# The Growing Edge

HARRISBURG FIRST CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

A DIFFERENT KIND OF CHRISTMAS EVE!!

Thursday, December 24 4:00pm Back Parking Lot

Please join us for an evening of
Campfire, recitation of the
Christmas Story, singing,
refreshments & just being together!!!

We will receive an offering of clothing donations and a designated cash offering to benefit

Harrisburg First Church of the Brethren (HFCOB) and Brethren Housing Association (BHA)

Bring family and friends for electric candlelighting to close our time together.



2020

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#### **SUNDAY WORSHIP SCHEDULE**

VIRTUAL SUNDAY BIBLE STUDY
10 AM; VIRTUAL WORSHIP 11:15 AM
OUTSIDE ONSITE WORSHIP 11 AM
VIRTUAL BIBLE STUDY 3 PM

## Our Community Ministries



#### **PEACE**

Pursuing Shalom is a value of bcm-PEACE that has been at the very heart since the beginning. Through programs and community engagement, we strive to create a place where God's peace shines and every person is shown love, grace, and mercy. We pray for continued shalom as we continue to grapple with the state of our world and aim to provide services that address the whole person and their needs so that we can

be a strong body working together for peace and justice.

## Valuing What

## **Matters**

Looking at our new core values and praying for peace, hope, love and joy this Christmas Season

#### **HOPE**

Empowering leaders in our community provides hope, Programs like Agape Satyagraha and Pathway to Prosperity allow hope to flow through the community and leaders to feel empowered and enabled for greatness. We pray for hope so that our neighbors will know their strength and power. We will come together to create a just community and a just world where we feel God's presence and always have hope for the future.

#### LOVE

Strengthening relationships shows love for God, for our community, for our neighbors, and for the active work of justice and peace that we are pursuing. Engaging in these meaningful relationships through our Wellness Hub and Pathway to Prosperity and Kid's Church

allows us to show our love in all of these aspects. It also allows others to show their love to others. We pray for love so that our relationships we strengthen are pure and meaningful.

#### JOY

Collaboration and advocacy brings us joy, because working with our neighbors for the good of the whole body is Shalom at work. Joy comes in many forms and one is the joy we bring to others such as the youth that receive hats and gloves or the hungry neighbors that need food, or the student that earns a new computer. Another is the joy that exist in the presence of His goodness. By His grace we are able to provide for our community and bring joy. We pray for continuous joy in collaboration and advocacy. May our yearning for justice result in shouts of praise and celebration in Your joy!

"You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,

and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young." - Isaiah 40:9-11



Alyssa M. Parker
Operations Manager

## Our Brethren Volunteer Service Members

Hello Friends,

As a member of First Church of the Brethren and the Harrisburg community, I'm realizing my purpose here, and that is to do the work of God by giving back and helping in whatever capacity He calls me to do.

For example, I enjoy my work with the community classroom at the Journey Church, helping those pre- adolescent kids with school work and listening to them when they need assistance or help for anything. Also, I enjoy the many contributions I've engaged in with the church, especially with Sunday worship service. During Sunday Service, I contribute by giving the announcements or reading a scripture. All these things have been helping me grow tremendously. Furthermore, going forward here in Harrisburg with my mission and purpose, my desire is to keep helping wherever I can, and keep striving to make an impact in this community and the church because I believe that's what God called me to do.

Thank you for your continued friendship and prayer support.

Eric Joloka BVS Volunteer

#### **All About Christmas**

Christmas 2020 is going to be like no other in our lifetime. For once we are not allowed to gather and be with friends and family like we always do. The hard part is for some people there is not a next year. Age, illness and accidents will take our loved ones from us.

Before I came to Pennsylvania, I drove through the small Oklahoma town where I had lived from my late teens to my early 30's. My parents' house filled with so many memories has been empty since they moved out in 2008. No one is left in the old neighborhood that I knew, and I doubt I will ever return. I did not go in even though the house was open to the elements. I wanted to remember it as it was so long ago, It is just empty rooms now. Soon the house and those around it will be gone.

Live each day as if it were your last and make the best of it you can. Today is all we have, and tomorrow is not promised.

In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 the bible says that "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things".

Christmas apart from being the celebration of our Savior's birth is not just about stuff, even though our society tells us it is. When you are a child your thought process is: "CHRIISTMAS is a TIME WHEN I GET PRESENTS!!!! CHRISTMAS is a TIME WHEN I GET CANDY AND JUNK FOOD!! Understanding the importance of meeting with family comes in time and with maturity.

Christmas is about quiet contemplation and time with those we care about. Although this year the latter is going to be severely curtailed, we must make a sacrifice this year so that those we care about can be here next year. It is hard not to be able to be close to our loved ones, but we have to make that choice.

