

The Third PRESS



December 2017

“Genuine Faith Grows Good Works”

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

(Ephesians 2:8-10)

In this newsletter, as we reflect upon Paul’s words in the passage written above, I want us to think about fruit – about good fruit and bad fruit – about the stuff we see at the top of the basket of strawberries and the stuff buried at the bottom ☺!

Of course, I don’t want to talk about strawberries, but about the expectation for the believer to grow “good fruit”, and about the role faith plays in cultivating such fruit.

Now, before we talk about the cultivation process we need to be clear on what good fruit looks like. And a good place to start is in Paul’s letter to the Galatians. In that fifth chapter of that letter we get a brief description of good fruit – of the fruit of the Spirit of God in the believer:

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Gal 5:22-23a)

And so, as we exhibit genuine faith -- which is the seed out of which the fruit of our lives grows -- we are to evidence love, joy and peace in and through our works, because genuine faith grows good works.

Moreover, we see that such fruit is nourished and nurtured by the Spirit of God working in and through us so that this fruit becomes, for the believer, the natural outworking of our normal functioning, even as an orange tree, when properly cared for, will by nature yield juice-filled oranges.

And so Galatians 5 and verses 22 and 23 describe what our lives are to produce – for those verses describe the essence of what makes our works good works.

But reality often tells a different story – for all too often our lives produce a different type of fruit, a fruit described by Paul in the immediately preceding verses in Galatians (vv. 19-21a) – a fruit that spreads like weeds in the heart of sinful people. (see also Col 3:5-9)

How does Paul describe that fruit? Paul writes,

“The acts of the sinful nature are sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.”

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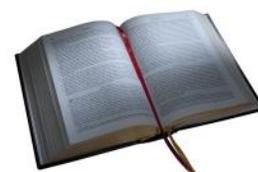
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A community of Christ  
-followers where,

