

PARISH NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF METUCHEN, NJ



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1 IN CRISIS

Jordan Klotz

Climate. Middle East. Mental Health. Political division. Ukraine. Racial violence. Housing. Haiti. Inflation. Immigration. Income inequality.

The list of crises that face our world, our nation, our community, and our selves is not a short one. We have access to non-stop information, day and night, with more headlines in our pockets than we could have read in a newspaper on any given day just merely twenty years ago. Our minds are tugged left and right by our heads and our hearts, both of which care a great deal about the crises that never seem to end.

To drown it all out: that is the first, and most convenient reaction to the chaos that is our world. “Stop worrying about things you can’t change,” or quotes like it, can be found in our Facebook feeds, sewn onto throw pillows, in fortune cookies, or on the lips of well-meaning friends offering a crumb of comfort.

In truth, that is what most of us do with most of the crises that are just too big and scary for us to comprehend. After all, who has the brainpower to think about all of these things that—let’s face it—are truly beyond our individual control. But...

What if there was another way? What if another model emerged, one that allowed individuals, or a group of people, to process not only the big and scary things impacting the world around us, but even the seemingly bigger-and-scariest things impacting the world in our homes, in our families, in our selves?

As a student at Westminster Choir College, I met with my entire department of Sacred Music students each Monday night for “Sacred Music Lab.” This zero-credit course was a requirement for all eight semesters of our degree, and we were tasked with planning liturgy, discussing worship, selecting music and scripture and art and then—when we had used every last creative and insightful bone in our bodies—we would create a worship bulletin and hold the service.

Sometimes, we invited other students from campus to worship with us. Other times, we kept it all to ourselves. The most memorable of these closed-door services included a time for “sharing of joys and concerns.” If you’ve been a member of any church for any period of time, you’ve likely experienced this yourself. A leader, whether clergy or a lay person, invites the group to share items that would then be scribbled down onto a piece of paper and incorporated into a prayer.

This is not the “new way forward,” as alluded to previously. In itself, this is not a novel concept in any way. Neither is the aspect of those services which made the communal sharing as impactful as it was, which was that, when we had finished, we *sang*.

All sorts of Sunday morning liturgies include a “Pastoral Prayer,” “Elder’s Prayer,” or “Prayers of the People” (see: 270 Woodbridge Avenue for the most accessible example; each Sunday at approximately 10:20 AM). Most of these liturgies follow this moment with song. What we did in Sacred Music Lab was not unique. What was novel, however, was the way we framed this experience in our minds.

For students at Westminster, we understood that music offered a way to process things that are too big for our hearts and minds alone. Privileged access to the Divine, a window into God’s Love, music—especially in the context of worship with our peers by our side—allowed us to process the joys and concerns, the crises, the things we could or couldn’t change in a way that nothing else could.

My prayer for our community is not that we upend our liturgy, is not that we rid ourselves of the cell phones that plague us with endless frightening headlines (although there may be some merit to that proposition), and it is not that we all join a choir and have personal musical revolutions (although I could make a strong argument for that, too).

My prayer for our church is that we look a little bit deeper. The music we sing, the people around us, the Holy Mysteries of worship: they offer more than meets the eye. These essential things can breathe New Life into this broken, messy, and ugly world.

Take time.

Notice: look, listen, think.

*“Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:
such a joy as none can move:
such a love as none can part;
such a heart as joys in love.”
-George Herbert*

TO WHOM DO YOU BELONG?



The article author, Jed Koball, brother of FPC-M staff member Heather Koball, is a Teaching Elder in the Presbyterian Church (USA). Since 2009 he has served as a Presbyterian Mission Co-Worker in Peru where he accompanies the church's global partner Red Uniendo Manos Peru as the Catalyst for Extractive Industries, Human Rights, and the Environment. Jed is a graduate of McCormick Theological Seminary. He has served pastorates in New York, and prior to that was a Development Worker in Nicaragua and a Human Rights Intern in the Philippines. Jed lives in Peru with his wife Jenny Valles, the Young Adult Volunteer program coordinator in Peru, and their six-year old son, Thiago.

If you want to solve the climate crisis, listen to indigenous peoples. This is the essence of a message emanating from deep in the Amazon Rainforest. Only in recent years has this message reverberated beyond the roaring rivers and canopy treetops of the jungle and reached the ears of the industrialized world – ears like mine!

