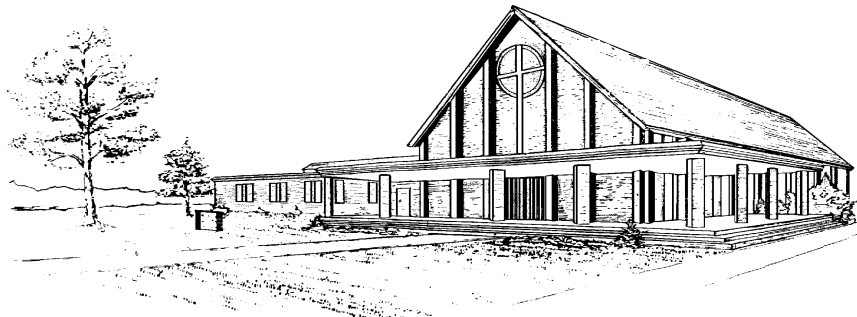


# STEEPLE CHIMES

Newsletter of the First Presbyterian Church of Greenlawn

ISSUE: Two Hundred Twelve

JUNE 2018



## Message From the Pastor

With the celebration of Pentecost on May 20th, the church enters into what, in the Liturgical Year, is called "Ordinary Time." But "ordinary" in this context does not mean unexceptional, vanilla or boring. It simply describes a season in the church year between Pentecost and Advent when our Sundays are measured out in *ordinal* numbers.

There is nothing ordinary about ordinary time. It is within the ordinary, and sometimes *especially* within the ordinary, that we discover our triune God's saving presence- if only we would pay a bit closer attention to the unfolding of our lives in the hands of our loving God; if only we would believe that God is all over us and in our stuff; if only we might deepen our spiritual awareness.

What is "spiritual awareness" anyway? Contemplative Cynthia Bourgeault invites us to imagine it as an "interior compass, whose magnetic north is always fixed on God... And its purpose, just like a compass, is for orientation."\*

Perhaps our spiritual awareness is heightened when we see a searing sunset, or hear a haunting harmony. Perhaps it is sharpened when we stand on an ocean beach, climb a mountain, or witness a birth. Or maybe the occasion itself is seemingly unremarkable, but for something in it that evokes a sense in us that we are being flooded with God's grace. Whenever and wherever it happens, a "nostalgia for the divine" sweeps over us and we are left trembling before the presence of a Mystery almost more vivid and beautiful than we can bear."

The challenge is that we fall out of touch with our spiritual awareness and are not quite sure what to make of it when it arises within us. But a further challenge also presents itself: the impression tends to fade, and we are tempted to continue on with our lives as if nothing has happened. Forgetting that God is speaking all the time, we simply stop listening.

Whereas in our usual mode of awareness we split the world into subject and object, "spiritual awareness perceives through an intuitive grasp of the whole and an innate sense of belonging." Bourgeault compares this to what happens when a note is struck on a piano and sets up a resonance in which we hear at once the third and fifth of its major chord. "Since spiritual awareness is perception based on harmony, the sense of selfhood arising out of it is not plagued by that sense of isolation and anxiety that dominates life at the (more usual) level of awareness."

By God's grace, even our experience of isolation and anxiety may lead us to send down spiritual roots. As we go deeper, we may discover "our own being and the divine being become more and more mysteriously interwoven." Meister Eckhart hints at this truth of the divine indwelling: "There is in the soul a something in which God dwells, and there is in the soul a something in which the soul dwells in God."

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None of this need be a struggle. In fact, when it is forced, it is probably not a spiritual experience at all. All that is asked of us is that we consent to God's mercy at work in us, ease up at all our clutching at the illusion of our separation- from God and from God's creation- and surrender to God's steadfast love already at work in us.

We can trust that even those moments in which God seems absent have a great deal to teach us. Sometimes our very emptiness and hunger become a sort of wordless prayer that we might be freshly open to God's healing presence. As God removes the obstacles that we have erected, we may discover again that there is more to God than we knew, and more to our lives than ever we imagined. Ordinary life becomes extraordinary. Welcome to ordinary time!

See you in church,  
Pastor Fred

*\*Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening, Cynthia Bourgeault (Lanham: Cowley Publications, 2004) p. 12-13.*

## **Healthy Giving**

One of the realizations of Christian faith is that as we get our minds off of ourselves and our narrow concerns, as we give of ourselves, even lose ourselves in the act of giving, we begin to find ourselves. In Christian discipleship, healthy living is marked by healthy giving. Healthy giving, an expression of stewardship, a response to God's grace, not an exchange intended to win God's favor- we already have that.

There are two ways we can die of asphyxiation, the one, when we are unable to breathe in, and the other when, as in an acute asthma attack, we are unable to breathe out. There is a parallel with our spiritual lives. The experience of the amazing love of God in Jesus Christ is a kind of in-breath. Service in Christ's name is our out- breath. Both are necessary for fully oxygenated spiritual well-being.

