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January 2017

### **“Reforming Our Lives around the Character of God”**

I want to continue through our study of “Nehemiah” as we take time to think about what it is that the Lord is calling Third Church to be and do as we enter 2017.

Using Nehemiah’s experiences to help stimulate our thinking, we’ve seen over the last four newsletters that in order for us to follow God’s vision together we must “put first things first” – with the first of the first being prayer for God’s guidance; next we must “work as one in Christ Jesus”, being that united Body of Christ that God calls us to be; we must “persevere in the work of the church”, staying committed together to live out our mission (To Love our God and Neighbor; To Proclaim the Gospel through word and deed; To Make Disciples of Jesus the Christ); and we must ground all that we do upon the infallible Word of God – that Word given to us in our Scriptures of the Old and New Testament; and, of course, we must do all this for the glory of God and the blessing of others.

In this newsletter, I want to continue through our study of “Nehemiah” by focusing on portions of the ninth chapter of that book and reflecting upon who God is and how we can model our lives after the character of our God. And to do this one thing we need to spend time reflecting on the attributes of God. I will speak to that in part in this newsletter, but I encourage all to join in the adult Sunday school study of the attributes of God that will begin on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Please join us at 9:15 on Sunday mornings. For now let’s begin the topic of this newsletter by looking to Nehemiah 9:1-5a, which reads:

**“On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads. Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers. They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the LORD their God. . . . And the Levites . . . said: ‘Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting.’”** (Neh 9:1-5a)

Have you ever messed up over and over again so that you wondered if you would ever get another chance? Have you ever heard the words, “How many times do I have to tell you . . .?!”

Well, that might describe the mood in Judea at the time of Nehemiah. The Israelites were chosen by God; cared for by God; blessed by God. But throughout their history they rebelled against God. And now, after God allowed them to return to their land, they were hoping to be restored into God’s graces – they were hoping God would forgive their past stubbornness.

Nehemiah is a story about this attempt to become, once again, a people of God’s favor.

As you recall, Nehemiah came to Jerusalem from Susa with a vision to rebuild the walls of that city. Through Nehemiah’s careful, thoughtful and determined leadership, combined with the united efforts of many of the people, the walls were completed.

All this, as Nehemiah well knew, was purely by God's grace.

The next step was to work on the people. Rebuilding walls takes hard work, but, transforming hearts takes a miracle. And once again God delivered. Not only did the people rally together to work on the city, but the people came together to work on their lives and their relationship to God.

As we saw in chapter 8, the people gathered together on the first day of the seventh month and asked the leaders to teach them from the Word of God. There was a renewed hunger in their heart as they started to see God's working among them. In fact, they became so overwhelmed by what God was doing that they were in despair of their own unrighteousness. However, as the word was read and taught, the people were called not to mourn, but to rejoice, for the strong hand of their God was upon them!

And so the people celebrated. But the time of celebration was not an end in itself. In turn, at the close of the Feast of Tabernacles, the people were again called together. Ezra and the priests encouraged a time for celebrating God's present provision – the rebuilding of the city. But next it was time to renew their relationship with their God. And, it was time to address the tough questions: Would they give themselves fully to their God? And, would their God give them another chance?

Ezra knew that it was time to appeal to God and seek His favor. Ezra knew that it was time to renew their covenant with their God. And Ezra believed their God would welcome them – not because of how well they built the city, nor because they were deserving of God's love, but because of the character of God. (Dt 7:7-9)

Our confidence in God's love must not be based upon our goodness or our achievements. Rather, our confidence in God's love ought to be based solely on the trustworthiness of our God -- which is why any petition set before our Lord must be presented with an appeal to God's character and not our merit.

And so through this prayer (attributed to Ezra) Ezra reminded the people of who this God is with whom they were being called to renew their covenant.

Our God desires our devotion, but the devotion He desires is to flow from a right knowledge of Him. God finds no pleasure from those who reject His revelation of Himself in order to think about God in one's own terms, for God knows that the end product will certainly lead to idolatry – worshipping and serving a god who is no God – the very thing which too often characterizes the religious life of His people.