Historically, the Church does not have a good record of listening to indigenous peoples. One might argue that over past centuries the Church has been highly instrumental in silencing indigenous peoples and eradicating indigenous cultures from the Earth. As a mission co-worker, this history is something I take seriously in light of past missionaries of all denominations who may have been (and continue to be) active participants in a quest to annihilate indigenous wisdom and ways of living. It is a history I pray earnestly not to repeat or legitimize in any way. Indeed, it is a history of harm I hope to help repair and a continuing threat to the world that I hope to help

resist. With gratitude to global partners, I am learning how to better do this work.

Upon arriving in Peru nearly 15 years ago, Angelica – a leader from within our global partner Red Uniendo Manos Peru - invited me to visit a community with which she worked high up in the central Andes. The community members were alpaca herders, and they continued to practice ancestral wisdom and spirituality passed down over generations. As Angelica noted, they believe that the mountains that surround them are sacred. It is the mountains that protect them and give them water. The mountains for them are life.

But, also in those mountains are people who take life away. In the search for gold, silver, copper and other metals essential to the industrialized world and the backbone to the global economy, mining companies blow up the land and poison the waters. And, on the other side of those mountains, in the jungle below, others deforest the land in search of oil, timber and other resources, contributing to climate change that melts the Andean snowcaps, the source of water. As Angelica explains, the people who do these things are just like you and me – humans in need of clean air, clean water and clean soil. The difference is that they believe the earth belongs to them; whereas we believe that we belong to the earth and that the earth belongs to God. “To whom do you belong, Jed?” she asked. “Do you belong to the fallacies of wealth? Or do you belong to the generosity of God?”

When someone believes that the earth belongs to them, then too often they believe they can turn the earth into wealth and buy and hoard all that they need. Yet, when one believes that we belong to the earth and that the earth belongs to the Creator, then we know that we must live in harmony with all of life in order to sustain what all of life needs.

Climate change is but one manifestation of the enormous harmful impacts of believing that the earth belongs to us. The crises we face in this world – from climate change, to hunger, to war and so much more – are more than political crises, economic crises, technological crises, or even ethnic or religious crises. Fundamentally the crises of the world are a spiritual crisis rooted in

TO WHOM DO YOU BELONG? (CONT.)

the answer to one simple question – Angelica’s question: to whom do we belong?

It was Angelica’s question that was in my heart this past December, when I traveled from my home in Lima, Peru to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates where I served as an official observer to the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP-28) – the annual United Nations Conference on Climate Change. As I listened attentively to government leaders and climate experts, it was the presence of indigenous peoples standing on the periphery who captured my attention. From across the world – Africa, Asia, the Americas – indigenous peoples representing their tribal lands reminded the leaders of the world that they are the ones who have lived in harmony with nature for countless millennia. They are the ones who actively protect 11% of the world’s forests and 85% of the world’s biodiversity (essential for capturing of carbon emissions). They are the ones on the frontlines of protecting the Amazon and other rainforests that are fundamental for the generating of the oxygen we breathe. They are the ones who have been saying for decades that we must abandon fossil fuels. They are the ones who are not causing the climate crisis, yet they are among those who are most suffering from it. And, they are the ones who today are being threatened once again, just as their ancestors were, because the minerals needed for a

transition to renewable energies are located on their very lands. They are the ones who must be consulted. They are the ones who have answers. They are the ones who know to whom we belong. They are the ones we must listen to.

As the COP-28 came to a close, an agreement was reached among the 190 participating countries. After nearly three decades of negotiations, they finally recognized the need to “transition away from fossil fuels”. While the sentiment is worthy of celebration, the reality of keeping such a commitment will require immense coordination, collaboration and pressure from the outside world – namely those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change – in order to hold governments and industries accountable. And, at the heart of such a movement, it is the voice of indigenous peoples that must ring loud and clear.

In the Spirit of repairing the harms of the past and participating in a sustainable and equitable future, I pray that we in the Church may recognize our call to this very moment – a call to listen to (and lift up!) the voices we have long ignored – that together we might respond with great certainty to the question Angelica asks not just to me, but to each and every one of us who care for this one common home we inhabit together: to whom do you belong?

ASSOCIATE PASTOR NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Update on the Selection of an Associate Pastor: The Associate Pastor Nominating Committee (APNC) was formed on February 25 at the Congregational Meeting. The members of the committee include Russ Dickow, Wendy Kukowski, Amy Bellisano, JoAnne Bedenek, Beth Russian and Drew McCully.

The team held its first meeting on Sunday March 3, and they met weekly after church.

A Ministry Discernment Profile (MPD) has been submitted to and approved by Session. It is now awaiting approval by Presbytery’s Committee on Ministry (COM). The APNC requested they expedite their review process so we can put this opportunity in front of 2024 seminary graduates.

The APNC is already proactively reaching out to candidates through personal contacts. Once COM approves the MDP, they will have access to any candidate matches throughout the denomination.