But it is easy to slip into patterns of unhealthy giving, to gasp and hyperventilate. If my "charitable acts" are motivated by shame, guilt, pity, or other forms of moral superiority, my faith life becomes short of breath. If through my giving I am trying to create a sense of obligation or dependency in others, I am choking off our common air supply. If I am giving because I am afraid to say "no"; if I am catering to others to such an extent that I am beginning to live in resentment, I am poisoning the air we breathe together. If my giving is manipulative, if, that is, I am giving so as to control people, places or things, I am at risk of asphyxiation. If I am giving to prove to myself, others or God that I am worthy, if, in summary, my giving evidences compulsion, addiction and idolatry, I am smothering the Spirit and doing no one any favors, least of all, God.

But God is merciful and intends our healing in Jesus Christ. The invitation, should we accept it without reservation, is to share what and who we are and have with an attitude of respect and love for ourselves and others. As we better discern to whom to give, when and how much, we will no longer feel victimized by our own giving and will, along with those to whom we offer ourselves, breathe at last a sigh of relief.

Submitted by Pastor Fred

## The Christian Stewardship of Ignorance

Christians are called to be stewards of their time and talents, but perhaps ours is also a calling to be stewards of ignorance, even more so as God adds to our years while stripping from us our certitude about most everything we presume to know. Assisting me in my own disillusioning was a fairly discouraging article\* I read some time ago about our resistance, when wrong, to correction.

Research suggests that not only are facts insufficient to move us to change our minds about what (we think) we know, they can even cause us to cling more tightly to our mistaken beliefs.

None of us likes to admit we are wrong. We believe we have formed our opinions after a lifelong consideration of the facts. And so it comes as a surprise to us that our opinions are rooted much less in *facts* than in our *beliefs* which perversely influence which “facts” we will choose to acknowledge. Our opinions may lead us to force the facts, like puzzle pieces that don’t belong, simply because they seem to fit better with our preconceived notions. And they can lead us to accept misinformation because it has the benefit of reinforcing our mistaken beliefs, which increases our (false) confidence that we were right all along, leaving us even less likely to receive new information.

Paradoxically, in this age of proliferation of information and facts, it has never been easier for us to be wrong, and at the same time, more certain than ever that we’re right. In fact, the more cocksure we are in our beliefs, the less grasp we may have of the facts. Not only do we resist correcting our mistaken beliefs, those of us who most need to correct them may be the very least likely to do so. And when discourse is so cheapened that truth itself is under assault, when lies are repeated so many times that they appear to have a certain truthiness, it is all that much worse.

Researchers theorize that our brains are wired for consistency which leads us to interpret information in ways that reinforce our preexisting views. If we believe something about the world, we are more likely accept as truth any information that confirms our beliefs, and to ignore or dismiss information that does not. And when we feel threatened or afraid, we tend to be closed off to new learnings, which is why demagogues seek to keep us in a perpetual state of agitation, confusion and fear: in that condition we are more easily manipulated and controlled.

Our confidence that we are more sophisticated or better educated than others can also leave us vulnerable to self-deception. A study conducted at Stony Brook suggested that we (supposed) sophisticated types may be less, not more, open to new information. Even where we may be factually right, say, about 90% percent of some subject matter, our exaggerated confidence makes it nearly impossible for us to correct the 10% on which we are dead wrong. All this cautions us that we are perhaps in no greater danger of being in error than when we are damn sure. Conviction is not the same thing as certainty, nor belief the same thing as fact.

What caught my attention in this mountain of bad news was the mention of research suggesting that we are more open to new information the less defended we are, the better we feel about ourselves. That suggests that as Good News continues to sink in, we become more teachable. And if we are open to it, there is plenty of good news to go around: we are loved and accepted; there is far more grace in God than there is transgression in us. And as we continue to recover from the auto-immune disease of sin that turns us away from love for ourselves, others and God, as we are relieved of splitting ourselves and others into good and bad selves, we are granted greater awareness and knowledge. But it is not *what we know* that saves us; that is not our good news. Our good news is about the *One who knows us* and calls us his own, the One whose perfect love casts out fear, even our fear of being wrong.

Submitted by Pastor Fred

\* “How Facts Backfire: Researchers Discover a Surprising Threat to Democracy: Our Brains,” Joe Keohane, Boston Globe, July 11, 2010)

# THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOLMES!

**Presbyterian Camp and Conference Center, Holmes, New York**

A welcoming Christian community, responding to God's call, where lives change and faith grows in a natural setting.