Thus, Ezra's prayer was an opportunity to remind the people of what they had learned from hearing God's Word, and, in turn, to honor this God who demands their worship and delights in their praise. In order to see this, let's consider Ezra's prayer. Beginning in verse 5 we read:

**“Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you. (Neh 9:5b-6)**

Ezra began his prayer with an appeal to the *Sovereignty* of God. In this opening statement we hear the words of Deuteronomy where it's stated that the Lord our God is One (Dt 6:4). There is no other god who compares with the God of Israel.

Ezra further identified their God as the *Creator*. Fundamental to the nature of the God we worship is the belief that He, being *Eternal*, is the creator of everything that is. Indeed, the first verse of the Bible is perhaps the most important statement of all of Scripture for there we encounter the assertion that, in the beginning God was, and, God created (Gen 1:1). Everything was created -- out of nothing -- by God and for God.

And so, whenever we approach our God we can approach with confidence knowing that He is the one and only sovereign God, and that all creation must and will submit to His bidding. In turn, we worship a God who is able to do all He promises – who is able to care for all our needs.

Now, after speaking of God as *Creator*, Ezra's prayer identified God as *Covenant Maker*, for Ezra said:

**“You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. You have kept your promise because you are righteous.”** (Neh 9:7-8)

After affirming the sovereignty of God over all creation, and, in turn, that God alone is worthy of our worship, Ezra's prayer moved to addressing God's working among a particular people. Some 1600 years prior to the offering of this prayer, God entered into a covenant relationship with Abraham -- a covenant to make the descendants of Abraham as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore (Gen 12:1-3, 15:1-5).

God made a promise to Abraham, and God put His character, His very existence on the line. If he were to fail to fulfill His promise, God Himself would suffer the fatal consequences (Gen 15:9-21). And God has been *faithful* to His promises despite the faithlessness of His people (2 Tim 2:13). God has been *true* to His word -- God is perfectly *righteous* and will do as He says.

We worship a God who is not only able to do, but does as He promises. And so, it's upon the promises of God that we can ground our lives -- knowing that God's Word is steadfast and unshakable (Ps 119:1-5).

We live in a time of instability where it seems everything about us is always changing. We live in an age where even the existence of truth is questioned. We live at a time where people are building their lives on their own thoughts and opinions, or upon those of other sinful, naïve people – or even upon good things, but good things that eventually obscure the best. Ezra's prayer speaks to the existence of unchanging truth and to the character of the One who is the *Truth* – of the One who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. (Heb 13:8)

In this prayer we are reminded that the promises of God will be fulfilled – in God's time and in God's way. Therefore, we can live in confidence knowing that our God will never leave us nor forsake us (Mt 28:20; Heb 13:5b). We can live in hope knowing that He who began a good work in us will bring it to completion in Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6). We can live in peace knowing that God can and will sustain us in and through all trials and temptations; and that, in the end, nothing can separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph 3:20-21; Rom 8:38-39). These are among God's sure promises to His people!

Ezra drew the people's attention to God's promise to Abraham, and then he moved in his prayer to the time of Israel's captivity in Egypt. And so, we read on in verses 9-11:

**“You saw the suffering of our forefathers in Egypt; you heard their cry at the Red Sea. You sent miraculous signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his officials and all the people of his land, for you knew how arrogantly the Egyptians treated them. You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day. You divided the sea before them, so that they passed through it on dry ground, but you hurled their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into mighty waters.”** (Neh 9:9-11)

While in captivity the people cried out for a deliverer and God offered His strong hand of deliverance through Moses! For God is a Saving God. Ezra knew that his people needed to hear this because the Jews under Nehemiah had just rebuilt their city, but their situation was less than secure.

Who knew how long their present peace would last – how long Sanballat, Tobiah and the others would be content to remain quiet? (Neh 7:14)

And so, in his prayer Ezra acknowledged the power of God to save, while reminding the people that the same God who defeated Pharaoh would watch over them.