When a candidate is selected, they will preach for the congregation, and the congregation will have a chance to meet them. Then the congregation votes on the candidate. If you have any questions or comments, please reach out to any of the members of the APNC.

COMPOST WITH US

Mark Herzberg

Over the last several months, the Local Mission and Social Justice Committees have been discussing ways that FPC can “take a bite” out of food waste by:

- Educating members on the issue, focusing on ways that individuals can make a difference,
- Initiating a pilot food waste composting program at FPC, collecting organic food wastes from the Food Pantry, as well as from other events held at the Social Center.
- Using the composted material that is produced to enhance the health and productivity of the Food Pantry garden.

Learn more about this exciting project during a second-hour forum on food waste and composting that will be held at FPC on Sunday April 21.

Here's a little bit more about food waste and composting:

Food waste is an inevitable outcome of human consumption in modern society. Home food waste results from preparation of meals and plate waste. Pre-consumer food waste, food wasted in its production, harvest, processing and storage, along with post-consumer waste resulting from over preparation of meals and partial consumption (plate waste) contributes to this food waste.

Organic waste sent to landfills decomposes and produces methane gas emissions. Composting the organic waste instead is purported to reduce the amount of methane emissions in addition to leading to carbon sequestration as the finished compost product can be used as a soil amendment.

Composting wasted food produces a valuable soil amendment that can be used to build soil health, increase soil water retention, and reduce soil erosion. Composting is the process of breaking down organic materials such as wasted food and yard trimmings in an oxygen-rich environment. Producing and using compost recycles organic matter and nutrients that are important for long-term soil health and ecosystem resilience.



Sonny Cruz and Mark Herzberg, by the composting bins in the community garden.

CALLED BY GOD

Nicole Parisi

Romans 1:20 For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So, they have no excuse for not knowing God.

We are called to combat climate change, not only for our health or even the lives of those who come after us; we are called by God to take care of all his creations, including the Earth.

Climate change involves more than just warmer temperatures, it includes the quality of our health, housing, our ability to grow food and to work; essentially it truly does affect nearly every aspect of life.

Climate change can increase the occurrence of respiratory and cardiovascular disease. This is because it increases ground-level ozone and particle matter air pollution in certain areas. Ozone formation can be affected by heat, concentrations of precursor chemicals, and methane emissions which are increased due to climate change. This increase can lead to diminished lung function, emergency room visits for asthmatics, and can even increase premature death due to prolonged air quality issues.

Housing is affected by climate change since the land that made an area originally livable is now changing rapidly, and we simply cannot keep up. Climate change can result in areas that have traditionally never had flooding, to having many rainstorms which causes flooding. Similarly, an area which historically has had very mild weather, may experience extreme weather conditions like hurricanes, which can destroy homes. Comparably, an area which has always had fertile soil may suddenly face desertification with a lack of access to water for both drinking and agriculture.

Desertification is considered to be a man-made issue, but it is exasperated by extreme weather conditions causing both droughts and heavy rain which can cause soil to be washed away and lead to land degradation. Climate change is to blame for an increase in natural disasters

because as more water vapor is evaporated into the atmosphere, it allows for more powerful storms to develop. More heat in the atmosphere also leads to warmer ocean surface temperatures which can lead to increased wind speeds in tropical storms. In addition, rising sea levels are displacing millions of people each year due to eroding shorelines, threats to coastal drinking water due to salt-water intrusion, higher storm surges, and flooding. Rising sea levels are caused by the melting of land-based ice like ice sheets and glaciers, in addition to the expansion of water as it heats up.

Climate change can affect our ability to grow food due to the changes in weather patterns which not only affects the crops, but also the soil. Heavy precipitation can harm crops by causing soil erosion and depleting soil nutrients. Heavy rain can also increase agricultural runoff into streams, lakes, and oceans. Temperature changes adversely impact agriculture as well, with both high heat and below freezing temperatures occurring in places where they never did before. Global warming, as a result of climate change, also puts workers at a greater risk for heat-related illnesses, such as heat-stroke and heat exhaustion, especially in outdoor jobs that are physically demanding.

Global warming also affects our ability to live safely in certain areas. For example, climate change has led to an increase in wildfire season length, frequency, and has expanded the areas that are at risk for it. Due to warmer springs and longer summer dry seasons, vegetation and soil becomes dry due to drought. The combination of these elements leads to the areas becoming more flammable, increasing their risk of igniting quickly, and increases the rate of speed which the fires spread. You may recall the smoke that New Jersey received this past June from the wildfires in Canada. This past season, Canada marked its worst fire season on record with over 200 of the wildfires burning “out of control”. The smoke from the fires at the end of June was received by over a dozen states, as far south as the Carolinas and as far west as Minnesota. The wildfires in Canada caused the destruction of many homes and forced people to evacuate their homes even though they were not near the fire due to the smoke damage. These issues will

CALLED BY GOD

become more frequent, and more homes will be destroyed if we do not combat climate change.

