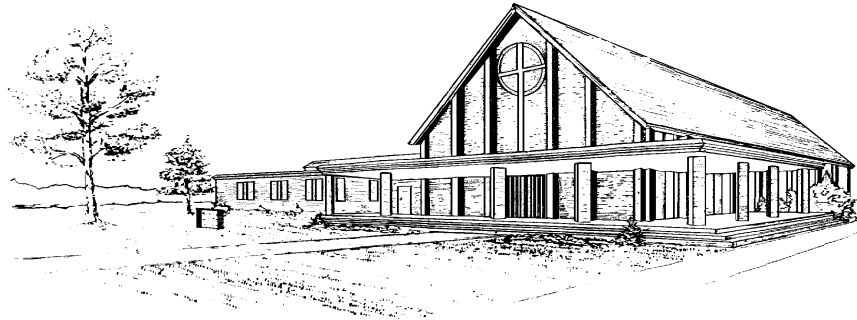


# STEEPLE CHIMES

Newsletter of the First Presbyterian Church of Greenlawn

ISSUE: Two Hundred Eight

FEBRUARY 2018



## Message From the Pastor

On the weekend our nation recognized and honored the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., there was an extraordinary confluence of events. In addition to the holiday itself, we remembered the 8<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the earthquake in Haiti that claimed in excess of 230,000 lives. And on the eve of that anniversary, we heard the report of racist remarks disparaging Haiti and well as African nations, which were made in the presence of lawmakers meeting to discuss immigration reform.

In part because our church has been a partner in ministry with the Ebenezer Wesleyan Church over this last decade, and mourned with their members the earthquake's terrible toll, I found myself drafting a letter to our nesting congregation in which I confessed my shame and sorrow at those remarks as well as my personal complicity in racism. (That letter appears on page three of this issue of Steeple Chimes.)

As a pastor, I noticed another haunting juxtaposition: the lectionary text for that Sunday included Nathanael's question of Philip, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46, NRSV). When it came time to preach, I found myself proposing that Nazareth is any place from which we do not expect the Christ to come. Racism, nativism and jingoism not only express our disdain for "Nazareth" and its people, whether "Nazareth" happens to be Haiti, an African nation, or a country south of our border. Racism also rejects the Christ who comes whence He will.

Racism has been aptly described as our nation's "original sin." Our national economy was premised on slavery and as many as half of our first 16 presidents owned slaves, including the one who famously declared that "all (white) men are created equal." (Thomas Jefferson owned some 600 slaves over the course of his lifetime.)

Racial bigotry can be explicit and shamelessly expressed, but it can also be implicit and largely disowned. What makes all sin and addiction intractable, and racism especially, is denial. Denial functions as a defense against the pain of truth about ourselves and our nation. We are in denial about racism because of the stigma associated with being a racist and our very human tendency to disown in ourselves what does not correspond with our carefully constructed self-image.

Because I had an African American brother-in-law and biracial nieces as I grew up in the 1960s, had personal friendships with African Americans, and, as a young member of this church, joined in marches to end racial segregation, I persuaded myself that I was somehow beyond the reach of racism. I recall conveying my sense of transcendence to an African American supervisor I had in one of my first jobs out of graduate school. What I recall most was his stunned silence at the way I had astonishingly succeeded in pulling the wool over my own eyes.

American University Professor Ibram X. Kendi recently observed that the more racist our president and supporters sound, the more his opponents look away from their own racism to brand him and them racist.\* That is the way I suppose it is with us: the easier it is to make projection screens of others, the easier it is to look past the logs in our own eyes. We are like the alcoholic who comforts himself that he doesn't drink like his friend who is a *real* alcoholic.

(Continued on page 2)

Professor Kendi proposes that being a racist is not some fixed identity, any more than “not racist” is. “A racist is not who a person is, but what a person is, what a person is saying, and what a person is doing.” In that understanding, our very use of the labels of “racist” or “not racist” of others and of ourselves is evidence of the way we sustain our denial. Despite all our talk about disunity in this fraught season of our national life, Professor Kendi suggests that America is in fact unified in its denial regarding racism. Some of us may hold that our highest elected leader is not really a racist, and others of us may hold that his racism is singular and exceptional. But what unites us all is our denial about our own racism.

Perhaps as we approach Lent this year, we will accept the invitation to fast from all our dining on denial. As followers of Christ, we know that the truth will set us free, but experience instructs us that it sets us free only after it has roughed us up.

See you in church,

Pastor Fred

\* “The Heartbeat of Racism Is Denial,” Ibram X. Kendi, *New York Times*, January 13, 2018. Ibram X. Kendi is a professor of history and international relations at American University, and the author of *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*

## **Nativism and Christianity**

Nativism is the policy of protecting the interests of native-born or established inhabitants against those of immigrants. Nativism got its name from the “Native American” parties of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and referred to those who claimed descent from the settlers of the original thirteen colonies (*not* the native American population that those earlier settlers displaced). 19<sup>th</sup> century Nativism was a reaction to the inflows of immigrants, primarily from Ireland, but later also to those of German and Chinese descent. After WWI, nativists directed their animus to Catholics and Jews from Eastern Europe.

