

# FIRST PRESS NEWSLETTER



*We are a welcoming community formed in Christ, committed to sharing his love with others – with feet that carry us out into the world, with hands that serve, and with hearts in fellowship and faith.*

Dear Friends,

It was two days before our regularly scheduled Sunday, March 15, 2020 worship service. Reports were beginning to surface that Bergen County residents were contracting the highly transmissible coronavirus, and local hospitals were beginning to admit very sick COVID-19 patients. Therefore, out of an abundance of caution, a decision was made that for the sake of the health and safety of First Pres members and friends, we would cancel worship in the sanctuary on March 15 and provide the service online. And that's what we did.

One year later, that's what we're still doing; although now a limited number of worshipers are permitted in the sanctuary, and we wear masks and practice social distancing in order to keep each other safe.

During the past year, I have learned a great deal. I suspect all of us have. Most of all, as 500,000 of our fellow Americans have lost their lives as a result of what has become a pandemic, I have come to a more profound realization that each day is a gift from God, not to be taken for granted. Furthermore, I have drawn encouragement and strength from the words of the prophet Isaiah:

*But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint. [Isaiah 40:31]*

And I have placed great faith in the hope-filled words of the psalmist, who wrote: *Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.* [Psalm 30:5b]

What follows are a few more things I've learned, or observations I've made, during the 12 months since the onset of the pandemic:

1. We are still the church. In spite of recent challenges, we can still share the love of Christ with each other as well as with neighbors, locally and globally. In fact, the challenges caused by the virus have made it all the more crucial that we share the love of Christ with others.
2. People are generous. Members and friends have been generous to the church. And the church has been generous to those in need.
3. Living with gratitude, living with a focus on the blessings which remain, helps me compensate for the losses. Helps me keep life in perspective. I'm grateful to be alive, to be healthy, to have purpose, to be employed. I'm grateful for my family, friends and church family.
4. Part of loving one's neighbor is to practice social distancing and wear a mask. This prevents me from infecting another person with the coronavirus in the event that I am infected myself.
5. It would be wonderful to visit in person with loved ones and friends as well as church members. Yet, because I love them, I can wait until we've been vaccinated.

6. More time at home has meant more time to read for spiritual formation as well as enjoyment.
7. The church has been extremely versatile, adapting quickly to the need to move to an online worship service, hold meetings virtually, and harness the love and compassion of members to minister to each other one-on-one during this season of isolation.
8. With good planning, outdoor congregational gatherings can continue safely. Examples include the Pizza and Pop Tailgate, an outdoor worship service, the Celebration of Light and the upcoming OGHS Fish & Chips event.
9. The Produce Mission was able to thrive during the summer and fall in spite of the restrictions caused by the pandemic. Thanks be to God and all the volunteers!
10. Excellent leadership by members of Session and the Board of Deacons, as well as staff and many volunteers, has enabled the church to thrive and not simply survive during the pandemic.
11. Everyday goes better when I begin the day with prayer, scripture reading and/or meditation.
12. Gardening is therapeutic. So are long walks.

Forward in faith,

Bruce

One Sunday Pastor Bruce greeted members with snowflakes and Dana helped sweep them off their cars!



Thank you to Sandy Santangelo for the lectern shield- lay readers can now read mask free!

## Endowment Corner



The cover on the Endowment brochure says..."Saving For A Rainy Day...and Beyond." And when the COVID rains came we climbed aboard the First Pres ark and prayed while the storm raged. In the meantime we kept feeding the hungry, staying in touch with those living alone and continuing to plan for the future.

We masked up, sanitized, distanced ourselves and zoomed our way into a hopefully temporary but new normal. We are grateful for a healthy Endowment Fund which has helped the church weather this COVID storm. It is your ongoing support of our Endowment Fund that helps keep us afloat in challenging times while still being able to help others in their time of need. You do this through your memorial gifts, Tree of Life Leaves and Stones, Green Umbrella Note Cards and outright cash donations. We are deeply appreciative of your generosity.

We are very happy to announce the arrival of a new Leaf for our 'Tree' this month. The Leaf is in memory of Jack Bruckman , a long time active member of First Pres. We thank Jack's wife, Joanne, of 55 years for this tribute and permanent memorial in his honor. Jack's life was built around his love of family, sports, church and his beloved Cape Cod home.



On Sunday, February 7, the McDevitt family delivered dinner to the men at St. Paul's men's shelter. A big thank you to Joanne Bonwick for mini meatloaves, Laura Magrath for ham, Suzy McDevitt for a Mexican chicken casserole, Donna Flagg for salad and Rebecca Burger for plenty of fruit and bread.



These ladies braved a snowstorm to deliver their food to the McDevitts' home, and it was much appreciated by the men, who helped carry it all in through the snow.

We are always happy to have new volunteers join our group of faithful volunteers. You don't have to be a good cook to help out. Salad, bread and fruit are always a part of the meal, and things like store bought fried chicken or pizza are always enjoyed by the men.