The Head of the Church  
is...  
The Lord Jesus Christ

The Ministers of the  
Church are...  
Every Believer

The Passion of the  
Church is...  
to be Spirit empowered  
ministers of  
reconciliation to God,  
inviting all people to  
faith in Christ Jesus  
our Lord and  
to holiness of life.

~~~~~  
Our Mission:
To Love our God and
Neighbor
To Proclaim the Gospel
through Word and Deed
To Make Disciples of
Jesus the Christ



Quite a disturbing list. But what is even more disturbing is how, although we can more easily recite the fruit of the Spirit, we seem to produce a lot more of the weeds of sinful mankind, the product of hearts that wrestle with the enticements of the world, the devil, and our own fleshly passions.

And that from us good Christians!

Now, we may do a good job putting on our Christian face Sunday mornings, but those close to us, including God, know what goes on inside our hearts and minds, what goes on in those secret places in our lives, those places we all have! Like the husband who serves his employer, his community, even his church, well; but neglects, or worse, abuses his wife and children. Or, like the teenager who says that God is important, that they want to follow Jesus; but instead spends the weekends following their friends into sinful activities.

And why is this so? Why do we produce such rotten fruit, especially when there is that part of us that really wants to please God? Why, if we were once dead but by God's grace we have been raised to new life, does our behavior not reflect such grace? Could it be that our faith -- that faith which is the seed which grows forth good works -- is somehow defective or counterfeit?

As we wrestle with these questions in the light of God's word let me first tell you two stories which may help to illustrate the struggles we face in living out our faith.

First, there's the classic tale of the frog that fell into a huge pitcher of milk.

He knew he was in trouble, and so in his desperation he did the only thing he could do. He used the gifts God gave him, those strong legs, and he worked and worked, kicking away with all his might until he churned butter, which then enabled him to hop out of the pitcher and save himself.

Rumor has it that he "hopped around" the globe giving self-help talks.

And then there's the true story of D. L. Moody's encounter with a drunk on a street in Chicago.

You see, Rev. Moody, that great evangelist of the late 1800's made a commitment to God that he would never go to sleep at night until he had told at least one person about Jesus.

So one night after he had prepared to go to bed, he remembered that he had not spoken to anyone about Jesus that day. So he rolled out of bed, put on his shoes and overcoat and hit the streets looking for someone with whom to share the gospel.

As he walked along he came across a man sitting slouched on the sidewalk holding a bottle in a brown paper bag. The drunk looked up just as Rev. Moody was passing by and yelled out in a slurred voice, "Rev. Moody, I know you! I'm one of your converts!"

To which Moody replied, "You must be one of my converts because you certainly aren't one of God's!"

So what's the point of my sharing these two stories?

Well, in the first story, the frog was a pretty good frog, using his abilities, working hard and eventually saving himself. And perhaps that's possible if you're a frog stuck in a pitcher of milk, but it will only lead to frustration and disappointment if you're a sinner in need of salvation.

In the second story we're told of a man who heard the gospel and "received" Jesus, a man who "got saved", but who never "got changed"!

And each story speaks to the false teachings propagated by many Christians, which when adopted yield an empty, fruitless, joyless faith. And unfortunately, such is the faith of all too many so-called Christians today, with the result being that there is a severe discrepancy between what we claim to believe and how we live!

Now the first story, that of the frog, if applied to Christianity is a picture of "legalism". Legalism is the idea that if you work hard enough, and do good things -- using your God-given gifts -- you can somehow save yourself, you can merit your salvation. Sure, God may be involved in the process but you decide for Jesus, you obey his laws, you produce faith, and so any good works that result are yours.

The second story is one of license. It's the picture of what some have labeled the "Carnal Christian" -- the one who knows about Jesus, who prayed the "prayer of faith", who can recite the creeds from memory, but whose life produces little if any good fruit. Certainly, as with legalism, some good works are evidenced, but only the ones the "Carnal Christian" chooses -- only the ones that allow us to hold on to our comfortable, self-centered, and yet often self-destructive, behaviors. After all, we think -- even if we're not bold enough to speak it -- "Isn't Christianity all about what it does for me?" "Isn't it supposed to make me feel good, help me to be happy, enable me to be successful, bless me with a family that is practically-perfect-in-every-way?" "And didn't Paul say that God's love is unconditional -- so that He has to love us regardless of our behavior?"

