

DECEMBER 2023

The Stone Church Newsletter

The monthly publication of the Stone Church of the Brethren



Our Welcome Statement

ADOPTED BY OUR CONGREGATION JANUARY 2012

Stone Church of the Brethren is a Christ-centered community, which celebrates every individual as a unique and beloved child of God.

We welcome all regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, race, ethnicity, physical or mental ability, economic circumstance, or current relationship with God.

We invite your active participation in the life of this congregation, as together we continue to grow in grace and seek justice for God's creation.

MORE READS INSIDE:

PASTOR'S DESK - 2
ADVENT POEM - 3
TEXTING BUDDIES - 3
STONE CHURCH GIVING - 4
GENE'S JOTTINGS - 4
POINSETTIA ORDER - 4
SEASONAL EVENTS - 5 & 6
ASTURIAS ACADEMY - 7 & 8
CHRISTIAN ED SPOTLIGHT - 9
SALVATION ARMY RINGING - 9
NEWS FROM CAMP - 10
ANNOUNCEMENTS & EVENTS - 11
STAYING IN COMMUNITY - 12

From the Pastors' Desk



"Maybe the play wasn't about miracles. No, maybe it was about the passage of time, and the need for patience, and the ability to forgive. Maybe Shakespeare was saying that even in a world where miracles can happen, there's still going to be pain, and loss, and regret. Because sometimes people die and you can't bring them back. That's what life is Joseph realized, miracles and sadness, side by side." - Brian Selznick in *The Marvels*

Everett brought home Brian Selznick's book, *The Marvels* and I could not put it down. Three of the five of us read it and have continued to ponder its beauty together. I highly recommend it to you! This powerful image of life being full of miracles and sadness, side by side, spoke deeply to me in connection with the story of Advent and Christmas as well.

As we move through the season of Advent we will look at the stories leading up to the birth of Jesus - the sadness and pain of Elizabeth and Zechariah's infertility, right alongside the miracle of John's birth. The fear and danger for a young Mary, right alongside her determination and hope. The Bible story does not show us a neat, curated picture of the world only rejoicing. It shows us the complicated reality of joy and grief and pain all mixed together.

And it is not just the Bible story that contains this mixture. Our own stories are full of delight and sorrow. Our world is plagued with violence and despair - even as it is also filled with beauty and new life. I think of the people we have lost this year, the war in Israel and Gaza, the health issues and struggles around us; and I confess that I am weary...AND hopeful.

This is the story of the Incarnation - of the miracle of God coming to dwell among us in the midst of the real world - with all its suffering and sanctity. This is Christmas - miracle and sadness, side by side.

Our worship theme for Advent is, *How Does a Weary World Rejoice?* How do we faithfully, thoughtfully, creatively hold this miracle and this weariness all together? How might you engage in the season in ways that bring healing, hope, compassion, and peace - for yourself and for others? Can we find ways to experience the weariness of the world while also recognizing and celebrating the nearness of God?

Each Sunday in worship, we will tell stories and sing songs. Instead of one large pageant, we will have mini-pageants each week - a way of mixing joy into all we do. There will be an opportunity each week to look at art together and reflect. We are planning a special service for the weary on a Sunday night - it will be a time for silence and healing. We will go caroling together and gather at the Alternative Christmas Gifts Bazaar. There are Advent Calendars available filled with activities to guide us; as well as devotional books for everyone so that we can center deeply into the season. And we will gather on Christmas Eve - we will light candles and let ourselves be drawn into the holy...

*A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn;
Fall on your knees, Oh hear the angel voices!
O night divine! O night when Christ was born.
O night, O holy night, O night divine.*



How does a weary world rejoice?

The Last Time I Saw God

BY SARAH ARE SPEED

The last time I saw God face to face
I was looking at a bed of tulips.
God was every color of red.
I was merely a mortal,
in awe of it all.
The time before that,
we were tying back the curtains,
looking for stars.
God was the deepest purple
and the brightest light.
The time before that,
the city was soft with snow.
God was the quiet
that tucked us all in.

And in between these small gifts
there were
newborn babies,
and sapling trees,
homemade bread,
the sound of a church
singing on Sunday.
...
Why, yes, we are lucky.
We are more than lucky
for the moments when
delight and awe
unzip the weight
we carry around.

