

# STONE CHURCH NEWS

December 2021

**Calendar of Events** – See inside for the full calendar of events this Advent and Christmas Season!

**Pledges for 2022**– There is still time to fill out a pledge card for 2022! We appreciate your continued generosity as we look toward next year.

**Holiday Scavenger Hunt**–The Fellowship and Hospitality Team is running a Holiday Scavenger Hunt you can do from home! There are prizes available, so be sure to read on!

# STONE CHURCH NEWS

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## From the Pastor's Desk



*"If you had to summarize it in a sentence, you could say that the history of private life is a history of getting comfortable slowly. Until the eighteenth century, the idea of having comfort at home was so unfamiliar that no word existed for the condition. Comfortable meant merely "capable of being consoled." Comfort was something you gave to the wounded or distressed. The first person to use the*

*word in its modern sense was the writer Horace Walpole, who remarked in a letter to a friend in 1770 that a certain Mrs. White was looking after him well and making him "as comfortable as is possible." By the early nineteenth century, everyone was talking about having a comfortable home or enjoying a comfortable living, but before Walpole's day no one did."*

*~ Bill Bryson in *At Home: A Short History of Private Life**

Getting comfortable slowly. This phrase connects for me - about home and about Advent. We have lived in *our* home for almost 4 years now - and I am still working on the things that make it comfortable for our family and for anyone who visits. I have a running list of "improvements" that I am slowly working on: a mirror for the guest room, good space for each child to do homework, a better system for storing craft supplies, hooks to hang the backpacks on, the seating arrangement in the living room. It is our home - I love it and the people who share it - but it's not done. It's still a work in progress. I am getting comfortable there slowly.

In reflecting on our worship theme, *Close to Home*, Anna Strickland from *A Sanctified Art* writes, "Our home is never finished because home isn't a destination. It's where life happens. It's about the pets buried in the backyard and the pencil marks on the kitchen wall showing how tall the kids have grown. It's about the meals we've shared at the table, whether birthday celebrations or casseroles to comfort our grief. Home is where we live out the whole tapestry of human existence, good and bad, mundane and extraordinary, trivial and overwhelming."

Advent is a season where we yearn for God to come close, even as we celebrate that God already has. We long for God to draw near again....and again...and again. It is not all "merry and bright" - the whole tapestry of life is here - the grief, longing, hope, peace, heartache, joy, and love. We hope you will fully engage all that we have planned on this journey to and from and in God's welcoming home for us. Even in the places where you must get comfortable slowly.



# *Advent and Christmas Story*

## *Close to Home*

*See below for the schedule of events this Advent Season and beyond!*

### **Tuesdays at 7AM - Tuesdays Together**

Check your email in the morning for a video reflection on "Home" from a Stone Community member!

### **Wednesdays at 7PM - Visio Divina**

Zoom discussions on Advent art led by Donna Rhodes

### **December 4 - Alternative Christmas Gifts Bazaar Pickup**

### **December 5 - Second Sunday of Advent: *Laying the Foundation***

10:45AM Hybrid Worship

### **December 12 - Third Sunday of Advent: *A Home for All***

10:45AM Hybrid Worship

Caroling in the afternoon, time TBD

### **December 19 - Fourth Sunday of Advent: *Seeking Sanctuary***

10:45AM Our First EVER Hybrid Christmas Pageant

6:00PM Hybrid Longest Night Worship Service

### **December 24 - Christmas Eve Service(s): *Invited Home***

Worship will be hybrid with time(s) still TBD

### **December 26 - First Sunday After Christmas: *Chosen Home***

10:45AM Hybrid Worship with Poetry and Carols

At-Home Liturgy for worship on your own with family available!

### **January 2 - Epiphany Sunday: *Home by Another Way***

10:45AM Hybrid Worship

*See the Friday Flash or contact the office for more information*

1623 Moore St., Huntingdon, PA

[stonechurch@verizon.net](mailto:stonechurch@verizon.net)

# COVID Response Team Update

Dear Stone Church family,

It's been a while since we sent out an update from the COVID Response team. We continue to meet weekly to review data in the region and develop safe protocols for upcoming events and use of the facility. Below are some of the most common questions we have been hearing.

## **Are our protocols working?**

Yes! As far as we can tell, there has been no COVID transmission during a church event. We have had COVID positive participants at church services, indicating both that the protocols are working, and that we need to keep them in place.

Our policies currently focus on protecting the most vulnerable in the community – those who are immunocompromised or cannot be vaccinated. Therefore, we follow CDC protocols for unvaccinated groups, focusing primarily on spacing and masking.

## **Are community groups allowed to use our facilities?**

Yes, if the use fits within our safe use policies. For example, users must mask, groups in the Fellowship Hall are limited to 30 people, and we do not allow meals in the facility. Policies for outside users are the same as those for our own members.