Even when it goes by the name of “patriotism,” nativism is incompatible with Christianity, which is based on the life, work and teachings of Jesus who taught that in receiving the stranger and alien we are receiving Jesus himself (Matt. 25:31-46). “Jesus “First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (Rev. 23:13) expresses Christianity. “America First,” a slogan first used by Woodrow Wilson before the U.S. presidential election in 1916, expresses nativism.

In times of intense vulnerability, the fear of losing what we have or of not getting what we think is rightfully ours may understandably draw us toward nativism. But it is love, of course, not fear, that draws us toward Christ, the One who promises to meet us in the stranger and alien. Although it humbles us to openly acknowledge our fear, we can receive the consolation that perfect love, the love with which we have ourselves been loved, casts out fear (1 John 4:18).



## Letter To Pastor Rochemond and the Congregation of Ebenezer Wesleyan Church (January 13, 2018)

*Can Anything Good Come Out of Nazareth?* (John 1: 46, NRSV)

Personally, and not on behalf of our church's session, I reach out to my friends in the Ebenezer Wesleyan church to affirm my solidarity with you on the occasion of the 8<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the devastating earthquake in Haiti that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives back in 2010. But there was another tremor that shook our world on the eve of that anniversary, when the president of the United States, in a meeting with lawmakers on immigration, made a series of disparaging, crude and racist remarks. He was heard to question whether our nation really “needed more Haitians,” urge that Haitians living here should be “taken out,” and describe African nations as “shithole countries.”

As deeply dismaying as those remarks were, many of us were not shocked. In 2016 we had seen our nation elect as its president a person who inflamed racial bigotry to gain political power, blamed and demonized vulnerable immigrants, urged Muslim bans, promised to wall America off against outsiders, displayed vulgar behavior toward women and even boasted of sexual assault, pledged to advance the economic security of the wealthy while shielding his own wealth from public scrutiny, and attacked the functioning of the free press. And then came 2017 with fresh onslaughts against democracy and human decency, and the espousal of an ethnic nationalism tainted with human cruelty.

I write to express my deep sense of sorrow and shame not only at the president’s remarks but also at the uncritical devotion of professing Christians who continue to hold him up, as Franklin Graham did in December, for his “strong outspoken stand for the Christian faith.”

But I also write to acknowledge my own complicity.

As the contemplative priest Thomas Merton watched the approach of WWII, he reflected, "There was something else in my own mind, the recognition: 'I myself am responsible for this. My sins have done this. Hitler is not the only one who has started this war: I have my share in it too.'"

Although I should like to disown any participation in the sin of racism or the heresy of white supremacy - I find both deeply repugnant- I have grown up in the midst of- and benefited from- institutional racism and racial bias. On a conscious level I utterly dis-identify with the words and actions of the president. But from words I have said and left unsaid, deeds I have done and left undone, I too am responsible for the state of our nation today. The way the prophet Isaiah put it, “Woe to me!” I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.” Isaiah, of course, did not leave it at that, but added, “And my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”

It is not in a spirit of political partisanship, but as a matter of theological integrity, that I share my sense of solidarity with you and my shame at the words and actions of our highest elected leader and those who condone in him what is inexcusable. How we treat the stranger in our midst, the immigrant and refugee, is a matter faithful obedience to Jesus Christ, not a matter of party allegiance or identification. And it is not for reason of partisanship but for the hope of the integrity and wholeness of my own soul that I acknowledge my unwitting participation in the evil of racism with all its attendant privileges from which I too have benefited.

But even as I pray in sorrow, shame, and contrition, I trust in God’s mercy unto all of us, even unto me.

God’s peace,  
Pastor Fred

## **A Lenten Fast**

*Fast from judging others; feast on the presence of God within each person.*

*Fast from judging others; feast on the unity of all life.*

*Fast from apparent darkness and gloom; feast on the reality of light and enthusiasm.*

*Fast from thoughts of illness; feast on the healing power of God.*

*Fast from discontent; feast on gratitude.*

*Fast from anger; feast on patience.*

*Fast from pessimism; feast on optimism.*

*Fast from negatives; feast on affirmatives.*

*Fast from bitterness; feast on forgiveness.*

*Fast from self-concern; feast on compassion for others.*

*Fast from discouragement; feast on hope.*

*Fast from facts that depress; feast on promises that inspire.*

*Fast from idle gossip; feast on purposeful silence.*

*Fast from shadows of sorrow; feast on the brilliance of the Resurrection.*

Submitted by Pastor Fred

## **The Guest House (Rumi)**

*This being human is a guest house*

*Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whoever comes  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.*