God's hand is mighty for the tearing down of strongholds, and for the building up of a people for Himself. And by God's grace we've experienced this truth for we have experienced the saving power of our God through His Son, Jesus the Christ. For, through Christ we too have been freed, not from bondage to the Egyptians, but from bondage to sin: from bondage to our own sinful desires, from bondage to the temptations of our fallen world, and, from bondage to the enslaving power of the devil and his angels!

Knowing that we have a Savior allows us to walk in the assurance that there is no power on earth that can bring us down.

Ezra reminded the people that their ancestors experienced the liberating power of their God, and, that it's this same Savior-God whom Ezra called them to serve. But God did more than just rescue the Israelites from the Egyptians, God supplied for Israel during their forty years of wilderness wanderings. And so, Ezra continued his account of God's working as he prayed about those wilderness wanderings saying:

**“By day you led them with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to give them light on the way they were to take.**

**You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and laws that are just and right, and decrees and commands that are good. . . In their hunger you gave them bread from heaven and in their thirst you brought them water from the rock; you told them to go in and take possession of the land you had sworn with uplifted hand to give them.**

**But they, our forefathers, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and did not obey your commands. They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. . . . But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate; slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them, even when they cast for themselves an image of a calf . . . or when they committed awful blasphemies.**

**Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them. . . . For forty years you sustained them in the desert; they lacked nothing.”** (selections from Neh 9:12-21a)

Ezra's prayer continued with a recounting of the wilderness wanderings of their ancestors, and how God called this people to Himself and cared for them. Within that time we're reminded of how God brought them to Mount Sinai where He was going to enter into a specific covenant relationship with them.

However, while Moses was on the Mountain receiving God's covenant commands, the people turned to idolatry – to seeking to worship God in a way that dishonored Him. The people enticed Moses' brother Aaron into leading them in the worship of a golden calf – a symbol of the “god” of their age – a “god” which today might better be called “career”, or “cash”, or “car”, or “home entertainment center”, or “technology”.

As we know, God was not pleased with their idolatry. Yet, although in His justice God disciplined His people and caused them to wander in the wilderness for forty years, He was also *merciful* and spared them the full consequences of His wrath. In His *compassion* God forgave them and supplied them daily with all they needed to survive.

And so in this prayer, Ezra revealed the *justice*, *mercy* and *compassion* of God. But Ezra was doing even more, for his words served to remind God of God's commitment to care for His people – a promise which, if broken, would jeopardize God's own integrity!

Ezra's prayer also served to remind the Jews, even amidst their trial, to recount God's blessings.

We too need to take account of God's provision even and especially when our journey with Him seems hard. And so, as we look to the New Year it's fitting to remember all God did for us this past year – despite the times of hurt and pain and loss, and even in and through those times. For, as the hymn, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing", states, we are prone to wander, we are prone to leave the One we love, but thanks to God's compassion and mercy, He seals our hearts for His courts above.

The Israelites of old received God's Word in the Law, and, although they failed to live by it, God poured out His mercy upon them.

We have received God's Word in Jesus the Christ, and despite our failings we can live with the assurance that God will care for us, because, like the Israelites, our confidence is not based upon our worthiness but upon God's righteousness. (Ps 55:22; 1 Pt 5:7)

God showed His mercy and compassion by being with His people and providing for them while they wandered in the wilderness. But God didn't leave the Israelites to wander, for He made a promise to Abraham to give his descendants a land.

And so, Ezra moved from recounting God's wilderness provision to speaking of God's amazing grace in bringing a rebellious people into a land flowing with milk and honey, for Ezra continued in his prayer saying:

**"You gave them kingdoms and nations, allotting to them even the remotest frontiers. . . .**

**You made their sons as numerous as the stars in the sky, and you brought them into the land that you told their fathers to enter and possess. Their sons went in and took possession of the land. . . . They captured fortified cities and fertile land; they took possession of houses filled with all kinds of good things. . . . They ate to the full and were well-nourished; they reveled in your great goodness.**

**But they were disobedient and rebelled against you. . . . They killed your prophets, who had admonished them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies. So you handed them over to their enemies, who oppressed them. But when they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies.**

**But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in your sight. Then you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they ruled over them. And when they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven, and in your compassion you delivered them time after time, . . . for you are a gracious and merciful God."** (selections from Neh 9:22-31)

Through Ezra's prayer we learn of God's *forbearance* and *mercy*, for even after they were brought into the Promised Land, the people wandered after false God's. The people ignored God and suffered at the hands of their enemies. The people turned a deaf ear to God's Judges and rejected and even killed God's Prophets. But God didn't give up on them.

