosted its third [Climate Action Pacific Partnership Conference](#) in Fiji. The consultation involved 45–50 people, most of whom were from Pacific island countries, including Kiribati, Nauru, French Polynesia, Niue, Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Tonga,

Samoa, American Samoa, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea and the Cook Islands.

A statement issued from the conference said in part: “As we seek to reweave the economic, ecological and ecumenical strands of the mat on which we all sit in the context of climate change, the Pacific churches urge innovative and ecological frameworks for truly sustainable, decarbonized development that draw on the nature-affirming spiritualities of the Pacific and the rest of the world and incorporate traditional knowledge with wisdom of Pacific and indigenous peoples.

The Pacific Churches will continue to accompany and advocate for communities facing climate-induced relocation, for relocation with dignity — particularly around non-economic loss and damage, spiritually-based trauma counseling and a framework for hospitality in the context of climate-induced relocation for receive communities who themselves are impacted.”

The statement calls on all church members and all Christians in the Pacific to eliminate single-use plastic bags, plastic straws and Styrofoam containers, both in their personal lives and in church activities. They are also asking for member churches to advocate with their government to ban single-use plastic bags and Styrofoam containers.

Although the crisis is critical, the Pacific Conference of Churches hopes it can have a realistic impact. “If we cannot be brothers and sisters to the fish, the land and the air, at least let’s be good neighbors,” Bhagwan said.

The Pacific island nations are not alone. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, reports that in 2018, 17.2 million people in 144 countries and territories were displaced by disasters within their own country. From 2008–18, their numbers show that 265.3 million were displaced worldwide. South and East Asia and the Pacific were the most affected.

Kathy Melvin is director of mission communications for the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

Transform Communities: Consider furthering the work of World Mission among our partners in Asia and the Pacific. pcusa.org/donate/E864200

A Meditation (by [Richard Rohr, OFM](#))



Being Peaceful Change : Look with the Eyes of Compassion

Wednesday, July 29, 2020

The Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (born 1926) is one of the world's most influential spiritual teachers. During the Vietnam War, his work for peace brought him into friendship with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Thomas Merton, and other Christians who shared his belief that peace must be who we are, not just something we demand. Thich Nhat Hanh teaches:

This capacity of waking up, of being aware of what is going on in your feelings, in your body, in your perceptions, in the world, is called Buddha nature, the capacity of understanding and loving. . . . It is with our capacity of smiling, breathing, and being peace that we can make peace.

Many of us worry about the world situation. We don't know when the bombs will explode. We feel that we are on the edge of time. As individuals, we feel helpless, despairing. The situation is so dangerous, injustice is so widespread, the danger is so close. In this kind of situation, if we panic, things will only become worse. We need to remain calm, to see clearly. Meditation is to be aware, and to try to help.

I like to use the example of a small boat crossing the Gulf of Siam. In Vietnam, there are many people, called boat people, who leave the country in small boats. Often the boats are caught in rough seas or storms, the people may panic, and boats can sink. But if even one person aboard can remain calm, lucid, knowing what to do and what not to do, he or she can help the boat survive. His or her expression—face, voice—communicates clarity and calmness, and people have

trust in that person. They will listen to what he or she says. One such person can save the lives of many.

Our world is something like a small boat. Compared with the cosmos, our planet is a very small boat. We are about to panic because our situation is no better than the situation of the small boat in the sea. . . . Humankind has become a very dangerous species. We need people who can sit still and be able to smile, who can walk peacefully. We need people like that in order to save us. Mahayana Buddhism says that you are that person. . . .

The root-word “budh” means to wake up, to know, to understand. A person who wakes up and understands is called a Buddha. It is as simple as that. The capacity to wake up, to understand, and to love is called Buddha nature. *[Christians would call this Christ nature, the Christ self, or the mind of Christ.]* . . .

When you understand, you cannot help but love. . . . To develop understanding, you have to practice looking at all living beings with the eyes of compassion. When you understand, you love. And when you love, you naturally act in a way that can relieve the suffering of people.