Submitted by Pastor Fred

## **February Youth Happenings**

Want to know more about the Church Youth Group?  
Contact Youth Director Debbie Eitel at [debbie\\_eitel@ibi.com](mailto:debbie_eitel@ibi.com)

### **Sunday Feb. 18 ~ BowlmorBowling 2-4 PM**

Meet at Bowlmor located at 895 Walt Whitman Rd on Route 110 - Melville - Just North of the Northern State Pkwy -Exit 40N - behind Bertucci's. Cost is \$6.69 per game.(We usually play at least 2 games). Shoes- \$5.69 ~ Come out and join us and bring a friend!

### **Lenten Soup Suppers**

Our annual Lenten Soup Suppers begin on Ash Wednesday, February 14<sup>th</sup> and continue each Wednesday for 6 weeks through March 21<sup>st</sup>. Soup is served at 6:00 PM, so bring your appetites and some soup or bread to share and join your church family during Lent.

# **PRAYER CORNER**

## **FEBRUARY 2018**

—  
*Do everything in love.* 1 Corinthians 16:14

### **LET PEOPLE CARE FOR YOU**

From: *The Beauty of Caring* by Lloyd John Ogilvie

A dynamic expression of caring is to be able to receive caring. Let people love you! But that means to be vulnerable. People cannot care about us if they do not know our needs. We give people a special gift when we become honest and open about what's happening to and around us. Independence and self-reliance block deep caring. A person who refuses to be cared for by others will usually end up caring little about the people around him.

Share your needs, ask for others' prayers, seek their insight and wisdom. Your openness will create an openness in the people you want to help. It takes a lot of energy to keep the façade of adequacy. The mask brings strained relationships. People feel put down and guilty in the presence of a person who pretends to "have it all together."

We begin to become caring persons when we let God care for us. Then our hearts are set on fire with care for others. But the "I'm going to care for you!" attitude often sets up resistance in the very people about whom we care. Asking them for their care for you is often the first step in preparing an openness for you to care for them.

*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*

Ephesians 4:2

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." – **Martin Luther King Jr.**

*Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.* Matt 6:34 MSG

## TRUE LOVE

A bell is not a bell until you ring it; A song is not a song until you sing it.  
Love in your heart is not put there to stay;  
Love is not love until you give it away.  
~Oscar Hammerstein II

He drew a circle that shut me out— Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.  
But love and I had the wit to win; We drew a circle that took him in.  
~Edwin Markham

Love is not blind—it sees more, not less.  
But because it sees more, it is willing to see less.  
~Julius Gordon

*Love never gives up.  
Love cares more for others than for self.  
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.  
Love doesn't strut,  
Doesn't have a swelled head,  
Doesn't force itself on others,  
Isn't always "me first,"  
Doesn't fly off the handle,  
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,  
Doesn't revel when others grovel,  
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,  
Puts up with anything,  
Trusts God always,  
Always looks for the best,  
Never looks back,  
But keeps going to the end.*

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 The Message Bible

Submitted by Betty Chatfield



## **We Have Been Visited By An Angel**

A very special angel came to our aid when our office computer failed the week before Christmas. Our special angel donated a new computer to the church along with a new telephone system that allows for the pastor and administrative assistant to communicate from office to office. This angel spent many hours at Best Buy and in the office making sure that the computer and phone system were set up and working properly. Her donation of equipment, time and talents was invaluable to the church. So...if you see a red-headed angel name Margaret, be sure to give her our thanks!



# *First Presbyterian Church of Greenlawn*



497 Pulaski Road  
Greenlawn, New York 11740  
Phone: 631-261-2150

## ***Sunday Worship***

## ***Sunday School***

**10:30 AM**

*Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matt 19:14)*

### **Pastor Fred's Office Hours**

are from 11:00am through 5:00 pm Monday through Thursday... unless visiting or attending meetings.  
Outside the above hours, please call (631) 626-3702  
for appointments and consultations.

## **OUR STAFF**

**Rev Frederick H. Woodward, Pastor**

**Linda Siegmann, Administrative Assistant**

**Catherine Mahler, Director of Music**

**Debra Eitel, Youth Director**

**Margaret Negrelli, Clerk of Session**

**Jim Dean, Treasurer**

**Betty Chatfield, Financial Secretary**

**Nancy MacIntyre, Benevolence Treasurer**

### **This is Your Church**

As Christians, we are called to serve God by serving others. Here at Greenlawn, many members respond to that call by volunteering their time and talents in one or more of the activities that support our church and community. Volunteers care for our church and facilities, participate in our worship and music services, nurture each other in times of need, and reach out to lend a helping hand in communities near and far.

Ask yourself :

*"How is God calling **Me** to His Service?"*