## **Will we ever sing in church again?**

Yes! Congregational singing has not gone away forever. Unfortunately, studies show that singing is a really good way to spread the virus. For now, we will continue to just listen, or Zoom in from home and sing loudly. And continue looking forward to the day we can sing together. When will that be? See the next question...

## **When do things go back to normal?**

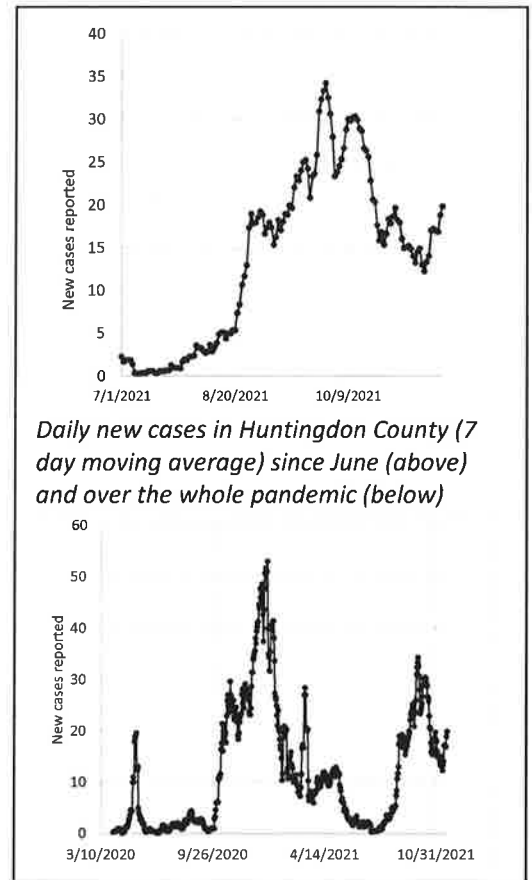
We've had some really positive changes during the pandemic. For example, the hybrid model of church allows us to hear voices from across the county (or globe!) as well as letting people participate from home for many good reasons. This isn't going to go back to the old way. But we're missing a lot too – such as hugs, singing, congregational meals. Things that we will go back to when it is safe.

I wish we could tell you when and how we will be able to call the pandemic over. But things keep changing in ways we can't predict, so we keep coming to the same conclusion: it's not over yet. In good news, we did not need to close the church facility, even as cases increased in September. Unfortunately, cases remain high enough that masking and distancing remain a critical part of our safety plan. Things we are watching include vaccine availability for every age and low case rates in the county.

Most of all – we want to say thank you. Thank you for continuing to prioritize health and safety, thank you for masking and distancing, and thank you for making the in-person church experience safe and welcoming. Response to the COVID pandemic has been divisive for so many communities. Instead of feeling divided, our committee and the pastors and staff have felt supported and encouraged by you and the sacrifices you are willing to take to keep our community safe. Thank you.

*Warm regards,*

*Sharon Yohn, Daisy Decker, Brooke Meadows, Luke Roth, Marty Keeney, and Pastor Cindy Lattimer*



## Share Recipes from YOUR Home

As the worship team brainstormed for the Advent series, we each shared some of our images of "home." Many of us named food. The meals we share can be a powerful connector - creating a sense of home - and memories that last.

With that in mind, we are creating a *Close to Home Cookbook* - and we need YOUR recipes. What are the special recipes that remind you of home? That evoke memories of connection for you? Please share them with us!

We are hoping that most of the recipes will come to us in handwritten form - there are index cards and a basket in the back of the sanctuary. You may also drop them off in the office. Or if you prefer, you may email [stonechurch@verizon.net](mailto:stonechurch@verizon.net). If you have a recipe that is written in someone else's hand - we are happy to help you scan the recipe so that you may keep the original! And don't forget to include your name so that we know whose food we are sharing.

We would like to give out the cookbooks on Christmas Eve, and so **we need your recipes no later than December 10**. We look forward to cooking "together!"

## Join us for Caroling December 12!

Please help us spread blessing and cheer to members of our Stone Church community through caroling and cookies! We will gather at the church on Sunday, December 12 at 2:30pm to divide into groups to go out. This is always a special tradition both for those who sing and those who receive the gift. Please wear a mask!



## **Gene's Jottings**

### **"Hoping At Christmas"**

There's been so much trouble in the world, the nation, and my personal life in the recent past that it was hard to get even a small grin or get writing, but a friend came to my rescue when writer's block struck as I thought about December's Jottings. I had wanted to write about Jesus's birthday. The Bible does not tell us when Jesus was born, but it tells us a lot about Easter and Jesus' Resurrection. My friend suggested that, because of all the trouble we've had recently, I concentrate on the Hope his life gives us as well!