This is a time when we have to substitute fist and elbow bumps for hugs and kisses; zoom meetings for being face to face. This time *will pass* and we will all be together again.

As a BVS volunteer, I have not yet attended a service in the church, only outdoor and virtual worship. I look forward to the day when I can. *Again, this time will pass, and we will all be together again. I look forward to that time!* 

Daniel Wright, BVS Volunteer

#### A Different Kind of Christmas Eve

You may recall that back at the beginning of Holy Week 2020 I preached a sermon entitled "A Different Kind of Palm Sunday." The idea being that this certainly is a different year due to the COVID -19 pandemic, and yet we still remember and celebrate all that the Lord has done and is doing in our lives. It strikes me that as each season of the year has come and gone, we have truly had a "different kind" of 2020. Easter, High School and College graduations, Mothers and Fathers Days, Summer vacations, the beginning of school in the fall among other occasions have been quite different than any year before.

With that being said, I invite you to celebrate "a Different Kind of Christmas Eve." Due to the pandemic, we have decided as a congregation NOT to meet inside until the factors in our area change drastically. Instead, join in a gathering on our back parking lot full of laughter, family, singing carols and enjoying sweets! We will set up several fire pits along with our outdoor heaters back on the lot where we celebrate our outdoor worship services. We will have roasted marshmallow/s'mores, Christmas cookies, hot cocoa or other hot beverages. Christmas music will be played and we will sing some of our favorite Christmas Carols culminating in the lighting of our battery powered candles and singing Silent Night.

There have been different ideas about whether to have this on Christmas Eve or at another time. Plans are still being made, *so stay tuned for the specifics as to date and time.* Weather may also dictate a change closer to the time of the event as well.

One nice thing about this year is that because of the unusual circumstances caused by the pandemic, we have the opportunity to try new things. We hope you will allow yourself to envision how a celebration like this can come about and bring us together in joy. Please join us as we celebrate "A Different Kind of Christmas Eve."



# MASKS AND SOCIAL DISTANCING REQUIRED AT ALL WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

#### **WEEKLY ACTIVITIES**

#### SUNDAY

(As Announced)
Youth or Young Adult Group

#### WEDNESDAY

Agape-Satyagraha Conflict Resolution Training: 5-6 pm



#### Deacons At Work

In past years, the Deacons of Harrisburg First Church have distributed fruit baskets to the widows and widowers in the congregation. This year, due to changing circumstances and certain restrictions related to Covid-19, this ministry will also include some of our homebound members and the pastors. Instead of fruit baskets, Deacons will deliver pre-packaged bakery cookies only. Deacons will be asked to pick up cookies for persons in their zones then deliver them before Christmas. If this is a problem, please notify Joy Reardon, Spiritual Life Team Chair so we can arrange delivery. Also, we can use help with the preparations. An email with details will be sent the Deacon body. Thank you to our Spiritual Life Team and Deacon body.



Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!

#### Have You Noticed?



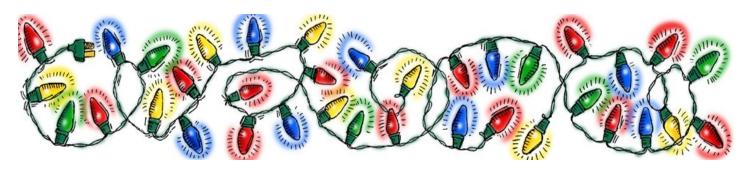
We have an increasing number of children in our congregation and we're blessed to have strong leadership working with these children on an intentional basis. Some new activities have been added to our Children's ministry and some of the existing activities are continuing. We continue to feature the "Time for Young Disciples" during the worship services. We've intentionally included children as scripture readers and to present the

weekly announcements in worship. The Shine Curriculum continues to enrich the children's ministry and was used for the intergenerational "All Church" Sunday Bible Study that was implemented during the Lenten Season. Stewardship Education is being emphasized and it is a joy to see the children anxiously making their offerings using the special children's offering envelopes . In order to strengthen and expand this ministry, we need more volunteers. If you are interested in serving with our children, background checks are required, and a brief orientation is offered. Thanks to Christine Ludwick , Renee Hart and the Christian Education Team for providing primary oversight for these ministries with our children. Please contact either of them or Donna Benson, Team Leader with your inquiries and offers to help: christineludwick@yahoo.com, reneeahart@gmail.com, or donnaksbenson@gmail.com

#### New Library Underway

Thanks to the joint efforts of the Christian Education Team and bcmPEACE. A new "Social Justice Library" is being established at our church. Space is being designated in the coffee room to include seating and a bookcase to encourage use of the newly acquired reading materials.

