

STEEPLE CHIMES

Newsletter of the First Presbyterian Church of Greenlawn

ISSUE: Two Hundred Eleven

MAY 2018



Message From the Pastor

Among our church's confessions is the *Theological Declaration of Barmen* ("Barmen"). Like all of the church's confessions, it arose in a specific context in the life of our church and world. Before his election to Reich Chancellor of Germany in January 1933, Hitler's Nazi party pretended to be compatible with, and even to give expression to, Christian faith. As the power of the Nazis grew, so also did their supporters in the churches who increasingly proclaimed a message of racial purity, thus conflating Cross and swastika, Table and throne.

Once Hitler took the reins of power, the Nazi regime increasingly meddled in the affairs of the church, going so far as to enact the "Aryan paragraph" which called for the exclusion from the church of all Christians who had Jewish ancestry. Race thus became a criterion for church membership.

Bringing to a head several currents of resistance to the growing Nazi war machine, *Barmen* sought to name the alien principles that were being advocated by the "Christian" supporters of Nazism. *Barmen* declared that Jesus Christ, and He alone, was the source of the church's proclamation, the one Word to whom alone the church must listen and whom alone it must obey. *Barmen* thus called out those who held up other persons and powers as somehow qualifying or supplanting the truth of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. It also called out any ideology by which the state would overstep its limits and exercise a totalitarian claim upon the whole of life, or which would turn the church into an organ or instrument of the state.

Barmen reminds us that no human being, office, or political institution can stand in the place of our Living God made known to us in Jesus Christ. If Jesus is Lord, than all human authority is subject to Jesus, not to Caesar who, in vainly boasting of his power both to save us and make us great, conflates domination with dominion, the love of power with the power of love.

Although we live in a very different age and context, as Christians and citizens we struggle with the same temptations and idolatries. Now, as then, our nation's soul and our church's integrity is at stake. In such a season as this, it is appropriate to declare ourselves, as Peter did, when Jesus asked, "But who do you say that I am?" In such a time as this it is appropriate to declare in what kind of God we will entrust ourselves, and to what gods we will not bow down; what we believe and what, for the Gospel's sake, we must reject.

To help us in our discernment, some two dozen elders from various Christian faith traditions collaborated on a faith declaration during Lent (see pages 2-4). They commend their declaration to the churches for a process of prayer, study, reflection and action. To their invitation, I earnestly add my own.

Pastor Fred

Reclaiming Jesus: A Confession of Faith in a Time of Crisis

I. WE BELIEVE each human being is made in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). That image and likeness confers a divinely decreed dignity, worth, and God-given equality to all of us as children of the one God who is the Creator of all things. Racial bigotry is a brutal denial of the image of God (the *imago dei*) in some of the children of God. Our participation in the global community of Christ absolutely prevents any toleration of racial bigotry. Racial justice and healing are biblical and theological issues for us, and are central to the mission of the body of Christ in the world. We give thanks for the prophetic role of the historic black churches in America when they have called for a more faithful gospel.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT the resurgence of white nationalism and racism in our nation on many fronts, including the highest levels of political leadership. We, as followers of Jesus, must clearly reject the use of racial bigotry for political gain that we have seen. In the face of such bigotry, silence is complicity. In particular, we reject white supremacy and commit ourselves to help dismantle the systems and structures that perpetuate white preference and advantage. Further, any doctrines or political strategies that use racist resentments, fears, or language must be named as public sin—one that goes back to the foundation of our nation and lingers on. Racial bigotry must be antithetical for those belonging to the body of Christ, because it denies the truth of the gospel we profess.

II. WE BELIEVE we are one body. In Christ, there is to be no oppression based on race, gender, identity, or class (Galatians 3:28). The body of Christ, where those great human divisions are to be overcome, is meant to be an example for the rest of society. When we fail to overcome these oppressive obstacles, and even perpetuate them, we have failed in our vocation to the world—to proclaim and live the reconciling gospel of Christ.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT misogyny, the mistreatment, violent abuse, sexual harassment, and assault of women that has been further revealed in our culture and politics, including our churches, and the oppression of any other child of God. We lament when such practices seem publicly ignored, and thus privately condoned, by those in high positions of leadership. We stand for the respect, protection, and affirmation of women in our families, communities, workplaces, politics, and churches. We support the courageous truth-telling voices of women, who have helped the nation recognize these abuses. We confess sexism as a sin, requiring our repentance and resistance.