Texting Buddies

WRITTEN BY PAM GRUGAN



“And so, this Advent, we will hold space for our weariness and our joy. We will seek a ‘thrill of hope’ in our hurting world. We will welcome joy—even and especially if, like the prophet Isaiah, we cry out for comfort (Isaiah 40:1). In this weary world, may we find many ways to rejoice.” *A Sanctified Art*

What’s one way our weary world can rejoice? Be a Texting Buddy!

Eddie Crader and I have been “Texting Buddies” since the spring of 2020. You see, Eddie lives on Washington Street, right where I watered baskets of geraniums every day through the summer and into the fall. And then, one day, Eddie made a really generous offer. He offered to help me water flowers each day. Since I don’t live in Huntingdon, Eddie and I would text each morning about the weather and whether or not I needed to come into town to water the flowers.

In October of 2020, we took down the last of the hanging baskets of flowers, but we were so used to texting every day, we just kept on texting...daily...ever since. We text when we’re weary. We text when we’re joyful. Sometimes that’s it, and we carry on with our day. Sometimes there’s an emergency, and we find a way to help each other out.

Because Eddie and I have benefitted so much as Texting Buddies, we propose for this ADVENT season that you might like to give it a try. It’s a simple way to brighten someone’s day or know that someone’s thinking of you when you’ve got a worry.

If you’d like to be a Texting Buddy with someone in our Stone Church family, please either call the church office, answer a few questions, and wait for your first text to learn who your new Texting Buddy (or Buddies) might be...and Rejoice!

The Stone Church Ministry is Strong: Can our giving sustain it?

So far, Stone Church members and friends have returned 43 pledges for 2024 giving totaling \$158,392. This compares to 57 pledges for the 2023 budget year totaling \$229,000. Also, through October of 2023 our expenses have exceeded giving by \$30,017. Stone Church has financial reserves that will allow us to support our ministry through a few years of deficit spending at the level we expect for 2023. As your Leadership Team builds the budget for 2024, they will be challenged. If you have pledged, please consider whether you are able to increase that pledge. If you have not yet pledged, please make a commitment to sustaining the ministry in which we share. Finally, please plan to attend congregational forums set for Sunday December 3rd, January 7th and January 28th, so that together we can discuss the joyous work we share and how we can best continue that work.

Gene's Jottings: Faith

WRITTEN BY GENE GOSHORN

I have saved faith for the final chapter of the year just as Revelation is the last book of the Bible. The last verse of my Bible is the sentence "and the grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen." St. Paul's letter to the Romans near the end reads, "so faith comes from the hearing and the hearing comes from the word of Christ." This is the right focus for our faith.

Sometimes our faith wanders. What about our own "gods"? Faith in modern technology - fast cars and airplanes that can get you to the other side of the country in a few hours, or phones that can reach the other side of the world in an instant. Money... if we have enough cash on hand, who or what is to deny us? Sometimes we put our faith in ourselves. We have depended on ourselves for years, thinking we don't need anyone... Instead let us live faithfully - trusting that God holds us.

Even if I had died very young, I believe that I would live in God's hands, even though I didn't have time to know Jesus. But many of us do know Jesus and have the opportunity to believe in Him and live in him. Let's keep our year's end faith pointed there as we await Jesus' birth.

Poinsettia Order

WRITTEN BY PATTI PATERSON

Once again, we will be ordering poinsettias to adorn the Worship Center this year. The only color we want to use for the worship center is white. If you would like to order poinsettias for our use on the Worship Center, please let the office know how many you would like, or simply fill out the order form in the Bulletin, with a check made out to Stone church. As always, you can pick up your poinsettias after our evening service on Christmas Eve.

All orders must be received by December 13th. The cost of each poinsettia will be \$13.00 for a 6.5" pot.

Friends of the Asturias Academy Annual Support Request



Miguel Angel Asturias Academy | A Fair Start

Dear Asturias Academy Supporters,

As Giving Tuesday fast approaches and your email inboxes are inundated with requests for financial support, I bring greetings from our friends and partners at the Asturias Academy and extend my annual plea for you to generously support the little Guatemalan school that COULD despite the obstacles they constantly have to surmount.