~ SWIM LESSONS ~ ROW BOATS ~ ARTS AND CRAFTS ~ FISHING ~ HIKING ~ FARMING ~ CANOEING ~  
TEAMBUILDING ~ PRAYER ~ TEAM GAMES ~ HIGH ROPES ~ VESPERS ~ NATURE EXPLORATION ~  
LAKE SLIDE ~ 9 SQUARE ~ FAITH EXPLORATION ~ ARCHERY ~ LOW ROPES ~ SINGING ~

This is just a portion of what happens when children and youth create their own community with their counselors! Every family group cooks their own dinner on Wednesday evening over their own campfire. They sleep out one evening. We create a safe place where children and youth can think about, explore, and talk about faith-related issues. One way we do this is daily Bible study, which includes games, crafts, discussions, skits, and other ways to engage with the Bible story and the daily theme. This summer, our curriculum invites us to ask big questions about God and our faith. Together we will explore how God can be seen in the vastness of creation, the power of community, and in our own hearts! We will be challenged to see how we can experience God and share God's love with those around us.

Consider a week at Holmes Camp for your child this summer. Information and registration brochures are in the literature rack on the table across from the church office, or visit their website at [www.HolmesCamp.org](http://www.HolmesCamp.org).



## June 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 June 17 Father's Day/Youth Sunday/10:30AM

Youth will help lead the Father's Day service



Sunday June 24 - Car Wash

2-5 PM in the church driveway

Please come out and join us for some fun & fellowship for a good cause!



**CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR GRADUATES!**

PLEASE LET US KNOW WHO WILL BE  
GRADUATING FROM HIGH SCHOOL OR COLLEGE SO THAT WE MAY RECOGNIZE THEM IN  
THE BULLETIN.

Let the church office know their name, where they are graduating from, their degree, where they will be attending school or working, and who they are related to. We'll need the information in the church office by Monday, June 11th.

# **PRAYER CORNER**

## **JUNE 2018**

### CONFESSION OF MY LITTLE BOY

~Andrew Gillies

Last night my little boy confessed to me: some childish wrong;

And kneeling at my knee he prayed with tears—

“Dear God, make me a man like Daddy—wise and strong,  
I know you can.” Then while he slept I knelt beside his bed,

Confessed my sins, and prayed with low-bowed head.

“Oh God, make me a child like my child here—

Pure, guileless, trusting Thee with faith sincere.”

*Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds  
and praise your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:16*

### BUILD ME A SON

~General Douglas A. MacArthur

Build me a son, O Lord, who will be strong enough to know when he is weak,  
and brave enough to face himself when he is afraid; one who will be proud and unbending in honest defeat, and  
humble and gentle in victory.

Build me a son whose wishbone will not be where his backbone should be; a son who will know Thee- and that  
to know himself is the foundation stone of knowledge.

Lead him, I pray, not in the path of ease and comfort, but under the stress and spur of difficulties and challenge.  
Here, let him learn to stand up in the storm; here, let him team compassion for those who fall.

Build me a son whose heart will be clear, whose goals will be high; a son who will master himself before he  
seeks to master other men; one who will learn to laugh, yet never forget how to weep; one who will reach into  
the future, yet never forget the past.

And after all these things are his, add, I pray, enough of a sense of humor, so that he may always be serious, yet  
never take himself too seriously.

Give him humility, so that he may always remember the simplicity of true greatness,  
the open mind of true wisdom, the meekness of true strength.

Then I, his father, will dare to whisper, "I have not lived in vain."

## ***FOR OUR GRADUATES***

### **IT IS NOT EASY...**

~Anon

To apologize  
To begin over,  
To be unselfish,  
To take advice,  
To admit error,  
To face a sneer,  
To be charitable,  
To keep on trying,  
To be considerate,  
To avoid mistakes,  
To endure success,  
To profit by mistakes,  
To forgive and forget,  
To think and then act,  
To keep out of the rut,  
To make the best of little,  
To subdue an unruly temper,  
To maintain a high standard,  
To shoulder a deserved blame,  
To recognize a silver lining—  
**But it always pays.**

### **THINK I CAN**

~Walter D. Wintle

“If you think you are beaten, you are; If you think you dare not, you don't;  
If you like to win, but you think you can't; It is almost certain you won't.

If you think you'll lose, you're lost; For out of the world we find  
Success begins with a fellow's will; It's all in the state of mind.

If you think you are outclassed, you are; You've got to think high to rise;  
You've got to be sure of yourself before You can ever win a prize.

Life's battles don't always go to the stronger or faster man,  
But soon or late the man who wins is the man WHO THINKS HE CAN!”

submitted by Betty Chatfield



Please remember our

## **Deacon's Food Pantry**

As you shop for food for your family!

Cereal, fruit juices, pasta, pasta sauces, and  
salad dressings are  
currently needed.

The Deacons thank you for your continuing  
generosity and support!





## *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**

**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?"*