Please let me know if you would be interested in helping out with food for the men on Sunday, March 7, Sunday, April 4 (this is Easter - arrangements can be made to deliver the food the day before) or on Sunday, May 2. Feel free to contact me, Sam McDevitt, if you have any questions. [sammcdev99@gmail.com](mailto:sammcdev99@gmail.com) or 201-820-8056 (cell).

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Thank you to all our soup, chili, stew and corn bread makers and those who helped with our curbside drive thru pick up for our Souper Bowl of Caring event.



Pastor Bruce Ballantine, Pete Castaldo, Elisa Cerrina, Jill Critchley, Joan Davies, Sue Dickinson, Sue Fischer, Cynthia Rae, Sandy, Samantha & Maddy Santangelo, Amanda Schnure, Linda Strickland & Kate Yates!

Thank you to all who purchased soup chili and stew and who generously donated to this fundraiser. We have collected \$885.00 to support Eva's Village in Paterson, N.J.



## Sunday school Events:



Students will be choosing Lenten Prayer Partners and will be receiving their "Fish Banks" to fill for OGHS!

### Lenten Food and Non- Food Drive

Through the month of March we will be collecting  
Nonperishable food items, cleaning and paper products!

Sponsored by First Pres. Church School  
to support "Social Service Association of Ridgewood"

PLEASE NO Glass Jars or Containers

What SSA really Needs!!!

Paper towels & toilet paper (packaged), tissues  
Cleaning products (spray type bottles)  
Hand sanitizer, soap, sponges, laundry detergent



~Non-perishable food items greatly needed~

Parmalat	Canned proteins (chicken & tuna)	Instant oatmeal	Canned soups
Tomato sauce	Pasta or spaghetti	Peanut butter	Jelly
Cereal & Crackers	Instant mashed potatoes	Canned gravy	Stuffing
Mac & cheese	Canned vegetables or fruit		



**The Mission Committee is sponsoring a fundraiser for One Great Hour of Sharing!**

**Fish (or Chicken) and Chips Dinner~ provided by Tastefully British**



**This is a take-out event!**

Date: Saturday, March 27<sup>th</sup> (rain or shine)

Time: 5 PM to 7 PM

Where: Food truck will be in front church lot (unless you require handicap parking please park in back lot or on Circle Ave)

Cost: \$17.00 for Fish (or Chicken) French fries and coleslaw

Dessert: baked goods will be available for purchase \$3.00

**ALL fish or chicken orders must be received by Wednesday, March 24<sup>th</sup>**

To order email [davies333@aol.com](mailto:davies333@aol.com) or [jessicatrader@gmail.com](mailto:jessicatrader@gmail.com) or text to Jess at 551-404-7345 or call the church office at 201-652-2504

**Pay at the event. Once you place order we are obligated to pay for your dinner!**

Kids bring your filled  fish banks and receive a goody bag!

The three programs supported by One Great Hour of Sharing - Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, the Presbyterian Hunger Program, and Self-Development of People - all work in different ways to serve individuals and communities in need. From initial disaster response to ongoing community development, their work fits together to provide people with safety, sustenance, and hope.

**The need is great and so is our calling, please come and support this cause!**

# ***First Pres. Nominating Committee***

It's that time of year again and your Nominating Committee is looking for dedicated members to serve in the leadership of our Church! The nominating process for the Class of 2024 for Elders and Deacons has begun and your participation is joyously welcomed.

Along with the entire world, the COVID pandemic required us to react, respond and adapt in ways we never could have anticipated. Thanks to in-person modifications, Zoom and virtual worship and meeting technology, our church leadership has endeavored to navigate this ever-changing landscape. The 2020 Annual Report highlights our continued efforts to be a light for our community and spiritual home for deeper faith and fellowship. Through God's guidance, we endured and many of us in the process may have found new skills, talents, interests and time that can be shared in the service of our church. Maybe now is the time to answer your call ò ò ò

***Do you sense God calling you to serve as a Deacon? Elder?***

OR

***On a Church Committee? How about:***

\*Worship and Arts

\*Hospitality

\*Mission

\*Technology \*Property

\*Finance/Stewardship

\*Endowment

\*Personnel

\*Christian Ed \*Growth

\*Nursery School

\*Nominating

***Or is there someone with special gifts and talents  
you would like to nominate?***

Please reach out to Anita Hutton, Chair of Nominating, via email at [anitac.hutton@gmail.com](mailto:anitac.hutton@gmail.com) or by phone (201)358-8970 Or any member of the Nominating Committee: Lew Dickinson, David Shaw, Marica Unger, Sue Fischer, Carol Davidson, Jeanine Jamieson

All nominations will be held in confidence.



