

"The Grapevine"

JANUARY - 2021



"PER CAPITA"

Each year, members of the Presbyterian Church are asked to contribute an amount over their pledge or other giving to support the connections we have to each other. That gift is called the per capita. It provides the resources to fund meetings and committees or commissions of the Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly. This year the per capita is **\$25.90** per member. Your contribution will relieve the general budget from paying this levy for you.



- 2- Kathleen Buffleben
- 5- Jean Shipman
- 10- Matt Clarke
- 11- Joseph Weisenberger
- 13- Cristian Lamas
- 16- Joshua Clarke
- Rich Clinton
- 18 - Isabel Vaishampayan
- 20- Allen Brown
- 23- Gladys Smith

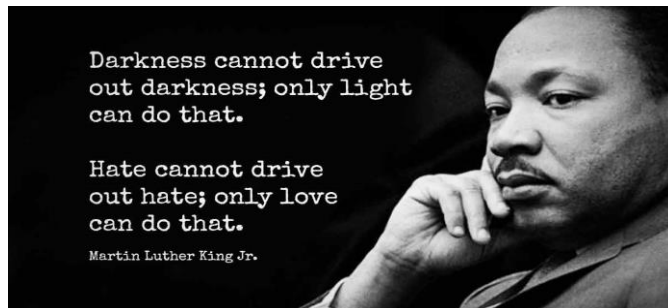
Important Dates this Month:

Friday, January 1 & Monday, January 4:
Office Closed - New Year's Day

Friday, January 15:
Newsletter Deadline & ANNUAL REPORTS DUE
Email to: jill@tracyfirstpres.com

Monday, January 18:
Office Closed - Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Sunday, January 31:
ANNUAL MEETING (more details to come)



"PD's Pickings"

"A lot can happen in a year, can't it?"

That is how I began my January 2020 newsletter article. Little did we know then just how *much!* The relatively normal life and worship we shared together a year ago seems like a lifetime ago. On January 1, 2020, 99.99% of us had never heard of COVID-19. And what was to come in a few short weeks was unimaginable.

If we had a time machine today and could send a message back of what was to come in 2020—medically, socially, economically, politically, spiritually, you name it—would our year-ago selves have believed it?

Yet, here we are.

In times like these it is natural to wonder things like "How could God allow this?" or "Does God care?" or "Is God even there at all?" We read about many awful things happening to humanity in our bibles and history books. They are more common to life on planet earth than we'd like to think, whether plague or famine or genocide. But even when we're well-acquainted with history, until we live through it, it seems distant, unreal.

Now it's real. And we've been trying to make sense of it. We don't like to think we're *that* vulnerable, or life or society is *that* fragile. So when we stare that fragility in the face we do everything we can to cope: rationalize, numb, blame. We try to take control. Some of us convince ourselves it's not as bad as we're told. Some catastrophize. Some theologize. Some hide. Some defy. Some vent. Some deny. Some paste on the positivity, others the negativity. Some talk. Some don't. All of us try to cope—according to our own personalities, proclivities, emotional health, and state of mind.

There's one thing I left off that list, though: Some PRAY. Maybe our prayers aren't perfect. But our prayers are nonetheless a shout of faith from the darkness of the unknown and unexpected. When we pray, we are saying *I still believe. I still put my hope in You, God.* When we pray we say that we believe God is good, God cares, God is present, God is involved, and God can change things. When we pray, we proclaim to the world that God is real, and that God is not just a clock maker who wound up the universe and just lets it run. Rather, we are saying God is more like a first responder—hearing our cries, running toward the craziness, intervening, rescuing lives, treating injuries, holding our hand in the ambulance.

There is a fun little blackboard/whiteboard exercise that learners of ancient languages are often confronted with, because the manuscripts they read are often written in all caps or smalls, with no spaces or punctuation as we're used to today. The following letters are written on the board: GODISNOWHERE. What does it say? Does it say "God is now here?" or "God is nowhere?" The author could not intend both. Only context can tell us which was intended.

The context we have as we try to "read" life tells us that, whatever else can be said about God, God is present. Why God allows certain things to happen no one can fully know. But we know from the first Christmas morning that it can't be because God doesn't want to be involved. We know from the cross it can't be because God doesn't care. And we know from the resurrection it can't be because God isn't powerful enough.

So... we have our context. We know how to translate GODISNOWHERE. We know it reads "God is Now Here." We pray to Emanuel: God before us, God behind us, God sheltering us, God upholding us, God surrounding us... God *with* us.

2020 has irreversibly changed our families, or culture, our churches, our circumstances, and us. That year will be studied for decades if not centuries to come. But so will *this* one. Not, perhaps, for “what happened,” which we all pray will be far less and far better than 2020, but for what we learned from 2020, good or bad. How did we *chose* to change, and how did we *let* it change us. Who did we think we were, and who were we revealed to be? Now what? That goes for each of us individually, and all of us collectively.

Of all the lessons we will to try learn, all the debates we will have to sort out, and all the emotions we will have to process, I hope there will be one thing that will be more evident to us than ever: GOD IS NOW HERE. God has always been and will always be “Now Here.” And God’s “Now Here” is eternal, active, unstoppable, and good.

Shalom my friends, and welcome to... whatever is next: where God is Now Here.

Pastor Doug

Treasurer's Report

GENERAL FUND	<u>MONTHLY</u>	<u>TO DATE</u>	<u>BALANCE</u>
Reserve Fund not included in the budget		\$ 21,572.65	
Balance Forward		\$ 36,028.17	
Monthly Income	\$ 8,540.00	\$ 119,270.02	
Monthly Expenditures	\$ 14,531.90	<u>\$ 157,562.65</u>	
Balance:			\$ 19,308.19
Special Fund Balance:			\$ 21,424.45
In-and-Out Fund Balance:			\$ 23,773.85
Memorial Fund:			
Undesignated:		\$ 5,650.00	
Designated:		<u>\$ 12,545.69</u>	
Balance:			\$ 18,195.69
New Site Fund:			
Balance:			\$ 1,350.16
Synod Savings Account			
Matching Challenge		\$ 49,608.93	
Youth Reserve		\$ 1,084.36	
Manse Fund		\$ 62.32	
Julia Sturtevant Fund		<u>\$ 5,436.81</u>	
Balance:			\$ 56,192.42