Now unfortunately, both doctrines are promoted and taught in many Christian circles. For some there's the push toward legalism. And so life in Christ becomes about following a list of do's and don'ts with the end result being obedience without love -- duty without delight. On the other hand, and often in reaction to legalism, we find license -- where a verbal affirmation to the Gospel is all that is asked for, if that. Fruit is encouraged but not required, and so the grace of God is cheapened, and eventually the cross itself is scorned.

Both views present truth mixed in with lies and so both present a false gospel. In fact, as you may have noticed, both legalism and license flow from the same source -- the sovereignty of humankind -- which in turn leads to a false understanding of grace, salvation, and ultimately, faith.

And this isn't some new heresy. It's a danger Paul was well aware of as he wrote to the churches in and around Ephesus. After all, when it came to legalism Paul was an expert. Recall, before his conversion he was a Pharisee among Pharisees. He worked hard to appear righteous before God, and his works and his lineage was something about which he once boasted -- and even counted on.

Then he learned the truth about grace and faith.

Paul was also aware of the license of the many religions practiced by the Greeks and Romans, some of which encouraged idolatry, sexual immorality and the like.

Paul knew first hand that neither legalism nor license reflected the true gospel and although they seemed to be opposites they were actually offspring of the same idol, known today as humanism.

And Paul knew that neither could bring about salvation -- the forgiveness of sins and restoration with God. Moreover, neither could produce good fruit, the fruit of the Spirit -- fruit that reflects a heart devoted to God in love.

And so Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus admonishing them that they were incapable of doing or being anything that could merit their salvation. Their salvation was by God's grace -- a free gift of love -- un-earnable, undeserved -- yet promising innumerable and incomparable blessings.

In verses 8 through 10 of chapter 2, Paul summarized the truth that: it's God who is sovereign; it's God who is in control; it's God who chooses us, calls us to Himself, convicts our hearts of sin, redeems us, and recreates us. For, it's God who gives us faith. And it's God who prepares for us the works which flow from faith.

Paul wrote that our salvation is not from ourselves -- not something we can take pride in or boast about -- but is a free gift from God. Our salvation is grounded upon God's grace -- His love displayed in His mercy to forgive us of our sins because of what Jesus had done upon the cross.

Instead, Paul continued, our salvation is by means of faith.

And it's precisely at this point where some fall into legalism or license -- a legalism that saps the life out of Christianity, or a license that permits one's walk to differ from one's talk.

But what Paul meant by teaching that salvation necessitates faith, is that, if one is truly saved they will have genuine, Biblical faith. Moreover, Paul wrote, even this faith, like salvation itself, is a gift from God.

So what is genuine Biblical faith -- this faith that does not lead to legalism or license? What does it look like?

Our Reformed Tradition, and more importantly, the Scriptures themselves, reveal three essential elements of Biblical faith – characteristics which are interrelated and inseparable.

And, to help us understand Biblical faith, I want us to reflect upon these characteristics so that, if we find ourselves in the trap of legalism or license, we can recognize and repent from such error, and, through the practice of genuine faith, grow the good, God-honoring works for which we were created.

Genuine faith is first of all content. It's knowledge of the truth of the gospel. Indeed, without some knowledge of the object of our faith our faith cannot be genuine. When it comes to Biblical faith, we are never called to trust in someone or something that we know nothing about. And so, as long as one's eyes are closed and ears stopped to the things of God there can be no true faith.

Now to varying degrees we all practice what is often called implicit faith. For example, many of us fly on airplanes with little or no knowledge of aerodynamics, the mechanical condition of our plane, or the ability of our Pilot. We trust in the ability and knowledge of others.

But implicit faith, although necessary to function in our world, is not Biblical, saving faith, which is necessary for us to live in communion with our God. And so, when it comes to our salvation, we must have a right understanding of who Jesus is, what he has done for us, and what he requires of us.