This academic year marked a return to in-person instruction for the first time in nearly three years, which presented challenges but was also a great joy for students, faculty, and staff. First, the good news: there were 132 students enrolled from pre-school through 9th grade, and this year there were no withdrawals and all 132 students successfully moved on to the next grade level. Being back in school enabled our partners to fully implement their transformative pedagogy of monthly generative themes and culminating activities such as a visit to a rural health center, planting seedlings in a nearby valley, and a panel discussion on corruption, democracy, and socio-economic differences in preparation for the August presidential election. They also resumed the annual school field trip for the first time since 2019, this year to the indigenous ruins of Iximché and the historic colonial capital of Antigua, as well as the annual trek up the Santa María volcano and the celebration of the school's anniversary the first week in August, complete with the election of student government officers, soccer and basketball tournaments, and artistic presentations and food delivery at a residential facility for impoverished senior women.

In his annual report, school co-founder and principal Jorge Chojolán identified four challenges the school has faced this year:

- Student socio-emotional issues such as anxiety, fear, and irritability triggered by pandemic isolation and ongoing economic and political conditions in Guatemala, particularly among younger children who were attending in-person classes for the first time. In response, the staff instituted what they called "friendly classrooms" and carried out a series of fun and group-building activities for all students.
- Student dependency on technology, primarily cell phones, and cyber bullying and harassment, particularly among the older students. The school created a counseling program and brought in professionals who offered presentations on strategies for handling these situations for students, parents, and teachers.
- A budget deficit from declining enrollments, down from 142 in 2022, 160 in 2021, and 215 in 2020 prior to the onset of the pandemic, as well as a reduction in charitable giving, which was essentially limited this year to donations given through Stone Church and scholarship support for girls from the Gendercide Awareness Project. To balance the budget, Jorge was forced to reduce administrative salaries and the number of half scholarships granted to only eight, while still offering 25 full scholarships to the students with greatest need and maintaining teachers' salaries.
- Government corruption, which often takes the form of attempts to extort money from the school. This year, the Ministry of Education decided to mandate the purchase of a biodigester, typically only required of large restaurants to break down generated waste, and they requested that the school change the windows and install a new door so there would be a separate entrance and exit. The school joined with other schools to file an appeal that resulted in a temporary suspension of the mandates.

Another way to support the Asturias Academy is through participation in our Summer 2024 delegations. There will actually be three options:

~ Continued ~

1) June 10th to 21st – a new elementary delegation especially for kids who have completed kindergarten through 6th grade and their parents, who will be matched with students at the AA for an experiential language and cultural learning experience. **2) June 22nd to 30th – a medical delegation** that will hold health clinics at the AA and possibly a more rural location. **3) July 1st to 12th – an educational delegation** that will prepare and share enrichment learning activities and complete maintenance projects at the school as well as engaging in cultural tourism, with the opportunity to also study Spanish in small groups or one-on-one.

The cost for the Guatemala delegations is \$1,800 for adults, \$1,600 for college students, and \$1,400 for children and youth, which includes round-trip airfare and the basic in-country expenses of transportation and room & board. Participation in additional programs costs only \$400 each. For the elementary delegation, which is likely a one-time offering, there is a reduced price for multiple parents and children, and the Leadership Team has committed to providing a \$500 scholarship for Stone Church children. Please contact me for additional information, and if you are interested in participating in one or more of the delegations (still no firm commitment required), please sign up on this Google Doc (call the office for link) by **Friday, December 15th.**

As you consider Giving Tuesday and year-end charitable contributions, remember that virtually 100% of your monetary gift goes directly to program expenses and will have an extraordinary impact at the school. For only \$50 per month, under \$2 a day, you can provide a deserving child a full scholarship that covers tuition, all necessary school supplies, and a school uniform. A half scholarship costs less than \$1 per day, but any amount you can contribute will go a long way toward helping our partners accomplish their empowering educational mission.