You can almost hear the words, "How many times do I have to tell you . . .?!" Such was the stubbornness of the Israelites.

But perhaps we can relate. Perhaps such resembles the stubbornness of our hearts: we who are quick to receive God's blessings one day, but then equally quick to question, doubt, and even deny God's goodness the next; we who are quick to say "God is good" when the bills are paid, and the car is running, and we're feeling healthy, but who cry "foul" when new bills arrive, and the car breaks down, and illness comes!

It's at those times that the truth of Ezra's prayer shines brightest, for it stands as a testimony to the *steadfast love* of God even when God's people question and doubt and show disdain for God.

And so, in light of their present circumstances, Ezra called to the one and only sovereign God to once again deliver His people.

The people were looking for a sign of God's favor. Ezra caused them to look back upon the history of Israel to show them that God had revealed His favor whenever His people turned to Him. Ezra's prayer set the ground for a call to seek the Lord that He might be found, for Ezra knew that if God seems distant, the separation is our choice, not God's, because God will be as near to us as we let Him be.

Ezra knew that if the people were to renew their relationship with God they had to make a commitment to live for God. And so Ezra closed this prayer offering himself and his people to God saying:

**"In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, [and] putting it in writing."  
(Neh 9:38a)**

Ezra's prayer was a prayer of conviction as it looked to God's past *faithfulness* with humility and thanksgiving. Ezra's prayer was a prayer of encouragement as it reminded the people of the *glory* of this God to whom they were offering their unwavering devotion. And, Ezra's prayer was a call for action – a call to return to the worship and service of their God.

As we encounter this prayer in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Nehemiah, we're reminded again of the character of God – of His *sovereignty*, of His *righteousness*, of His *grace* and *mercy* and *faithfulness*. And, we're reminded that the God we worship is a *holy* God who calls His people to holiness.

And so, as we consider this passage we too stand under conviction– like those before whom Ezra prayed -- because our holy God is not pleased by our rebellious ways (and we know in our hearts what those ways are).

But, even more, from this passage we too receive comfort, because we're reminded of the *glory* and *power* of the God we serve -- that our God is able to do all He promises and fulfill all He plans.

In turn, from this passage we too – like the Jews of old -- ought to grow in our confidence of God's love for us, for not only can we see God's love displayed in His deliverance and provision for the Israelites of old, but we have experienced what it means to be a new creation in Christ. After all, in Christ we're the recipients of deliverance from death and into new life; and, in Christ we live each day with the provision of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit; and, in Christ we know that one day we shall be ushered into the perfect Promised Land – the very dwelling of our God.

And, like the Jews before Ezra, we too should be compelled, from the depths of our hearts, to worship, since, like the people of Ezra's day: where we deserve death, God offers life; where we deserve separation, God offers communion; where we deserve justice that would lead to our condemnation, God offers mercy that leads to our restoration. And these blessings come to us not because of our great efforts and accomplishments, rather, these blessings come solely because this is the character of our God.

Ezra offered a prayer for the people as he called them to a time of covenant renewal. May his prayer remind you of the character of our God – of His *goodness* and *righteousness* and *faithfulness* – and through this prayer may you be challenged to dedicate your life anew to the worship and service of our God.

God's grace and peace be with you,

Pastor John

PS: I want to thank all who gave so wonderfully of themselves to make our Christmas Eve service a very special time of worship. And I want to thank the entire congregation for your generous Christmas gift to me and my family. May the Lord richly bless Third Church as we move into that through 2017.