This doesn't mean that we must know everything about God and have the entire Bible memorized before we can respond to God's grace. However, it does mean that God wants our mind. He wants us to know Him: to study His Word, to know His commands-and-promises-and-truths.

And it means that we must see Jesus for who He is: God Himself revealed in flesh and blood, and the only Savior of humankind. It means that we must know what He requires of his disciples, before we can confess a genuine faith.

But remember, this is only one component of genuine faith, because genuine faith is much more than head knowledge, just as sin is much more than a lack of knowledge.

Faith is content, but it's also much more.

And so a second characteristic of genuine biblical faith is assent -- a change of heart.

To possess genuine faith means that our wills have changed. To possess genuine faith means that our prevalent desires are no longer for sin – no longer for the things of the flesh but for the things of God.

By the working of the Holy Spirit the knowledge we receive about God fuels a heart transformed by God's grace so that it desires to respond to God in love. As a result, genuine faith demands and enables repentance. And in turn, as we repent and turn away from sin, faith enables us to turn toward God.

As Ezekiel wrote -- God takes our heart of stone and gives us a new heart, a heart of flesh that causes us to hunger after righteousness and holiness (Ezek 18:31, 36:26). And so we want to behave differently toward God and others. And in turn, we're willing to take the necessary steps in our walk with God that will help us to change destructive, hurtful, selfish behavior patterns and to replace them with behaviors: that minister to the needs of others; that honor God; and, that allow for us to experience genuine peace.

It's this element of faith that those who teach legalism and license fail to understand, because it's impossible for a man-centered-religion to bring about a spiritual change of heart.

This second component of faith, assent, affects the very core of our being, allowing us to desire God and His will, which in turn enables us to apply our knowledge to the bringing about of a change of lifestyle.

But there's more to faith than content and assent.

God wants more than just our head and heart, God wants our hands.

And so the third characteristic of genuine faith is commitment -- is trust.

Trust is the acting out -- the living out -- of what we know in our head and feel in our heart. Trust is the realization that we cannot serve two masters; we cannot have life our way and God's way -- unless our way is God's way! Trust is the recognition that if Jesus really is our Savior then He must also be our Lord.

Our trust in Jesus -- the application of what we know in our head and feel in our heart -- must cause us to follow him, if the faith we have is genuine, biblical faith.

In other words, there is no place in the Kingdom of God for a person who claims with his lips, "Jesus is Lord", but whose lifestyle tells a different story.

And so, genuine faith is faith that is characterized by content, assent, and trust -- interdependent and inseparable.

Genuine faith is faith that declares Jesus as Savior and Lord. Genuine faith is a free gift of the one sovereign God. And so genuine faith, by definition, must produce fruit -- good works -- not perfect works, but God directed works: a head that wants to know more about God, and less about how to gratify its sinful desires; a heart that longs for God and breaks when it looks upon injustice, prejudice, racism, hatred, and pride; and hands that seek to do the right thing, not just out in the open for all to see, but in the private places of our lives.

Such is the genuine faith which believers are called to possess, and such is the faith necessary to grow good works -- works that please God.

And that raises the question, "How do I know if I have such genuine faith?"

And the answer of the Scriptures is, "Check the fruit!" Is it good or is it rotten? Does it come from the Holy Spirit of God or does it grow out of the sinful spirit of man?

And, as we examine the fruit we must be sure to do so in the light of God's grace -- for both our faith and its fruit are the product of God's grace.

And so, when all is said and done, our role is to open our lives to the working of God's Spirit, to submit ourselves to the transforming power of God in us, to trust and obey, to die to self and live for God, and to avoid both the legalism of trying to earn God's love and the license of abusing that love.

In other words, in order to live a faith that grows good works, the best we can do is seek -- every moment of every day -- to live in communion with God, allowing the Spirit of God to guide our thoughts, inspire our hearts, and equip our hands, so that we might be those vessels fit for use by our gracious Lord and loving God.