III. WE BELIEVE how we treat the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner is how we treat Christ himself. (Matthew 25: 31-46) "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." God calls us to protect and seek justice for those who are poor and vulnerable, and our treatment of people who are "oppressed," "strangers," "outsiders," or otherwise considered "marginal" is a test of our relationship to God, who made us all equal in divine dignity and love. Our proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ is at stake in our solidarity with the most vulnerable. If our gospel is not "good news to the poor," it is not the gospel of Jesus Christ (Luke 4:18).

THEREFORE, WE REJECT the language and policies of political leaders who would debase and abandon the most vulnerable children of God. We strongly deplore the growing attacks on immigrants and refugees, who are being made into cultural and political targets, and we need to remind our churches that God makes the treatment of the "strangers" among us a test of faith (Leviticus 19:33-34). We won't accept the neglect of the well-being of low-income families and children, and we will resist repeated attempts to deny health care to those who most need it. We confess our growing national sin of putting the rich over the poor. We reject the immoral logic of cutting services and programs for the poor while cutting taxes for the rich. Budgets are moral documents. We commit ourselves to opposing and reversing those policies and finding solutions that reflect the wisdom of people from different political parties and philosophies to seek the common good. Protecting the poor is a central commitment of Christian discipleship, to which 2,000 verses in the Bible attest.

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IV. WE BELIEVE that truth is morally central to our personal and public lives. Truth-telling is central to the prophetic biblical tradition, whose vocation includes speaking the Word of God into their societies and speaking the truth to power. A commitment to speaking truth, the ninth commandment of the Decalogue, “You shall not bear false witness” (Exodus 20:16), is foundational to shared trust in society. Falsehood can enslave us, but Jesus promises, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32). The search and respect for truth is crucial to anyone who follows Christ.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT the practice and pattern of lying that is invading our political and civil life. Politicians, like the rest of us, are human, fallible, sinful, and mortal. But when public lying becomes so persistent that it deliberately tries to change facts for ideological, political, or personal gain, the public accountability to truth is undermined. The regular purveying of falsehoods and consistent lying by the nation’s highest leaders can change the moral expectations within a culture, the accountability for a civil society, and even the behavior of families and children. The normalization of lying presents a profound moral danger to the fabric of society. In the face of lies that bring darkness, Jesus is our truth and our light.

V. WE BELIEVE that Christ’s way of leadership is servanthood, not domination. Jesus said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles (the world) lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant” (Matthew 20:25-26). We believe our elected officials are called to public service, not public tyranny, so we must protect the limits, checks, and balances of democracy and encourage humility and civility on the part of elected officials. We support democracy, not because we believe in human perfection, but because we do not. The authority of government is instituted by God to order an unredeemed society for the sake of justice and peace, but ultimate authority belongs only to God.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT any moves toward autocratic political leadership and authoritarian rule. We believe authoritarian political leadership is a theological danger that threatens democracy and the common good—and we will resist it. Disrespect for the rule of law, not recognizing the equal importance of our three branches of government, and replacing civility with dehumanizing hostility toward opponents are of great concern to us. Neglecting the ethic of public service and accountability, in favor of personal recognition and gain often characterized by offensive arrogance, are not just political issues for us. They raise deeper concerns about political idolatry, accompanied by false and unconstitutional notions of authority.

VI. WE BELIEVE Jesus when he tells us to go into all nations making disciples (Matthew 28:18). Our churches and our nations are part of an international community whose interests always surpass national boundaries. The most well-known verse in the New Testament starts with “For God so loved the world” (John 3:16). We, in turn, should love and serve the world and all its inhabitants, rather than seek first narrow, nationalistic prerogatives.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT “America first” as a theological heresy for followers of Christ. While we share a patriotic love for our country, we reject xenophobic or ethnic nationalism that places one nation over others as a political goal. We reject domination rather than stewardship of the earth’s resources, toward genuine global development that brings human flourishing for all of God’s children. Serving our own communities is essential, but the global connections between us are undeniable. Global poverty, environmental damage, violent conflict, weapons of mass destruction, and deadly diseases in some places ultimately affect all places, and we need wise political leadership to deal with each of these.

WE ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED for the soul of our nation, but also for our churches and the integrity of our faith. The present crisis calls us to go deeper—deeper into our relationship to God; deeper into our relationships with each other, especially across racial, ethnic, and national lines; deeper into our relationships with the most vulnerable, who are at greatest risk.

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The church is always subject to temptations to power, to cultural conformity, and to racial, class, and gender divides, as Galatians 3:28 teaches us. But our answer is to be “in Christ,” and to “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable, and perfect.” (Romans 12:1-2)

The best response to our political, material, cultural, racial, or national idolatries is the First Commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Jesus summarizes the Greatest Commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, and your mind. This is the first commandment. And the second is like unto it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:38). As to loving our neighbors, we would add “no exceptions.”