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## A Lenten Devotional *by MaryEllen Castaldo*

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### ***A friend loves at all times. (Proverbs 17:17)***

On Sunday, February 7<sup>th</sup> Peter and I drove home from church in a snow storm and as we stopped at a red light, I was in awe of how beautiful this snowfall was. It was like a dance. I said, %could continue to sit here and just watch the snow fall for hours+ It was a feel good day for we heard a great sermon and the beautiful bell choir playing during worship and I was so happy that our %Souper Bowl of Caring+fundraiser was a success and *remembered* what a wonderful time we had preparing for it and connecting with people at the curbside drive thru that Saturday. A short time after we arrived home I checked my emails and messages to find that my dear friend lost her battle with cancer at the age of 62.

Thoughts flooded my headō .how amazingly strong and courageous she was as she fought two years to stay here with us on earth, how she kept her sense of humor thru it all, how kind and giving she was, how grateful she was to have the support of her friends, and how God had another plan for her. I felt relief that she would no longer suffer and I was comforted to remember that as she walked thru the most difficult time in her life, her friends and family walked along side her. Her friends meant so much to her. I knew showing up for Lori was critical. Just being there for her, made her feel determined to continue. Yet I knew this was only %ONE+way to show her our love and encouragement.

Showing love is important, but it's not enough. We need to speak words of love. And we need to say the right words, and you should say them in the right way. When Jesus used words, He used words that were very powerful. He spoke words of encouragement, direction and affirmation. God wants us to live just like that. I found myself encouraging her in her faith. Encouraging her to rely on %God to walk with her+during this difficult time.

I made it a daily habit of praying for her and for others who were in need of comfort. When you love someone, you have a pretty good idea of what is happening in their lives . what they're waiting for, struggling with, hoping for, which helps us to pray for their specific needs. I also learned that not only my words were needed to be encouraging, but I needed my promises to be firm, so that Lori felt that she could rely on us if needed. Being dependable is important! We need to be there when we say we will be there. I know that if you want to love like Jesus, your word must be your bond. Trust is earned. Being part of a church and Christian community l've learned that we are not meant to go solo, go it alone or to have an isolated experience.

### **We need each other. We serve each other, we serve together.**

Though we are blessed to have this technology today that allows us to connect with each other & see each other, being together as Pastor Bruce has said many times, allows people to come together in fellowship even in its smallest measure, it is a wonderful connection!

**Hebrews 10:25 NIV** %not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

We need each other so that we don't give up! Sometimes when life gets overwhelming and we go thru difficult times for whatever reason, we find many of us are right on the edge of giving up. Maybe it is physically, emotionally, relationally or financially. We need each other and we need to encourage each other to go on. You need other people to tell you, %Don't give up.+And you also need to tell others %You can do this+!

Even when you think you are about finished, you need to speak life into other people. Lori said cheerfully one day to meō YOU are my biggest cheerleader! Because I kept telling her...DONT GIVE UP, YOU CAN DO THIS! We need to seek to serve others and value the gift of life in a way we never knew before. I pray my friend Lori will know the eternal love of our Savior.

Sorrow is not Forever, **LOVE IS!**





*Easter Flowers will be beautiful in the Sanctuary with your help!  
 We ordered a minimum with our florist.  
 Please email the following to [office@firstpresridgewood.org](mailto:office@firstpresridgewood.org):*

*How many plants you would like?  
 Who are they in honor or memory of?  
 Do you want to pick them up after Easter or should they go to a shut in?  
 Please let me know as soon as you can.*

***Thank you! Blessings to all! Dana Feeney***

**Financial Update / News**

*At the request of several church members, the Finance & Stewardship Committee will start providing monthly updates on our finances. We hope you find this information helpful and informative.*

January 2021 Monthly Pledges & Plate Contributions	\$22,367
Other Church Income from Usage	\$2,361
Gifts (Laura Fleming Estate and Endowment Fund)	\$92,000
<b>Total January Income</b>	<b>\$116,728</b>
<b>Total January Expenses</b>	<b>\$52,736</b>

*Notes – Expenses were higher due to our gas, electric and snow removal bills and our first quarterly insurance premium payment. We know this will normalize over the upcoming spring months. We do thank the Fleming Family for Laura’s generous memorial gift and to our Endowment Committee for helping us stay liquid through this difficult time.*

**Church Staff~**

Pastor	Rev. Bruce Ballantine
Director of Children & Families	MaryEllen Castaldo
Director of Music	Dr. Edward Schmiedecke
Organist	Linda Sweetman Waters
Director of Youth Music and Handbells	Carol Schmiedecke
Administrative Manager	Dana Feeney
Youth Leader	Jessica Strader
Tom Carozza	Sexton
Custodian	George Wood
Director Nursery School	Julia Bolt
Newsletter Editor	Joan Davies (Volunteer)

**Church Phone (201) 652-2504 Pastor Bruce: (215) 337-5623** please contact him directly for Pastoral Care  
[www.firstpresridgewood.org](http://www.firstpresridgewood.org)