## Remember in Prayer...

### Our Shut-ins at home:

Tillie Herman, Marcella Goard, June Giles

**At the Eddy:** Dot Multunas, Edna Wells

**At Schuyler Ridge:** Dolores Robb

**At Brookdale:** Dot McGan

### Those dealing with health issues:

Stan Bentley, Doris Calamaras, Steve Derby

### Our Church:

Pastor John and the Session

### Our Community:

Those who don't know the Lord  
Those dealing with financial difficulties  
That our schools would be places of safety

### Our World:

Missionaries serving around the world  
Open doors for sharing the Gospel message  
Persecuted Christians around the world

### Dan serving in Africa:

For adjusting to a new place and culture  
That he would trust God for all his needs  
That he would find joy in serving



## Winter Collection for Capital City Rescue Mission

Throughout the winter months we will be collecting new and gently used hats, gloves and scarves for Capital City Rescue Mission. With the weather turning colder, the Mission struggles to provide these necessary items to those in need. There is a box near the entrance to the sanctuary where you can place your donations.

## Serving This Month

### January 1<sup>st</sup>

Worship Assistants: Bill Multunas, Sue Stierer  
Greeters: Rob Jensen  
Head Greeters: Rob Jensen  
Nursery: Jen McAuley  
Communion: Rachel Farnum  
Fellowship Hosts:

### January 8<sup>th</sup>

Worship Assistants: Deena Dominy, Kelly Valerio  
Greeters: Jen McAuley, Pat Gilmaier  
Head Greeter: Andy Miller  
Nursery: Megan Laz  
Communion: Alice Bentley, Andy Miller, Bill Multunas, Dean Calamaras  
Fellowship Hosts: Lois Pasinella

### January 15<sup>th</sup>

Worship Assistants: Kelly Valerio, Ella Miller  
Greeters: Deena Dominy  
Head Greeter: Peter Laz  
Nursery: Lois Pasinella  
Communion: Deena Dominy, Doris Calamaras, Eric Ofori, Jason Laz  
Fellowship Hosts:

### January 22<sup>nd</sup>

Worship Assistants: Bill Multunas, Jesse Ofori  
Greeters: James McAuley, Alice Bentley  
Head Greeter: Rob Jensen  
Nursery: Deena Dominy & Angelina Solomon  
Communion: Jen McAuley, Jerry Whitman, Natalia Multunas, Pat Gilmaier  
Fellowship Hosts:

### January 29<sup>th</sup>

Worship Assistants: Eric Ofori, Dean Calamaras  
Greeters: Valerie Bidwell, Vaughn Skarzynski  
Head Greeter: Andy Miller  
Communion: Peter Laz, Rachel Farnum, Rick Russell, Rob Jensen  
Fellowship Hosts: Potluck Luncheon

## Per Capita Apportionment

If you would like to help offset the \$43.00 per member, you may use the envelopes in your offering boxes marked Per Capita Apportionment

**From Music and AV Ministries...**

**“For Old Times’ Sake”**

Particularly astute Bible fans know that there’s only one book of the Bible that ends with a question, and a rhetorical one at that--the Book of Jonah (Look it up--4:11). I don’t know how many songs have been written that *begin* with a question, but probably it’s not all that rare. As we exit the Christmas season into the new year, we might very well have rung it in with that classic short song, *Auld Lang Syne*. Based on a Scottish poem by Robert Burns written in 1788 and oft translated as “for the sake of old times”, it is traditionally sung at the stroke of midnight on New Year’s Day to bid farewell to the year gone by. Outside the United States, you might find yourself singing it at funerals, graduations, and even at the closing ceremonies for Boy Scout jamborees. Here’s the minimalist translation from the Scottish:

*Should old acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to mind?  
Should old acquaintance be forgot, and old lang syne?  
CHORUS: For auld lang syne, my dear, for auld lang syne,  
we’ll take a cup of kindness yet, for auld lang syne.*

The opening rhetorical question is generally interpreted as a call to remember longstanding friendships. The song evokes a sense of belonging and fellowship. It oozes *nostalgia!* We normally think about nostalgia just being a wistful desire to remember the “good ole days.” Its literal meaning from a combination of two Greek words is better understood as “our shared pain” or “homesickness” in a term coined by a 17th century medical student to describe the anxieties displayed by Swiss mercenaries fighting away from home. It’s also at the root of some of those pills we take, *analgesics* (painkillers). Sometimes the *good ole days* weren’t so good after all!