We commend this letter to pastors, local churches, and young people who are watching and waiting to see what the churches will say and do at such a time as this. Our urgent need, in a time of moral and political crisis, is to recover the power of confessing our faith. Lament, repent, and then repair. If Jesus is Lord, there is always space for grace. We believe it is time to speak and to act in faith and conscience, not because of politics, but because we are disciples of Jesus Christ—to whom be all authority, honor, and glory. It is time for a fresh confession of faith. Jesus is Lord. He is the light in our darkness. “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

A Reason to Wear Red

On May 20th, we will celebrate Pentecost, the “birthday of the church.” As with all such celebrations, it is not so much *how old we are*, but *how we are old*, how open we are to God’s future, and to what extent we can trust that our lives, past, present and future, are held in the heart of our loving God.

What was it that turned a bunch of scared to death, self-absorbed, has-been followers of Jesus into a community on fire with love for one another, the world into which they are sent, and the God who equipped and sent them? Luke says it was the Holy Spirit of Christ, the very love of God unleashed in the world. The Holy Spirit’s descent at Pentecost means we no longer need to huddle in fear for ourselves. Living now in the Age of the Spirit, we do not need to pray for the Spirit’s return. It is enough to pray for the recognition of the Spirit’s presence already in our midst. In the Age of the Spirit, we do not need to anxiously seek God’s love. It is enough to ask God’s help in removing the barriers within ourselves against that love.

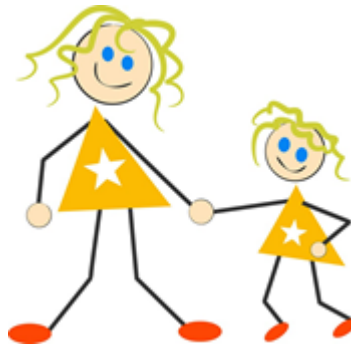
As the church collects donations for its yard sale on May 26th, maybe it would also be a good time for us to box up some of our worn-out questions. Instead of asking, “How do we bring new people in?”, we might ask instead, “How is God sending us, young and old, out?” Instead of asking, “What can we do to usher in the Kingdom God?” we might ask, “How can we get out of God’s way?” And rather than wringing our hands over what was and fretting about what is to be, we could celebrate the reign of God that Jesus Christ has already inaugurated in our very midst. We could, in a word, become fully present and available to our lives together in the spirit as they actually are, right here, right now.

That would be reason enough to wear red.

Submitted by Pastor Fred

May Youth Happenings

Want to know more about the Church Youth Group?
Contact Youth Director Debbie Eitel at debbie_eitel@ibi.com



Saturday May 12 Mother/Daughter Breakfast

9 AM in the CE Hall at the church.

Come join us for some good food and fellowship with all our "sisters" in Christ! All women & girls Welcome!

~Served by our "brothers" in Christ!

Specially prepared by Chef Gary Prentiss



Sunday May 13 Mother's Day Church service 10:30AM

Join us and worship with your Mothers, Grandmothers, sisters etc

Sunday May 27 P.A.C.K. Event -(Planned Act of Christian Kindness)

Meet immediately after church - give out a FREE item with a connection card with information about our church

Scatter seeds
of kindness
wherever you go

PRAYER CORNER

MAY 2018

She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all." Proverbs 31:25-29

As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you. Isaiah 66:13

MY TASK

~Maude L. Ray

To love someone more dearly every day,
To help a wandering child to find his way,
To ponder o'er a noble thought and pray,
And smile when evening falls—

This is my task.

To follow truth as blind men seek for light,
To do my best from dawn of day till night,
To keep my heart fit for His holy sight,
And answer when He calls—

This is my task.

And then my Savior by and by to meet,
When faith hath made her task on earth complete,
And lay my homage at the Master's feet,
Within the jasper walls—

This crowns my task.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Eph 4:29-32

MOTHER O'MINE

~Jan Miller Girando

Where there is home, there's a mother who cares,
who gives comfort and kindness, who listens and shares.

Where there is home, there's a mother who sees, we need
good times and laughter, and sometimes a squeeze.

There's a mother who guides us whenever we're lost,
who gives of herself without counting the cost,

A mother who's thoughtful and witty and wise,
who reflects all the love in her little ones' eyes.

Where there is home, there are children who know,
that they may need a push, if they're ever to grow.

There are children who feel that they're never alone,
for wherever a mother's love goes,
there is home.

Submitted by Betty Chatfield

**ANNUAL MOTHER ~ DAUGHTER
BREAKFAST
SATURDAY, MAY 12TH
9:00 AM
ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS WELCOME!**

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?"*