The Guatemala Circle is once again participating in Stone Church's Alternative Christmas Gifts Bazaar on December 2nd from 10:00am to 3:00pm at Juniata's Ellis Ballroom. You can stop by our Guatemala booth and make your contribution, or included below is the necessary information if you would prefer to mail your contribution or drop it off at the church office. A third option is to donate through the school's web site, although if you do so there, the fundraising platform will take a small cut of your gift.

On behalf of our partners and friends at the Asturias Academy, mil gracias for any support you can offer to make possible the life-changing gift of education for Guatemalan children and youth.

Best wishes for a joyous holiday season,
Henry Thurston-Griswold
Coordinator, Stone Church of the Brethren Guatemala Circle

P.S. Remember that **100%** of your tax-deductible contribution (minus credit card fees) goes directly to the Asturias Academy.

Donor's Name: _____
Address: _____
Telephone: _____ Email: _____
Donation: _____ Full Academy Scholarship (\$600)
_____ Half Academy Scholarship (\$300)
_____ Endowment (\$____/mth)
_____ Teachers' Compensation (\$____/mth)
_____ General Operating Budget (\$____/mth)
_____ Other (please indicate the purpose for which you wish to designate your gift: _____)

Payment: ____ one-time ____ monthly ____ quarterly ____ semi-annually ____ annually

****Please mail completed form to Stone Church of the Brethren, 1623 Moore St. Huntingdon, PA 16652
Make checks payable to Stone Church of the Brethren, with Guatemala Partnership on the memo line.**

Christian Education Spotlight

- **How Does a Weary World Rejoice?:** Our Sunday School class for kids of all ages meets in the Llamacats Room, down the hall from the office. It's a chance to learn Bible Stories and build friendships through crafts and games! Throughout Advent the children's lessons will connect with the broader themes from worship.
- **Biblical Leftovers Bible Study:** Rick Laabs leads this Bible Study for teens and adults - taking us on a deeper dive into the Bible Stories we read each Sunday morning in worship. It's a chance to really explore and digest the scriptures together. This gathering is open to anyone. You don't need to be a Biblical Scholar in order to notice and explore connections you hadn't seen before. Join in person or over Zoom!
- **Sojourners Book Study:** Be a part of this group of thoughtful people reflecting together on the intersections between faith and society. This Fall we're reading *From Inclusion to Justice*, by Erin Raffety which explores the ways we can be part of a more authentic community for persons with a variety of disabilities. Join in person or over Zoom!



Ring-a-ling-a-ling!

WRITTEN BY PAM GRUGAN



We all can think of aromas, sights, and sounds that awaken our holiday spirit. Among the things that delight our senses this time of year are the smell of cookies baking, holiday lights twinkling, and seasonal bells ringing. Our church bells have us humming familiar hymns, while the ringers in our bell choir mesmerize us with their creative means for making yet another joyful noise. And the bells ringing outside of ACE HARDWARE remind us this is a special season for giving.

By placing a donation in the Salvation Army's Red Kettle, we contribute to a collective effort to support some who struggle financially. By helping to ring the bells for the Salvation Army, we invite many more to make a similar contribution.

With Jeannie Lashlee's coordination skills, the friends of Stone Church can support the generous work of the Salvation Army by signing up to RING the BELLS on Friday, December 15, 2023 sometime between 2:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. You can ring with a friend for a half hour or more, or just ring those bells enthusiastically all by yourself.

If you'd like to volunteer, contact Rowan at the church office. Thank you!

News From **CAMP**

WRITTEN BY DAVID MEADOWS

District Youth Retreat - January 26-28

Youth in Grades 9-12 are invited to join the Middle PA District and Camp Blue Diamond as we gather together for a wonderful weekend of fellowship and conversation with Brittney (Lowey) Saltsman! Brittney is a former staff member at Camp, and is now on staff in children's ministry at North Way Christian Community near Pittsburgh. Come out to enjoy time in nature, fun and games, engaging conversation and reconnect with friends old and new!

We're going to take a deep dive into God's Word to understand the overall story of Scripture. Join us as we explore the Bible's big main ideas – creation, fall, redemption, and restoration – in order to meet God and see how we fit into His plan. Our story is His story - the Greatest Story Ever Told!