My favorite memory of the song itself is how it’s used at the end of “*It’s a Wonderful Life*.” If I watch the whole movie, it’s a full-blown cry at that point as George Bailey discovers just how many friends he has and how his life has made a difference to so many. If I’m flipping channels during the Christmas season and just happen upon the end of the movie with that song going, it’s still good for at least a hefty lump in the throat!

I referred to astute Bible fans at the beginning. On a completely different note, astute fans of *The Godfather* movie will recall Abe Vigoda as mafia henchman, *Sal Tessio* (no relation!), who, just having been caught betraying the crime family, makes an unsuccessful plea to *consigliere* Tom Hagen (Robert Duvall)--*Tom, can you get me off the hook? For old times’ sake?* I’m guessing there’s not an analgesic in the world that could have made a dent in *his* pain!

With joy in the journey,  
*Sal Sceccitano*

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**Share the Good News**

As Christians we are commanded to share the Good News of Jesus with others. In an effort to help all of us do this, the Outward Ministry Committee has provided various types of literature that can be taken and shared with those we know who do not know the Lord. We have Bibles, devotional booklets, and other literature available in the narthex and at the top of the stairs near the church office. Please feel free to take anything that is there for yourself or to share



**General Financial Update for  
November 2016**

	Year to Date	November
Total Income	\$153,560.00	\$13,436.00
Total Expenses	\$153,039.36	\$13,619.06
Difference	\$ 520.64	\$ (183.06)

**Help Fill the Shelves at Hope 7's Food  
Pantry!**

Hope 7's food pantry serves families in need right here in our own community. The need is great and has been growing every year!

**During the month of January we will be  
collecting hygiene items.**

Donations of other non-perishable food  
and hygiene items will also be accepted.

**January Birthdays**

1/10 Mike Martin (Sr.)  
 1/15 Caitlin Dickson  
 1/18 Mary Jane Somerville  
 1/18 Kurt Whitman  
 1/19 Nancy Garcia  
 1/19 Jessica Davey  
 1/20 Elizabeth Somerville  
 1/25 Mort Casey



**January Anniversaries**

1/14 Alice & Stanton Bentley  
 1/14 Daniel & Sally Nolan

**Many Thanks!!**

The Upward Ministry, Inward Ministry, and Outward Ministry committees would like to say big "THANK YOU" to everyone who helped to make this past Advent and Christmas season meaningful for all of us. Thanks to:

- Jerry Whitman for decorating the sanctuary.
- Andy Miller for arranging for the wreaths.
- Sal, the choir, the Red Letters and the Acoustic Worship Team for their gifts of music.
- Everyone who filled a shoebox or gave a donation for Operation Christmas Child.
- Jerry and Vera Whitman for planning the senior luncheon.
- Everyone who purchased a poinsettia to decorate the sanctuary.
- Bill Multunas and Pastor John for coordinating Christmas Caroling at The Eddy.
- The kids who made Christmas decorations to hand out to the residents at The Eddy.
- Peggy for all her work in the church office.
- Alice Bentley for coordinating the Christmas gifts for our shut-ins.
- Those who shopped for and delivered Christmas gifts to our shut-ins.
- Those who served the evening meal at Capital City Rescue Mission.

Last but not least, thanks to Pastor John for all the time, effort and care that was put into planning and leading our worship services and other holiday ministries.



## Mission Spotlight

Your giving to Third Church enables us to support many varied ministries, both locally and around the world. The funds we give and the prayers offered for our various mission partners are greatly appreciated and we wanted to share some of the thoughts and comments we have received from those we support.

From **Niki Campbell** – “Thank you for your ongoing partnership to the InterVarsity Ministry at RPI and Russell Sage. Merry Christmas to you and yours! P.S. It was great worshipping with you back in September!”

From **Perry Jones** – “Thank you for helping our struggling neighbors through your support of Capital City Rescue Mission in 2016. Many more are coming to us during the holidays and with your help we will serve them well.”