Millions of people around the world believe that Christmas is the birthday celebration of Jesus. The Bible does not mention birthday celebrations for Jesus. Celebrating Christmas was first mentioned in the Chronograph of Philocalus, a Roman almanac dated to 336 of the Christian Era.

*And in that region there were shepherds out with their sheep in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."*  
(From Luke 2)

Now, if the shepherds were out in their fields and Jesus was born in December, Biblical scholars point out the shepherds were out in the coldest months of the year, Chislev and Tebeth. (November to January). Caesar Augustus probably ordered his census to gather information for purposes connected with taxation and military conscription. To comply with the order, Mary, despite being heavy with child, accompanied her husband Joseph, on the journey of some 90 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Now think about it: Does it seem likely that Augustus-a ruler who rarely interfered with local government-would require a people who were already inclined to revolt to make such a long trip in the winter?

Hundreds of years after Jesus death, December 25 was chosen as the date of his birth. Why? Numerous historians believe that the time of year that became the Christmas season was actually a period when pagan festivities were celebrated. For instance, Encyclopedia Britannica states: "One widespread explanation of the origin of this date is that December 25 was a Christianizing of the *dies solis invicta nati* (day of the birth of the unconquered sun). It was a popular holiday in the Roman Empire that celebrated the winter solstice as a symbol of the resurgence of the sun, the casting away of the winter, and the heralding of the rebirth of spring and summer."

Christmas teaches us about hope and optimism, and here are just a few of the ways Christmas teaches me of hope and fills me with optimism. An epiphany refers to a sudden realization about the meaning of something. It usually feels inspired-from an intuitive place that is charged with wisdom. For Christians, the Epiphany is associated with the visit of the Wise Men to Jesus.

*I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and all knowledge-even as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you. (from I Corinthians 1)*

Christmas season is a reminder of Hope. For many, the Christmas season is about parties, gifts, decorations, and time off work. For Christians, however, this time of year is a happy reminder of the hope we have because of Jesus Christ. *"May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you."* (from Psalm 33)

Lord thank you that You sent your Son, so that we may have a reason to celebrate . We want to rejoice with You this year by honoring the birth of Christ. Help us to give freely as You freely gave. We praise You and give You all glory and honor. In Jesus' name, Amen.

May this festive season sparkle and shine, may all of your wishes and dreams come true, and may you feel this happiness all year round. May the divinity and purity of Christmas and the New Year festivals make your life holy and meaningful. May the closeness of friends, the comfort of home, and the unity of our nation, renew your spirits this festive season. May the melody and spirit of the holidays fill your home with love and peace all year long. To my special ones, my family, and all who read this - I wish you Happy Holidays, Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year 2022.

## December Birthdays

1—Brayton Oser *1	15—Terry Murray	21—Aislin Wright *16
5—Mario Grugan *18	17—Geoff Clarke	22—Terri Krabill
8—Virginia Biber	17—Jerri Wenger	24—Sally Stewart
9—Shepherd Miller *12	18—Emily Elder	26—Nora Roth *16
9—Dennis Plane	18—Max Hosler	27—Jeff Cloz
9—Zilla Wagner	18—Joanna White	28—Olivia Grugan
14—Tyler Hall	19—Martin Berger	30—Cora Dickey *9
14—Rick Laabs	20—Meredith Widman	

## December Anniversaries

3—Barb & Max Moyer

31—Tinka & Henrik Berger

### Grocery Gift Cards— Every card helps our church!

**(We get 5% to use in our ministries!)**

Buy your groceries at Weis or Giant using a grocery gift card purchased through Stone Church and Stone Church gets a donation of 5% back from the grocery store! To get your grocery gift cards, simply contact Cheryl Ritchey or contact the church office! Cards are available in denominations of \$25, \$50, and \$100.



## Men's Breakfast

December 18<sup>th</sup> — 8:00 AM

Enjoy fellowship, jokes, stories and a light reflection. Join the regular attendees, who look forward to seeing the gallery of faces and hearing the latest joke. If you are interested in attending, send your email address to Rick Laabs and he will send you an invitation. The location of this breakfast is still TBD, so keep your eye on the Friday Flash for updates! As always, there is also the option to join through Zoom. If you have questions, call Rick.



## Prayer Shawls

The prayer shawl ministry provides comfort and love from the Stone Church congregation to those who experience challenging times. The shawls are tangible reminders of God's ever-present hope and peace freely given to us. Challenges may cloud our awareness of God's continual presence, but a shawl is a wonderful reminder. Placed around shoulders or across a lap, a prayer shawl provides a comforting touch. We are journeying through a most unusual year filled with social unrest, political stress, COVID and maybe stress that is unique to you. The prayer shawl ministry offers shawls to those who may be feeling additional stress, sadness, or loneliness this season. If you would like a shawl, please reach out to Pastor Cindy, Pastor Ben, or Donna Rhodes. We will arrange for a safe delivery to you.