Cost for the weekend is \$85, but only \$75 if you register by January 12th! Registration is at 7pm on Friday, January 26 and the retreat will end around 1pm on Sunday. Bring warm clothes (we will sled if there's snow), a Bible, flashlight, and sleeping bag and pillow.

Summer Camp Staff and Volunteer Needed!

If you (or someone you know!) love Camp Blue Diamond and enjoy working with children and youth, nothing is better than working at Camp and getting paid too. Counselors, lifeguard, climbing tower director, naturalist, arts and crafts director, kitchen, and maintenance staff are hired each summer. Program Staff must be at least 18 years old. Support Staff – kitchen and maintenance workers – must be at least 16 years old. All must be committed Christians, enjoy children and youth, and must be able to live in harmony with others.

Summer Volunteers (counselors, kitchen or maintenance) are needed and CIT's (Counselors In Training) too. Volunteers need to be age 18+. CIT's need to be in high school and have completed CIT Camp.

2024 Summer Camp Schedule

It's never too early to start dreaming about summer camp! In case you're looking to make vacation plans or decide in advance which camp will fit into your schedule best, take a look and think happy CBD thoughts. Early Bird Registration opens in January and runs through February.

Upcoming Events

- Youth Retreat - Jan 26 - 28
- Jr. High Retreat - Feb 23 - 25
- Junior High - Mar 1 - 3

Questions? Contact your
Camp Representative,
David Meadows.

Announcements

December Food Pantry Collection

Our monthly collection for the Food Pantry will take place on Sunday, **December 17th**. We will be collecting **SPAGHETTI** this month. Additionally, starting in November and continuing until April 2024, any monetary donations will benefit the food pantry.

Upcoming Events

Visio Divina

*Held Wednesdays at 7pm over Zoom throughout the Advent Season
(beginning November 29)*

Our beloved Advent Art Devotional series returns this season! Join others in reflecting on the stories of this season through beautiful original works of art inspired by the week's scriptures. Anyone, of any age may participate. More participation leads to livelier and more meaningful discussion, since we all see the art differently. Please join us!

Older Adult Luncheon

*Held in-person on Wednesday, December 13th at 11 am.
This event will be held in the Fellowship Hall at Stone Church.*

The November Older Adult Luncheon was held at Donna's on Tuesday, October 10 at noon. Our group was smaller this time, only 7 total, due to illness and traveling. We will be back at Stone Church this month on **Wednesday, December 13th at 11 am!** When we meet at Donna's it is the second Tuesday of the month at noon, but when we meet at church it is the second Wednesday of the month at 11. Hope to see you.

Congregational Forum

Held on Sunday, December 3rd, following worship.

Plan to join us after worship on December 3rd for our Congregational Forum - as we vote on the slate of church leaders, reflect on the church's finances, look back at the year gone by and ahead to the future of our church! All members of the church - long-time and new - are able to vote, but everyone is welcome to be a part of the conversation!

Staying in Community

FIND WAYS TO CELEBRATE YOUR COMMUNITY MEMBERS BELOW!

December Birthdays

1st - Brayton Oser
5th - Virginia Biber
8th- Shepherd Miller
9th - Dennis Plane
9th- Tyler Hall
14th - Rick Laabs
14th - Terry Murray
15th - Geoff Clarke
17th - Jerri Wenger
17th - Emily Elder
18th - Max Hosler
18th - Joanna White
18th- Martin Berger
19th - Meredith Widman
20th - Aislin Wright
21st - Terri Krabill
24th - Brenda Quarry
24th - Sally Stewart
26th - Nora Roth
27th - Jeff Closz
28th - Olivia Grugan
30th - Cora Dickey

December Anniversaries

3rd - Max & Barb Moyer
6th - David & Betty Quarry
31st - Tinka & Henrik Berger
31st - Daniel & Jane Laprade



Homebound Members

*USE THE ADDRESSES BELOW TO REACH OUT TO THOSE IN OUR
COMMUNITY THAT ARE UNABLE TO JOIN US IN-PERSON*

DeLois Fluke
11325 Raystown Rd.
Huntingdon, PA 16652

Gene Goshorn
14155 Hill Valley Rd.
Mt. Union PA 17066

Louise Smith
11642 Station Road
Huntingdon, PA 16652

Westminster Woods
Sue Martin