And when we do this, others will see God's presence working in and through us, and perhaps they too will come to know and worship our glorious Savior and Lord -- Jesus the Christ.

God's grace and peace be with you,

Pastor John



Christmas Caroling at the Eddy December 10th

We will meet at the church at 3:00, travel to the Eddy to share some Christmas cheer with the residents there and return to the church to enjoy some food (pizza, cookies, coffee and hot cocoa) and fellowship!

We hope you will join us for an afternoon of music, fellowship, and sharing the joy of Christmas with others!



Help Fill the Shelves at Hope 7's Food Pantry!

Hope 7's food pantry serves families in need right here in our own community. The need is great and has been growing every year!

During the month of December we will be collecting soup.



Donations of other non-perishable food items will also be accepted.

In The Church Library...

Why not celebrate this holiday season by reading about the one whose birth we celebrate! There are several books in the church library that you can borrow including –

Jesus by Charles Swindoll

So You Want to Be Like Christ? By Charles Swindoll

The Case for Christ by Lee Strobel

The Case for Christ, Student Edition by Lee Strobel

Finding the Real Jesus by Lee Strobel

The Jesus You Can't Ignore
by John MacArthur



Who is Jesus? by R. C. Sproul

More Than a Carpenter by Josh McDowell

He Still Moves Stones by Max Lucado

No Wonder They Call Him the Savior by Max Lucado

Our prayer is that everyone will take advantage of the various resources that are available as, together, we seek to grow as disciples.



Remember in Prayer...

Our Shut-ins at home:

Tillie Herman, Marcella Goard, June Giles

At the Eddy: Dot Multunas, Edna Wells

Those dealing with health issues:

Stan Bentley

Our Church:

Pastor John and the Session

Our Community:

Those who don't know the Lord
Those dealing with financial difficulties
That our schools would be places of safety

Our World:

Missionaries serving around the world
Open doors for sharing the Gospel message
Persecuted Christians around the world

Dan serving in Africa:

Pray for the local believers that they would encourage and meet with each other
Pray that he will find a new French teacher
Pray that he will be able to make local friends and strengthen existing friendships
Pray for wisdom regarding the future
Pray for a local who has suffered very serious burns

Our college students:

Brian Giddings (Roger Williams)
Abigail McAuley (Boston College)
James McAuley (Albany Law School)
Joshua Multunas (Gordon Conwell)
Alida Sceccitano (Boston College)
Natalie Sceccitano (Houghton)
Angelina Solomon (SUNY Albany)
Serena Solomon (Coastal Carolina)

Become a Literacy Volunteer Tutor *and make a difference!*

Saturdays 9:30-4:00pm beginning in January
HVCC campus -Williams Road, Troy

For more information and to register, contact:

Literacy Volunteers of Rensselaer County

lvorc.coordinator2@gmail.com

(518) 244-4650

www.lvorc.org

Christmas Flowers

Order forms for Christmas poinsettias are available in the narthex. If you cannot make it to church but would like to purchase a poinsettia, please call the church office at 283-2420. **Orders must be turned by December 17th.** Payment can be submitted later if necessary. Checks should be made payable to "Third Presbyterian Church".



Luncheon December 9th

Come and enjoy some fun and fellowship. A luncheon sponsored by the Senior God Squad will be held on December 9th in the Post Memorial Hall. Lunch is at 12 noon with entertainment following; a barbershop quartet! Please RSVP to Vera or Jerry Whitman by December 4th at 283-4147.



Thanks to everyone who participated in and supported Operation Christmas Child. We filled **43** shoeboxes that are now on their way to children in need around the world!

Job Opportunities

The Capital City Rescue Mission has some immediate paid Ministry Job Openings available:

- Learning Center Director (full time)
- Finance Assistant (part time)
- Nurse Coordinator (part time)

More information is available in the church office or you can call the Rescue Mission at 518-427-8144 for further information.

There are also various volunteer opportunities available. To see their current volunteer needs please check online at www.capitalcityrescuemission.org or contact their volunteer coordinator, Deb Poczatek at vcoordinator@albanymission.com or 518-462-0459 ext. 237.

Serving This Month

December 3rd

Worship Assistants: Natalia Multunas, Ella Miller
Greeters: Dean and Doris Calamaras
Head Greeters: Peter Laz
Nursery: Megan Laz and Deena Dominy
Communion: Dean Calamaras
Fellowship Hosts: June Foltz

December 10th

Worship Assistants: Eric Ofori and Sue Stierer
Greeters: Jen McAuley and Bill Multunas
Head Greeter: Andy Miller
Nursery: Alice Bentley and Lois Pasinella
Communion: Deena Dominy, Bill Multunas, Doris Calamaras, Jerry Whitman
Fellowship Hosts:

December 17th

Worship Assistants: Kelly Valerio, Jesse Ofori
Greeters: Pat Gilmaier
Head Greeter: Rob Jensen