The plan is to have books available for children and adults that reflect our multicultural diversity, and inform a growing social justice consciousness; while empowering us to become an anti racist community. Many of these initial resources were obtained through gifts and donations received during the 2020 ANE District Conference Service project. We will maintain a perpetual wish list that will allow other contributions to be made as we grow the collection and maintain relevance in contemporary developments. We expect to add one or two periodical subscriptions such as Sojourners and Teaching Tolerance. Please contact Donna Benson, Christine Ludwick, or Alyssa Parker for additional information and ways you can contribute support for this important project.



#### **CHRISTMAS BLESSINGS**

From the Church staff, leaders, and members:

In this season of Advent and Christmas, we pray that you hold on to the strong HOPE of Christ the Messiah, comforting PEACE that Christ is the all-sufficient Savior, exuberant JOY that Christ is present in all circumstances, and all-encompassing LOVE that comes to us through God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Glow with the light of Christ to all the world, in all your experiences, and with all perseverance. Let Christmas remain in your hearts all year long.

Pastor Belita D. Mitchell Pastor Josiah Ludwick Rev. Jon Brenneman

Rev. Roger Dixon. Sr.
Alyssa M. Parker
Waneta Benson
Don-Valliant Mitchell II

The Ministries Coordinating Team (MCT)
The members and friends of Harrisburg First

Greetings and Blessings from Baltimore to all my friends( even ones I haven't met yet ) at First Church.

Diane Bellomo



#### More Congregational News

#### Transition and Search Committee

Hopefully you have already heard, we are in the midst of transition as Pastor Belita will move on from her duties at First Church at the end of this year. As such, we need to begin the process of finding a new staff member in the attempt to fill the immense void she leaves behind.

You may also be aware that over a year ago we called a Discernment Team into service whose job it has been to prayerfully seek God and His direction for the church. This team was intentionally made up of a cross-section of our faith family, and has been meeting regularly for over a year. Some of the new ideas we have incorporated as a result of this team's work have included: intentionality of including different languages in worship, regular use of the Lord's Prayer, Our solidarity/Black Lives Matter Statement, Using virtual worship as an opportunity to welcome visitors and leadership who ordinarily couldn't visit, multi-generational Sunday Bible Study, etc.

At our last MCT meeting, it was suggested that this team be assigned the task of serving as our Search Committee for our staffing transition. This seems to fit well with the original assignment for this team. Since that meeting, all the existing members have accepted this responsibility; and an initial meeting with our District Executive, Pete Kontra, is scheduled for this month. All decisions coming from this team will act as recommendations to the MCT, which will then be voted on by the Congregation via Church Council meetings. For your information and prayer support, the team members are as follows: Pastor Josiah Ludwick, Alyssa Parker, Donna Benson, Dr. Drew Hart, Briel Slocum, Oluremi "Remi"Senaike, and Joyce Albin. More details about the search process will be shared as things develop. Please hold this team close to your hearts and minds as we uplift their important work in prayer.

"Oh, Lord, Hear Our Prayer"

#### Holiday Gift Ideas



Order Joy To The Burg: Give the gift of music to help the homeless! Local art-

ists have rallied to create a Christmas album to fund CCU's winter walk-in shelter for women in downtown Harrisburg. It's a fun album, for a great cause...and is the gift that gives twice: it will bless your friends and family with music, and give the gift of hope to people on the street this Christmas.

**ORDER:** <u>www.JoyToTheBurg.com</u> (CD or Digital Download)

...or pick one up at your local Karns Grocery Store BUY FIVE OR MORE THROUGH THE WEBSITE.



#### **TV Special**

**Join us at 10 am on December 15, 2020 on ABC 27** for our first ever one-hour Joy To The Burg TV Special. Featuring interviews, songs and artists from the album Joy to the Burg 2020.

A special ministry of Christian Churches United, Harrisburg: www.ccuhbg.org

#### **OUR OWN CREATIVE PRESENCE:**

For those of us who have been fortunate to witness her creative gifts up close, we can now expose others to the whimsical, inspirational gifts of Alyssa Parker. Find her creative offerings at her self-named website: **www.sincerelylyssa**. There you will find art, poetry, life bearing and life giving thoughts while getting a deeper glimpse of this talented young woman God has placed in our midst.





**Ruth Lotz** 2—Dec 8—Dec Dianne Negley 9—Dec **Butch Eisenhour** 13-Dec Rachel Ludwick 17—Dec **David Stillions** Elana "Ellie" Hunn 21-Dec Rachel Knight 23-Dec Jane Webster 24-Dec

9—Dec Ken & Marlene Zook 10—Dec Gerald & Rita Rhoades Make sure you send a card or give these people a beautiful smile on their special day!