God created the world for us, and he calls on us to appreciate and take care of his creation as his children. Romans 1:20 essentially states that we can see God's divine power through his creation of the Earth, therefore we should treasure it. Not only do we have an obligation to God, but also to those who come after us, to ensure that they have a safe world to live in by combating climate change. Climate change affects us all in almost every aspect of life and it will continue to get worse if we do not fight for more sustainable practices.

The First Presbyterian Church Social Justice Committee and Local Mission Committee are working toward doing their part to care for God's earth. In this issue, we describe our efforts to compost and to locally source produce for the food pantry through the Community Garden.



Nicole Parisi is a senior at Mount Saint Mary Academy. She has been a part of FPC for her whole life, from baptism to confirmation. She takes AP Environmental Science, and, as a member of the Environment Club, she designed a composting program for her school. She says, "As a young adult, it is easy to see the effects of climate change in my life. I can only imagine how these issues will increase and become more impactful over my lifetime. While I do not plan on having a career in environmental science, I am very passionate about sustainability and environmental justice."

Our Steps They Guide A Puppy Raiser's Poem

Allison Karr

*The big day is finally here.
Go outside, the van draws near.
Inside, hearts are exploding,
those puppy cries are growing.
Starting our journey here today.
This puppy is perfect in every way.
We'll work together to help the blind.
As he walks with me, his steps I'll guide.*

*Learning now to sit and stay,
Not to eat the rocks and hay.
Taking trips, times flashing by,
Growing quickly now, don't blink an eye.
Walking faster, a stronger stride
I'll walk with him, his steps I'll guide.*

*Our time apart now draws near.
I'm trying not to cry or tear.
A greater purpose lies ahead.
I'll miss your warmth next to my bed.
Although our parting came way too fast,*

*I knew our time could not last.
As he goes to the van and gets inside;
I'll walk with him, his steps I'll guide.
Postcards come to me from you.
Graduation Day, after all we've been through.
Showing me: all the things you know,
Working carefully, stop and go.
Your instructor beams with contagious pride.
As you walk with her, her steps you guide.*

*The final letter has arrived,
On where you've gone and how you've thrived.
Your true purpose is finally here.
And though you are no longer near,
You and your person are now allied.
You'll walk with them, their steps you'll guide.*

*The van comes back around again.
A different adventure lies within.
And though that puppy is not you,
The lessons you taught me were tried and true.
And though you are no longer at my side,
You'll stay with me, my steps you'll guide.*

OUR FOOD PANTRY GARDEN

Eldon Parker

The food pantry garden is now entering its fifth season of operation, and its volunteers have already begun the hard work to provide fresh produce for food pantry clients.

The 2023 garden season was a marked improvement from that of 2022, in which adverse climate conditions and critter destruction of plants greatly affected crop yields. Although 2023's total crop yield almost doubled the 2022 amount of 464 pounds, it was still appreciably short of the 1,201 pounds garnered in 2021. Part of this decline can be attributed to the diminishing yield returns for both white and sweet potatoes. Fellow volunteer and expert in all things gardening, Barbara Schmidt, determined this diminution was due to the depletion of soil nutrients. We have thereby taken the measure of replenishing the nutrients with mushroom compost. The purchase of the compost was sponsored by food pantry volunteer, Grace Shackney, and we are extremely appreciative of her generosity.

To mitigate future critter damage to crops, reinforced wire fencing was purchased--thanks to the deacons for their support in approving the funds--and installed at the onset of the season. This mitigation barrier has worked quite effectively. Special thanks must be accorded to Charlie Day, Bill Marquard and Dan Cook, as well as food pantry volunteers Jenny Messina, Neil and Kim Montuori, Mark Herzberg and Beth Russian for their enormous help in completing this project.

In striving to provide more, and also a wider selection of, fresh produce to our food pantry clients, two new initiatives have been launched:

Extension of Growing Season

In the past, the garden season would normally end in September. Since the food pantry prides itself on offering, in as much as it can, healthy and nutritious food to its clients, the garden committee decided to embark on a pilot program to gauge the feasibility of extending the growing season into the fall annually. With the generosity of Justine Johnson of the Metuchen Public Library in providing a variety of fall crop seeds, the

endeavor was quite a learning experience in terms of managing crops in sometimes freezing temperatures. Nonetheless, it ultimately turned out to be a success; in fact, we were able to harvest kale, radishes, mustard greens, bok choy, lettuce, spinach and cilantro up to the first week of January this year.