Nursery: Diane Lewinski and Ella Miller
Communion: Eric Ofori, Jerry Whitman, Jason Laz, Jen McAuley
Fellowship Hosts: Lois Pasinella

December 24th

Worship Assistants: Sue Laz, Natalia Multunas
Greeters: Valerie Bidwell, Vaughn Skarzynski
Head Greeter: Peter Laz
Nursery: Jaime Miller, Deena Dominy
Communion: Jerry Whitman, Natalia Multunas, Pat Gilmaier, Peter Laz
Fellowship Hosts: Whitman's

December 31st

Worship Assistants: Pastor John, Ella Miller
Greeters: Bill Multunas and Deena Dominy
Head Greeter: Andy Miller
Nursery: Alice Bentley and Lois Pasinella
Communion: Rick Russell, Vera Whitman, Rob Jensen, Sue Laz
Fellowship Hosts: Jen McAuley

Mission Updates

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms” 1 Peter 4:10

Your giving to Third Church enables us to support many varied ministries, both locally and around the world. The funds we give and the prayers offered for our various mission partners are greatly appreciated and we wanted to share some of the thoughts and comments we have received from those we support.

From Peter Halder (YFC Bangladesh) – “There are so many reasons to rejoice in the midst of all the sad stories in the country and around the world. Your prayers and support are making a difference in the lives of the many teens and youth that we are serving. It is a great joy to see 175 orphan and street kids eating every day and going to school through BYFC’s Children’s Home ministry. Drug addicts who recovered in the BYFC rehab center and Hi-Club kids live transformed lives because of His love and our service. Teens are coming to the knowledge of the Truth which is setting them free. Hallelujah! Our heart is filled with thanksgiving for His awesome grace and your heartiest prayers and financial support. All you see that we are doing and have been able to achieve over the past months is because of Him and your great partnership. Thank you.”

From Dan (in East Africa) – “As we move into November to weather has cooled considerable – it’s been in the mid 90’s. The cooler weather makes trips to the store and the commute to school much easier, but what I’m most thankful for is that it makes going out to meet people easier. Going out in the evening to play soccer or sitting in an outdoor restaurant becomes something that is not just doable but enjoyable.

I have really enjoyed teaching and have gotten into a good groove but this coming month I hope to spend a lot more time with locals. My French is at the point where, as long as the person is patient, I can carry on with most topics of conversation, so I am excited to get out and make some new connections.”

From Joshua Multunas (at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary) – “One big answer to prayer is that I have found a wonderful church to call home in which I can both intern and pursue

ordination. Starting next semester the pastor plans to work with me in the area of preaching and I will be given opportunities to preach both at the church and at a local nursing home the church holds services at.

One area I would ask for prayer for is my soul care group. For one of my scholarships, I am tasked with getting together a group of guys regularly for accountability and prayer. It is really easy to bet off track in part of life, and this group is meant to prevent that.

I appreciate all of your support, and know that I am keeping you in prayer. If there’s anything in particular you want prayer for, please let me know.”

From Andy Lightcap (Capital District Youth For Christ) – “Authentic Christ Sharing Relationships is a phrase that has been used a lot by YFC. It is however much more than a phrase. These four words sum up beautifully the methodology of YFC. They take us beyond the programs and bring us to the heart of who we are; a team of people whose lives have been changed by Jesus and desire to introduce kids to Him through relationships. Thank you for your part in helping us reach lost kids.”

From Perry Jones (Capital City Rescue Mission) – Thank you for your gift to help hungry and struggling men and women in our community. Because of your generosity we will provide close to 1,800 Thanksgiving meals. You’ll also be providing nutritious meals every day, safe shelter good used clothing, recovery and discipleship programs and free medical care to hundreds of men and women. Beyond physical needs, despairing people ready to give up on life are offered forgiveness and new life in Christ. Thank you brothers and sisters. God bless you all.

Information and updates on all of our mission partners can be found on the bulletin boards in fellowship hall.

Updates and prayer requests from Dan as he serves in Africa are posted on the bulletin board in the narthex.

Join us on December 3rd to worship and enjoy a special celebration for Edna Wells’ 100th birthday. Cake and goodies served during the fellowship hours.

Bible Quiz for December 2017