From **Kevin Post** – “Most of the 11-19 year olds that we spend time with each week have not grown up attending church. Youth For Christ leaders establish authentic Christ-sharing relationships with them. We rejoice when God rescues a young person that we have been praying for, spending time with and inviting them to know and trust in Jesus. Thank you for investing in the lives of teenagers here in the Capital District.”

**Peter Halder** (YFC Bangladesh) wrote of 4 young ladies from one of their children’s homes who were serving at a VBS program for younger children. They said, “Uncle Peter we are so blessed with all that God has given us through people like our YFC sponsors that now it is our time to give. We want to give up our Christmas gifts and instead give some clothes to these children because they do not have good clothes.” They are now sending clothes for 146 poor children in the northern part of Bangladesh. The girls also want to go on a mission trip when their school year ends. They will visit villages for two weeks to share the life-changing message of Jesus and motivate poorer families to send their children to school. Peter writes, “This is the work of the transforming Gospel and the Holy Spirit. This is how **your investment is making an impact and a difference**. We want to express our deep appreciation and thankfulness for your love, prayer and financial support in 2016. Whatever was achieved was because of His grace and your support.”

From **Emerson** (our sponsored child in El Salvador) – “I greet you with much love, hoping you are in good health. I am happy to write to you. At the project we have been learning about drug addiction and the consequences of taking drugs. I like to play soccer with my friends. I pray for you for God to keep you well and in good health. Please pray for me and my friends to stay in good health.”

**Anyelo** (our sponsored child in Guatemala) writes that he is doing well in school and his favorite subject is math. When he grows up he wants to be a policeman.

Information and updates on all of our mission partners can be found on the bulletin boards in fellowship hall.

Updates and prayer request from Dan as he serves in Africa are posted on the bulletin board in the narthex.

## THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Our children and youth Sunday school classes are studying through various questions and responses from the Westminster Shorter Catechism over the 2016-2017 Sunday-school year. So that we may walk with them in that journey, and so that all of us may be able to interact with them should they approach us with their questions (as they should feel free to do 😊), we are going to return to that catechism over the next several months that we might be equipped to give a defense for the hope that is ours in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim 2:15; 1 Tim 4:16; 1 Pt 3:15)

**Q 21. Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?**

The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continues to be, God and man, in two distinct natures, and one Person forever.

**Q 22. How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?**

Christ, the Son of God, became man, by taking to Himself a true body and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin.

**Q 23. What offices does Christ execute as our Redeemer?**

Christ, as our Redeemer, executes the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.

**Q 24. How does Christ execute the office of a prophet?**

Christ executes the office of a prophet in revealing to us, by His Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.

**Q 25. How does Christ execute the office of a priest?**

Christ executes the office of a priest in His once offering up of Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us.

**Q 26. How does Christ execute the office of a king?**

Christ executes the office of a king in subduing us to Himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all His and our enemies.

### Congregational Meeting

Our annual Congregational Meeting will be held on Sunday January 29<sup>th</sup>. The meeting will start immediately following the worship service. We will enjoy a pot luck luncheon in place of our usual coffee hour. Please consider bringing a dish to share (hot or cold) or a dessert.

## Bible Quiz for January 2017

Our quiz questions come from the Old Testament book of "Ruth", which will form the content of our sermon series through much of January and February. For this quiz our questions will come from chapter 1 of "Ruth".

1. What were the names of the three women mentioned in chapter one of the book of "Ruth" and what was their relationship to each other?
  2. What were the names of the three men mentioned in chapter one of the book of Ruth and what were their relations to each other and to the three women mentioned above?
  3. What caused Elimelech to take his family and leave his home town of Bethlehem?
  4. Where did Elimelech move to and settle with his family?
  5. What happened to Elimelech and his two sons in Moab?
  6. Why did Naomi look to return to Bethlehem?
  7. Although both of Naomi's daughters-in-law offered to return to Bethlehem with Naomi, who actually did return with her and who went back to her own people?
  8. What was the time of the year when Naomi returned to Bethlehem?
  9. How did Naomi request to be addressed when she returned to Bethlehem?
  10. About how long was Naomi away from Bethlehem?
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## SESSION MEETING-THIRD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH-DECEMBER 12, 2016