#### Cause For Celebration

Over the past twelve months, much has occurred for us to celebrate in the life of our church. We rejoiced that Ellen Adkins celebrated her 100th Birthday; Robert "Bob" Brode celebrated his 93rd Birthday, and Leighton Stansbury celebrated 95 years of good living!

We are particularly glad about the new member received during 2020:

• By Letter—Alyssa M. Parker

We look forward to welcoming other new members and consecrating children in the near future.

We celebrated the "Home going" of: Joyce E. Nantz, and Dorothea "Dotty" (Crozier) Coulson. May they have eternal rest.



#### BHA Christmas Opportunities

We have the opportunity to provide some Christmas cheer this year to some of the families at Brethren Housing Association (BHA). The women at BHA work hard to learn the skills necessary to provide a safe and stable home for their families. Unfortunately, this year has been especially difficult for them as they all lost their jobs due to Covid.

Please prayerfully consider making a generous gift for our Special Offering on Christmas Eve that will be shared equally between the ministries of Harrisburg First Church and BHA.





The deadline for the **January**-**February**Growing Edge will be **December** 

be **December 15.** Please make

arrangements to turn in your submissions *early* to the church office.

Late submissions will be automatically deferred to the next issue.

# Announcements

### HELP US STAY UP TO DATE!

We need your correct contact information for updating our church records and the Church Directory. Please notify the church office or contact your deacon to insure your listing is accurate. We'd also like to have birthday information on file and Wedding Anniversary date.

### Our 2021 Offering Envelopes Have a New Look!

The Stewardship Team has eliminated the dates from the offering envelopes, however, they will still carry a number. Please use your assigned envelope when making an offering or you may use our online giving option.

## Advent Zoom Bible Study Begins 12/3/20 6 pm Thursdays

The Advent Devotional "Give Light" will be used to guide the study time. Please contact Joy Reardon to purchase your copy.

**Church Council** is scheduled for Sunday, December 6 at 1 pm by Zoom. Please have your council packet handy as you tune in.

"The Christian faith can never be separated from the soil of sacred events, from the choice made by God, who wanted to speak to us, to become man, to die and rise again, in a particular place and at a particular time." — Pope Benedict XVI

#### Pastor's Page



#### Fascination, Imagination, and Anticipation

(Be Holy] Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. 1 Peter 1:13

Since being in central Pennsylvania, my fascination with the changing seasons has heightened over the years. I've also become more fascinated by the changing seasons in my own life, and acquired a deepened awe and understanding of how God's faithfulness is universal throughout creation. I've watched infants grow into early childhood as my imagination begins to envision how long, and in what ways their gifts will grow and flourish. In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, I've become more aware of the variety of changing seasons, while I prepare to enter a new season in my own life according to God's timing. I anticipate moving from my role in full time pastoral ministry to a less demanding series of ministerial pursuits that will allow me to use and strengthen my gifts.

I expect that many of the vivid and impressionable memories of my tenure will hold on and continue to enrich me for years to come. I will always cherish the love and support I experienced during my time at Harrisburg First. As Advent arrives, we are reminded that a new Christian year is dawning. Now, I begin to imagine what the next few weeks will hold, and no doubt, Christmas is in the air! The changing of the seasons marks the end of one thing and the beginning of another. Without question, the coronavirus pandemic has had a tremendous influence on our lives together over this past year as have all the domestic and world events in the social and political arena. Nevertheless, we look forward with hope.

This is the time for us to be reminded about the coming of Christ into the world as Lord and Savior. It is the time to mark a new season; one filled with hope, peace, joy, and love. It is also a time to be reminded about what it cost the Father for us have the assurance of His great love lavished upon us.

Throughout eternity, "This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." 1 John 4:9-10

As we move through the Advent Season, let's be mindful that we are preparing to celebrate the birth of a king who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Let us be sober minded in our preparations for this celebration, as we remember to be ready for the Second Coming of Christ. Let us prepare our hearts and our homes to be welcoming places for the soon coming Christ. Let us "deck the halls and our hearts" with a new found fascination, imagination, and anticipation of God's continued faithfulness and blessing upon our lives as we seek to be a blessing to others.

#### Pastor Belita

Harrisburg First Church of the Brethren

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#### **CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED**



#### **OUR CHURCH STAFF**

Belita D. Mitchell, Pastor

Josiah Ludwick, Associate Pastor

Alyssa Parker, Operations Manager, Brethren Community Ministries/bcmPEACE

**Waneta Benson** 

Organist

Vacant Administrative Assistant We are called to be a
Christ-centered multi-cultural
Community in the inner city,
Sharing the love, healing, peace
and justice of Christ.



Anointed to share transformation in Christ Jesus.

The Growing Edge is published monthly by the First Church of The Brethren for our members, friends, and neighbors, except for the combined issues 2 times a year.