As we move into December and look to ready ourselves for the celebration of Christmas it's fitting that the topic of this Bible quiz is Christmas. So ready your hearts this Advent season with a friendly Christmas quiz. (Note: As you will notice (hopefully?), at least one of the quiz questions below doesn't come from Bible text.)

1. Who told Mary and Joseph to go to Bethlehem?
2. True or False: Joseph and Mary knew to go to Bethlehem because they were led there by a star.
3. What do the names "Jesus" and "Immanuel" mean?
4. Which emperor ordered all the young children in Bethlehem be killed?
5. What was the name of the innkeeper who would not allow the pregnant Mary to lodge in his inn?
6. What is the name of the priest who was told he would not die until he saw the Savior?
7. Two of the four Gospels do not mention the birth of Christ. Which two?
8. What type of animals did the wise men bring as gifts to Jesus?
9. How many wise men does the Bible say came with gifts to offer to Jesus?
10. Name the nine reindeer who helped pull Santa's sleigh.

December Birthdays

- 12/2 Eric Jesse Ofori (son)
- 12/2 Lois Pasinella
- 12/2 Rick Russell
- 12/5 Edna Wells
- 12/9 Deb Lawrence
- 12/9 Lucas Russell
- 12/11 Dean Calamaras
- 12/13 Peggy Siracusa
- 12/18 Dot Multunas
- 12/19 Bill Siracusa
- 12/24 Rachel Farnum
- 12/25 Robert Moore



December Anniversary

- 12/16 Marie & Kurt Whitman



Winter Collection for Capital City Rescue Mission

Throughout the season of Advent we will be collecting items needed by Capital City Rescue Mission to help those in need be prepared for the cold weather. Each week during Advent we will focus on a different item.

- Week of December 3rd – gloves and mittens
- Week of December 10th – hats
- Week of December 17th – socks
- Week of December 24th - blankets

With the weather turning colder, the Mission struggles to provide these necessary items to those in need. Throughout the winter months we will also be accepting donations of new and gently used coats. There will be a box near the entrance to the sanctuary for you to place your donations in.

From Music and AV Ministries...

ARTISTIC LICENSE REVOKED!

BREAKING NEWS FLASH! Not everything we sing is true. I trust you're not in shock. Neither are all the paintings we paint or stare at nor the sculptures we sculpt or admire. And especially... those greeting cards we design or send and receive. As powerful as all the arts are and effective in promoting the Good News of Jesus, it is indisputable that, when inspired by inaccurate teaching, they can burn images into our subconsciousness that can be hard to dispel and end up promulgating error for years, decades, even centuries!

Think of all the "facts" surrounding Christmas that are accepted without question now because of all the songs, paintings, Christmas Cards, etc. FACT: that--

- Jesus was born on December 25
- Three wisemen, named Kaspar, Melchior and Balthazar visited him in the manger
- *A little drummer boy* was present to serenade him
- A heavenly choir of angels sang their hearts out as he was born

How about that great carol, "I Saw Three Ships"? Uh, I think Bethlehem is landlocked, so it's unlikely Jesus and Mary came sailing in on Christmas morning. And what about Joseph? Without him, do we even need *three* ships? "Away in a Manger" tells us that *the little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes*. Hmm... a baby that doesn't cry. Maybe fully divine but hardly fully human! And just when *does* that *age of gold* arrive that "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" promises?

It's hard to fathom any great movement that would correct any of these *discrepancies*. We may suspect that it was far more likely that Jesus was born around September, since the shepherds were still *abiding in their fields* (amongst other evidence) but I'm not seeing a Christmas date-change in our future. That the Bible never mentions *three* wisemen (and certainly never names them) won't knock out "We Three Kings" from our carol-sings any time soon. (Not to mention that they probably showed up at Jesus' home when he was about 2 and not at the manger!) And the fact that scripture only indicates that the angels *said*, "*Glory to God in the highest...*" (apparently no heavenly SATB choir)--do we really want to sing "Angels we have heard on high, sweetly *saying* o'er the plains"? I don't.

Artistic expressions can be wonderfully inspiring and can help us appreciate, respect and celebrate profoundly significant events from our history. But buyer beware! Not everything we see, sing, touch or read necessarily passes the *smell* test. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 teaches us to "Prove all things and hold fast to that which is good." So enjoy all those cards and carols. Just remember that what they're suggesting as factual... Well, there may be more than meets the eye there!

With joy in the journey,
Sal Sceccitano

Serving at the Capital City Rescue Mission December 16th