### ORDER OF THE DAY

1. Examination of the readiness to serve of the newly elected Ruling Elders, Jason Laz and Rick Russell.
  - A motion was made seconded and carried unanimously to acknowledge the readiness to serve for both Jason Laz and Rick Russell. On January 8, 2017 Rick will be ordained and Jason and Rick will both be installed as Ruling Elders for a three-year term.
2. Membership Roll Review:
  - After a complete review and discussion of the Membership Roll of Third Presbyterian Church of Troy, NY.

**ACTION ITEMS** - A motion was made and carried unanimously to approve the proposed General Fund Budget for 2017.

### CLERK'S REPORT

- All correspondence received has been previously routed to the appropriate Committee or person, or posted in the office.
  - Reminder of upcoming activities before the next Business meeting:
    - 01/08 – Ordination of Rick Russell and installation of Jerry Whitman, Sue Laz, Jason Laz

and Rick Russell during morning worship.

- 01/29 – Annual Congregational Meeting following morning worship.

## **PASTOR'S REPORT**

- Albany Presbytery approved the merger of East Hebron United Presbyterian Church and West Hebron United Presbyterian Church. The new church to be called Hebron United Presbyterian Church.
- Still working on legal documentation.
- Adult Sunday School will move into the Attributes of God.
- Next sermon series will be on the Book of Ruth.

## **INWARD MINISTRY**

### **CHRISTIAN NURTURE**

- Men's Bible Study will be restarting after the first of the year.
- Women's Bible Study on Christmas break. Studying 1 Kings.
- Luncheon sponsored by the Senior God Squad was held on Saturday December 3<sup>rd</sup> at noon. Collection of individual serving food items for Ronald McDonald House in Albany (four boxes), as well as financial contributions of \$382 were received.

## **OUTWARD MINISTRY**

### **OUTREACH & MISSIONS**

- Spending for November: \$500-Capital City Rescue Mission, \$500-Bangladesh Youth For Christ , \$500-InterVarsity Hudson Valley Community College, \$500-Capital District Youth For Christ
- For January our emphasis for Hope 7 Food Pantry will be hygiene items.
- Throughout the winter we will be collecting winter clothing for Capital City Rescue Mission.
- The new website is live – [www.thirdchurchtroy.org](http://www.thirdchurchtroy.org). Be sure to check it out and let us know of any corrections, changes, etc.
- Working on letterhead, newsletter cover, and brochure to incorporate the new logo.

## **STEWARDSHIP**

### **GENERAL FUND/FINANCE**

- We had a negative cash flow for November of \$183.06. This gives us a year-to-date surplus of \$520.64.
- 2017 Offering Envelopes will be distributed over the next two weeks.

### **ALBANY PRESBYTERY**

- The 2017 budget was approved as presented. Per Capita will remain at \$43 per person.
- The Transition Staffing Team report was presented for a first reading.
- A closing on the sale of the last portion of the Hebron Camp property is anticipated in December 2016.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

- We were all reminded to get Annual Reports ready and submit to Peggy Siracusa for the 2016 Annual Report.

## Fellowship Hosts Needed

Hosts are needed for Fellowship Time throughout the upcoming months. Fellowship hosts are asked to bring a few snacks for after worship. Coffee, sugar, cream, cold drinks, cups, napkins, and plates are provided. In addition to snacks, you would also be responsible for setting things up and cleaning up afterwards.

You can host on your own or you could work together with others to make the job easier. There is a sign-up sheet near the kitchen showing the Sundays where a host is needed.

If you have not hosted before and would like some assistance or if you have questions, please speak with Natalia Multunas.



*Third Presbyterian Church  
115 Winter Street  
Troy, NY 12180*

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

*Our Mission:  
To Love our God and Neighbor  
To Proclaim the Gospel through  
Word and Deed  
To Make Disciples of Jesus the Christ*

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16