Additional Produce Offerings

The garden's main staples have been tomatoes, cucumbers, bell peppers and potatoes. However, since the food pantry clientele runs the gamut of nationalities and cultural backgrounds, we decided to undertake a survey to better understand what other types of produce the clients and their families would be most interested in consuming. Most respondents chose the following as their top choices: basil, bok choy, cabbage, carrots, cilantro, eggplant, lettuce, parsley, rosemary, scallions and thyme. We plan to honor their wishes by planting many, if not all, of the above over the growing seasons.

As has been the case in recent years, we are thankful to the Metuchen-Edison Boy Scouts, Troop 17 B, for their partnership in volunteering in the garden during their summer break. It's always a pleasure to see young people not only experiencing nature but also having the opportunity to do something good, however small, in their community. It would also be remiss of me to not personally express profound gratitude to Jenny Messina and Barbara Schmidt for the great work they continue to do in and out of the garden. I've learned a lot from them over the years, and without their knowledge, guidance, leadership and selfless dedication, there wouldn't be any food pantry garden as we know it.

In closing, the food pantry garden is always in need of not only volunteers but also gardening supplies and financial support. If you are able to contribute in any way, please contact Sarah Teti, Director of Local Mission, at 732-491-2325 or by email, foodpantry@fpcweb.org

PICTURES FROM THE FOOD PANTRY GARDEN



Food pantry and community garden volunteers working in the garden with Metuchen-Edison Boy Scout troop 17B



BEING CRITICAL OF TRAGEDY

Fred Garry

In January I took a train into the city to hear a lecture at the Council for Foreign Affairs. The speaker was Deborah Lipstadt, the U.S. Ambassador to Combat and Monitor Antisemitism.

I went because I wanted to hear her response to the question: is criticizing Israel antisemitic?

The first question she fielded in her dialogue was: how did the events of October 7th change your job?

The Ambassador apologized for the joke, but she said, "business is booming." All indicators, all levels of threat are increasing. And then she gave a warning. "Antisemitism," she said, "is a threat to democracy." To make her point she offered an adage: what starts with the Jews never ends with Jews.

I got a sense she was not one to pull punches. To the main question she said, if criticizing Israel is antisemitic, then what can you make of the mass protests in Israel by Israelis, the constant critique of their own government? Criticism is not antisemitic, except when it becomes isolated.

To demonstrate isolated criticism she gave two common critiques of Israel. Israel is not a sovereign nation and Israel only exists by displacing indigenous people. To the first she suggested that the debate over sovereignty before 1948 was certainly objective and legitimate, after 1948 there is a level of hatred and with the hatred Antisemitism, often born of and perpetuating myths of "Jewish" control. To the second she suggested that displacement of indigenous people as a disqualifier is difficult to take from American, Canadian, and Australian critics. Such criticism, once isolated from others, becomes antisemitic.

Her most difficult comments were very ambassadorial. To the question of Israel and war crimes she deflected the possibility by suggesting she was not a military expert. Was there room to debate, yes, but it was not clear at this point. To the question of genocide she was less ambiguous, no, was her answer, that is

inappropriate.

And then Ambassador Lipstadt pivoted. She spoke of her concern over silence. The lack of people speaking against the rape and murder of Israelis on October 7th. As her conversation came to an end she asked, how can human rights organizations and women's right organization not speak out?

There were times when the Ambassador spoke, especially as she took questions from the audience, that I took the question of "isolation" to heart. After 9/11 we killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and Afghanis. This was a point Thomas Friedman made in the days following October 7th. He pleaded for the Israelis to not follow our example. Yet, how often do we consider 20 years of warfare as something to critique?

For many years now I have struggled with a question of what it means to find your voice. The voice we each have and the voices we can join. What does it mean to speak against injustice without the hypocrisy of isolation? It seems we only discover our glass house after we cast the stone. Where do we find the line separating the need to speak against an atrocity while not creating a fantasy world? How do we speak against injustice without taking away the voice of the oppressed or endangering them even more?

I believe it is impossible to find a place to stand where we are above critique, but I also believe there are many times where we remain silent because of fear or indifference. Again, the lines get blurry. Blurriness, messiness, even risk doesn't demand silence, but care, honesty, and practice. Mostly, I believe finding a voice, joining voices to speak up, speak out should be done with caution, but it must be done.