# District Youth Retreat

## I've Been Meaning to Ask...



Join the Middle PA District and Camp Blue Diamond as we gather together for a wonderful weekend of fellowship and conversation with Pastor Ben Lattimer! Ben is a co-pastor at Stone Church of the Brethren, and will lead us in the theme "I've Been Meaning to Ask," a series of questions and activities designed to foster curiosity, courage, and connection!

Come out to enjoy time in nature, engaging conversation and reconnect with friends old and new!

<p><b>Who:</b> All Youth in Grades 9-12</p> <p><b>When:</b> January 28-30, 2022          Registration begins 7 p.m. Friday          Retreat ends 1 p.m. Sunday</p> <p><b>Where:</b> Camp Blue Diamond</p> <p><b>What to bring:</b> sleeping bag and pillow, Bible, flashlight, face mask, warm clothing for playing outside (we will sled if there's snow!)</p>	<p><b>Cost: \$80</b></p> <p><b>Early Bird Discount:</b>          Pay only \$70 if you register by January 15!</p>
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Please complete the form below and send it, along with payment, to:  
**Camp Blue Diamond, P.O. Box 240, Petersburg, PA 16669**

Make checks payable to: **Camp Blue Diamond** Questions: call (814) 667-2355 or email: [campbluediamond@verizon.net](mailto:campbluediamond@verizon.net)

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: M / F Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Youth Retreat

Street: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Parents:** I give my child permission to attend the **Sr. High Retreat at CBD on January 28-30**. I authorize the leaders to act in any emergency and give permission to the physician selected to hospitalize or secure treatment as needed. Should it become necessary for my child to return home for any reason prior to closing, I will abide by the decision and provide transportation. I give permission to use pictures of my child in District and CBD brochures & publicity.

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Medications: Bring in Original Bottle w/ Instructions: \_\_\_\_\_

Allergies or dietary restrictions: \_\_\_\_\_ Is Child covered by Medical/Hospital Insurance?: Y/ N

Insurance Carrier: \_\_\_\_\_ Policy #: \_\_\_\_\_ Insurance Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Check  Card Number \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Security # \_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_





## Holiday Scavenger Hunt

The Hospitality & Fellowship Team is hosting a Holiday Scavenger Hunt – with prizes! People can enter as individuals or family units. Pick the outdoor or indoor list (or do both!) and take photos of all of the things you find. Then send those photos to Jeannie Lashlee by text or e-mail. The first submission received with the most correct answers will win first prize. Other prizes will be awarded based on number of found items and date submitted. **Deadline to enter is 8 PM Saturday, December 18<sup>th</sup>.** Prizes are as follows: 1st Prize - a cake by Sweetheart Confectionary, 2nd Prize – ½ dozen cupcakes by Sweetheart Confectionary; 3rd Prize – Floral arrangement by Weaver the Florist. The participant who finds the most indoor items will win our 4th Prize – a Gift Card from Weis Markets. Good luck! I hope that even if you don't win a prize, that you enjoy spending time looking for the beauty of the holidays!

### **Outdoor Items**

- Decorated Shed or Doghouse
- Something White
- Halo
- Outdoor Christmas Tree
- Red Nose
- Bird
- Snow Shovel
- Snowwoman
- A Christmas word “Joy” or “Peace”
- Santa Claus on a Rooftop
- Poinsettia
- Red Nose
- Green Mat or Carpet
- Frost
- Door Decoration that's not a wreath
- An animal made of lights
- Bell
- Star of David
- A burned-out Christmas light
- Icicle
- Nativity Scene
- Firewood
- Pinecone
- Something Red, White & Plastic
- Decorative Candy Cane
- Holly
- Snow Pants
- Oversized Ornament
- All white lights
- Something gold & silver
- Green door
- Toque
- Lantern
- Snow angel
- Candle in a window
- Toboggan or sled
- Snowball
- Chimney

### **Indoor Items**

- Tinsel
- Animal ornament
- Dove
- Snowglobe
- Red & Green clothing
- Something Plaid
- Centerpiece Decoration
- Woolen socks
- Fuzzy slippers
- Envelope with stamp
- Three Wise Men
- 2022 Calendar
- Something that says “Merry Christmas”
- Ice Skate
- Gift wrap
- Christmas cookie cutter
- Blank gift tag
- Something with foil
- Cranberry
- Ribbon
- Music notes
- Item from the 12 days of Christmas
- Sprinkles
- Batteries
- Something with wings
- Lump of coal
- Fruit cake
- Antler
- Mistletoe
- Advent Calendar
- Something mentioned in “Twas the Night Before Christmas
- Gingerbread House
- Christmas cookbook