We have the privilege to minister to those in need by helping to serve the evening meal at the Capital City Rescue Mission. We will meet at the church around 5:00 and carpool or you can meet us at the Mission around 5:30. Serving involves ensuring the tables are set for dinner, serving the meal, and cleaning up the tables afterwards. If you can help please speak with Andy Miller or Rob Jensen.

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

The Scriptures exhort us to be ready to give a defense for our faith in Jesus (1 Tim 4:16; 2 Tim 2:15; 1 Pt 3:15). To equip us to be able to do that we will continue in our review of the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

Q 89. How is the Word made effectual to salvation?

The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching, of the Word an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation.

Q 90. How is the Word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation?

That the Word may become effectual to salvation we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love; lay it up in our hearts; and practice it in our lives.

Q 91. How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation?

The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that does administer them, but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them.

Q 92. What is a sacrament?

A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers.

Q 93. Which are the sacraments of the New Testament?

The sacraments of the New Testament are Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

SESSION MEETING-THIRD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH-TROY, NEW YORK-NOV. 13, 2017

ACTION ITEMS - A motion was made and carried unanimously to approve the updated Child and Youth Protection Policy.

CLERK'S REPORT

Miscellaneous Information:

- Average attendance for October was 41.
- Membership Roll is 64.
- 12/10 - Christmas Caroling at the Eddy 12/16
- Serving the evening meal at Capital City Rescue Mission. We will meet at church at 5 PM.
- 12/24 - Christmas Eve Worship Service at church at 6:45 PM.

WORSHIP & PRAYER

- Sunday afternoon prayer time is ongoing on the 3rd Sunday of each month during Sunday School.
- Lord's Supper Training is continuing.

CHRISTIAN NURTURE

MEN'S MINISTRY - The Men's Bible Study will be meeting the first Sunday of each month at 6:30 PM.

WOMEN'S MINISTRY - The Women's Bible Study meets on Thursday evenings at Pat Gilmaier's at 7 PM.

YOUTH MINISTRY - We will be expanding our Nursery Ministry to include a simple Bible story and craft or other activity each week.

SENIOR'S MINISTRY - Holiday Luncheon sponsored by the Senior God Squad will be held on Saturday December 9th at 12 noon, with a catered luncheon and a Barbershop quartet for entertainment.

MISCELLANEOUS MINISTRIES

- The Adult Sunday School class is continuing their study on the life of Jesus.
- The Wednesday evening Bible study will be at 6PM on Wednesday.
- We will go Christmas Caroling at The Eddy on December 10th at 3:30 PM. We will meet at the church at 3 PM.
- We are working on plans for a mid-week Christian Nurture program that would include a meal, a time of learning, crafts, games, and other activities. Final details have not been worked out but we are looking of possible Wednesday evening, ending prior to choir rehearsal.

OUTREACH & MISSIONS

- Spending for November: Capital City Rescue Mission-\$500.00, Reach Across (Dan McAuley)-\$300.00, Bangladesh Youth For Christ-\$500.00, InterVarsity at Hudson Valley Community College-\$600.00, InterVarsity at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute & Russell Sage College-\$600.00
- The special offering for Presbyterian Disaster Assistance was sent to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance for hurricane relief in Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico.
- We met with Danielle Bailey, InterVarsity Supervisor for this area in October. She thanked us for our ongoing support of InterVarsity's ministry in this area and shared her vision for increasing ministry in the Capital Region.
- During Advent we will be collecting items for the Capital City Rescue Mission.
 - Week of December 3rd - Gloves.
 - Week of December 10th - Hats and Scarves.
 - Week of December 17th - Socks.
 - Week of December 24th - Blankets.
 - We will also be taking donations of new or gently used coats.

GENERAL FUND/FINANCE

- We had a positive cash flow during October of \$4,516.78. this gives us a year-to-date deficit of \$418.75.
- The second draft of the General Fund budget for 2018 was handed out and reviewed. All were asked to verify their information on that draft and report back to the Finance Committee.

PROPERTY

- Were given an update on the parking lot repaving/expansion discussion.
- Snow blower was purchased.



Christmas Eve
Worship

6:45 P.M.

Join us as we
Celebrate God's
Greatest Gift!

Third Presbyterian Church
115 Winter Street
Troy, NY 12180

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



THIRD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
EXALTING GOD / PROCLAIMING CHRIST / MAKING DISCIPLES