I SAW YOUR CALL

Zoe Garry

Our daughter Zoe Garry is working as a campus minister with Tulane and Loyola in New Orleans. In conversations with her about the tragic events of October 7th, I asked her to write down how her ministry was impacted. Many campuses have seen protests and demonstrations, often with violence. I also asked her to address the challenge many face speaking to the ongoing tragedy in Gaza. Here is what she sent me. - Fred Garry

“I saw your call. I’m sorry because I’m on the train from New York to DC, and I’m scared to talk about this publicly because I have been hearing lots of scary stuff from people on the streets. I would love to call you back when I get home maybe tomorrow.”

“I’m ok. I feel like the post 9/11 aftermath has restarted and it’s scary to speak in Arabic or share much anymore openly or in public”

My friend texted me this on October 11th after I had called to check in on her. I’ve known her since 2013. She’s my friend, she’s been my mentor, and she is Palestinian. Her fear is real. She and all Palestinians have watched her people on live stream be murdered, starved, displaced, arrested, beaten, dehumanized and called human animals.

Nour Joudah, a colleague of mine who I worked with at the Institute for Palestine Studies in DC has lost over 20 members of her family in Gaza since Israel’s most recent military onslaught. On February 17th she wrote,

“Every Palestinian you know is in a state of constant mourning and grief. Even if they’re not calling it that. Even if they’re not telling you about it. Everything else is just coping.”

The past five months has been the most difficult season professionally for me and the most spiritually heavy and devastating period of my life. Working in campus ministry at two universities, I have navigated the height of tension and divisiveness. I’ve watched a colleague get doxed, and students lose friends, and I have personally navigated very difficult conversations in my

community and with my loved ones where I was bracing for the end of our relationship.

In the fall there were weekly protests on campus. Every protest on campus has had a counter protest, and all protests have had a hum of chaotic tension which culminated in a violent confrontation in which a student was hospitalized, and five students arrested. At my campus ministry, we have Jewish and Israeli students on staff, and Palestinian and Arab students in our religious community. Being a pluralistic space has had its challenges, but in a time when grief is often siloed it has been a blessing to be in a place where people can honestly show up and give voice to what it is to witness war crimes being livestreamed on our phones.

These are hard conversations to have, but not speaking about them has costs and we are watching that cost everyday as civilians are murdered, displaced, starved, and abandoned. I was asked, “how do you speak when it is not safe?” We speak with our chests. We speak with shaky voices, and tears in our eyes. We speak slowly and tenderly and repetitiously. We speak with our conscious. We say a genocide is happening now. We say “never again” for anyone. We say Lord have mercy. May we be the change we pray for.



LOOKING FROM AFAR

Simcha Brick

I saw one journalist advise that the Israeli military should just “pack up and go home.” I knew immediately that he was American. Most wars America has been involved with have been continents away. Our soldiers could “go home” in the span of a work commute.

If being close to the war isn't bad enough, being roped in may be worse. Moments after our baby fell asleep for her nap, I had to grab her from bed to run to our shelter when the missiles came to the neighborhood. The first time I went to work at a cafe since the war started, a siren blared and we all left open laptops and purses to get underground.

As shocking as all that may sound, it all ended up feeling exactly how you would expect. Running to a shelter, obsessing over the news, scanning the train station for attackers... you can guess what it's like pretty well.

For me, there have been two feelings that are much harder to explain.

First, the feeling of trying to internalize that these terrorists really mean what they say, and that they always have. When their spokesman said it doesn't matter that they murdered a hostage baby, because one day he would grow up to be an Israeli... they're not being hateful, mean, inflammatory, or political. They really mean that they want me, personally, to be dead. Me and my wife and baby. They've demonstrated that they'll make it happen if given the chance.

Second, how can we explain the constant feeling of being gaslit by the world? After Israeli-Irish 9-year-old Emily Hand was returned from weeks in Hamas captivity, her PM in Ireland said he was glad the girl was no longer “lost”. Jews with no connection to Israel are being disinvited from speaking engagements and losing contracts for being supporters of “genocide.” The global women's organizations took almost two months to condemn Hamas' widespread sexual violence on 10/7, not to mention what's happening to the 100+ surviving hostages still in captivity.

Which comes to the most surprising experience

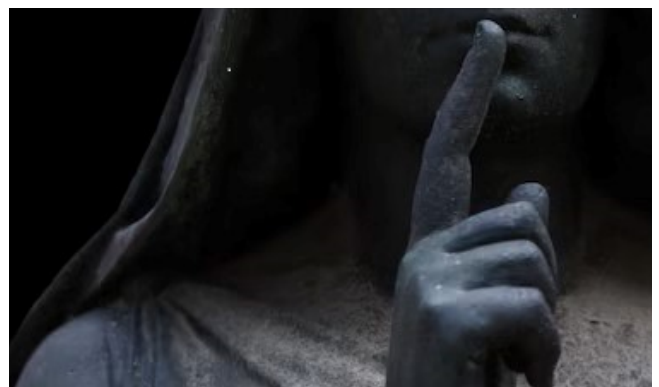
of all. October 7th, at the time, felt like a nightmare. Around the world, Jews are now feeling like it was a waking up from a dream.

We had convinced ourselves of a fantasy - that modern peoples didn't care to hate us anymore. More, that they saw us as the peers. That we were Americans and Brits and Australians and that people looked at us as members of the community.

And then the foreign politicians started insisting Israel not fight the terrorists, since the war would surely radicalize more Palestinian youth. The implication - that we should therefore not do anything in response to the worst attack in our history - is mind-boggling, and obviously something they would never consider for their own countries. But that's what Hamas revealed - many “modern” people still hold us firmly in a separate category and expect us to behave by different rules, rules they would ever accept for themselves.

Our bad neighbors have made us grieve, made us angry, and made us bleed, but we hoped, as everyone does, that we would have friends to lean on in our pain. Thank God, we do, and none like American Christians. But it would be false to say we weren't also hurt to discover that we had far fewer friends than we imagined.

Simcha Brick grew up in St. Louis, MO. After studying at SUNY Binghamton, he spent 2 years in Israel in a Torah study program. He then taught Torah to teenagers for three years before meeting his wife, Sabrina, a Metuchen native. They married in 2019 and moved back to Israel where they've lived ever since. They have an eighteen month old daughter and another one on the way!



FAMILY FAITH MOMENTS

Encouraging simple practices for families of all ages, shapes, and sizes.



The Seqira Family enjoying vacation together

Reach Out

Becoming more like Jesus means weaving service and hospitality into your family life. Reach out beyond your usual social circle and open your doors and hearts to others. There are so many ways to do this! Volunteer together for people and causes you care about. Get to know the people in your neighborhood. Care for members of your church and community who are hurting. Be the hands and feet of Jesus.*

Is your family open to more ideas of growing in faith?

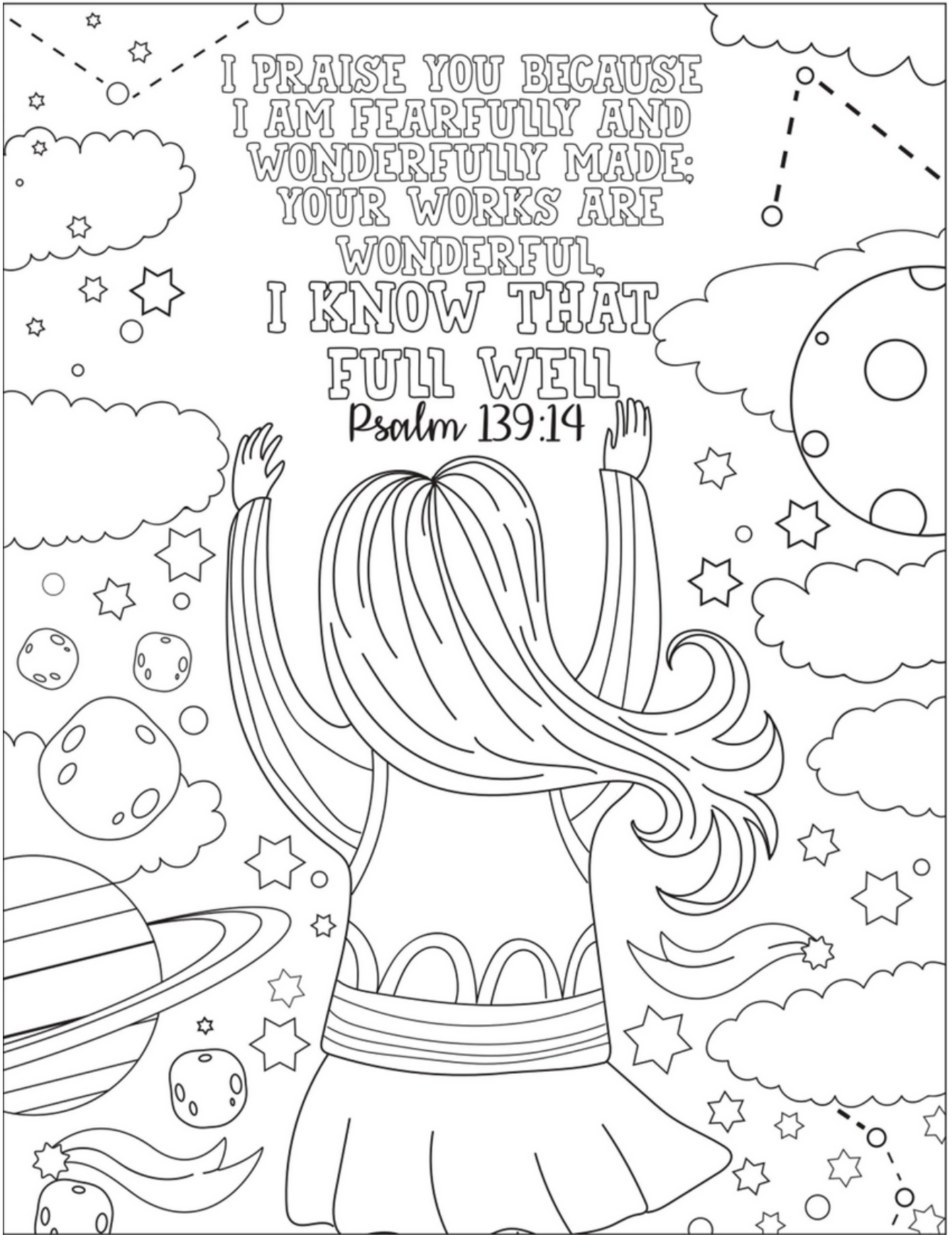
Here are some resources to discover, learn about and explore together. Type in the link or scan the QR code to learn more:

<https://www.faithaliveresources.org/Products/810743/ten-ways-to-help-your-family-grow-in-faith.aspx>

<https://www.familyfaithbuilders.org/20-family-faith-bucket-list-ideas/>



*excerpts from Ten Ways to help your family grown in faith, crcna.org/faithformation



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Looking to serve and wondering where to go? Here are some opportunities that might be right for you!

Children's Ministry

The children's ministry needs you! Volunteers are needed for Vacation Bible School, June 24-28, to help greet in the narthex, assist with our mission project or provide snacks and water to our adult and youth leaders. The Sunday school has opportunities for teachers and assistants this fall. Volunteers are also needed for the All Church Picnic. Please contact Nancy Leardi for more information and to set up a meeting. Email: nleardi@fpcweb.org

Community Dinners

Our first two Community Dinners were a great success! The Community Dinner team is always in need of volunteers and supplies. Please contact Gilly McKie (gilly@mckie.com or (908) 405-2299) if you can help out!

Mission Commission

Come check out the new book nook outside the Social Center, installed by the Mission Commission! The Mission Commission organizes FPC's outreach to the broader community. Next, they are planning to pack lunches for those in need. If you would like to be part of the Mission Commission, contact Russ Dickow rdickow377@gmail.com

Church Historical Documents

There are many fascinating historical documents in our church closets, including session minutes from the early 1800s and original building plans. We need help organizing these documents. If you would like to help with preserving our church's history, please contact Heather Koball, hkoball@fpcweb.org

Cemetery Clean-Up

May 4, 9AM-12PM

Help spruce up our historical cemetery during this church-wide clean up morning

Safety and Security Committee

Do you know where the defibrillator is in the church? Did you even know we have a defibrillator? Would you know what to do if there was an emergency during the worship service? FPC has formed a Safety and Security Committee to create safety protocols and educate the congregation about safety procedures. If you would like to join, please contact Pete Bellisano (pbellisano@gmail.com). Stay tuned for more information about keeping our church and our congregation safe.

Food Pantry Garden

The food pantry garden provides fresh produce to our food pantry clients, all grown by volunteers. We would love your help watering and harvesting during the growing season! If you don't have time to volunteer, but want to help, the garden is also in need of fencing to keep out the rabbits and welcomes donations of supplies or money.

Community Garden

The community garden, adjacent to the food pantry garden, rents out garden plots to community members. There is one plot left, if you would like to grow your own garden! Or for a \$100 donation, you can sponsor a new garden bed, all sponsors are honored on a plaque by the garden. They also need volunteers to help assemble the new beds. If you would like to volunteer or donate to either garden please contact Eldon Parker (eldonmack@yahoo.com) or Jenny Messina (messinajenn@gmail.com)

Mission Volunteer Night

April 25 and May 23, 7-8:30PM

Join the food pantry in packing spring cleaning buckets and packing food for clients. Contact Sarah Teti foodpantry@fpcweb.org for more details.

Cemetery Plot Available

Our recent inventory of the FPC cemetery has revealed one available plot. If you are interested in purchasing the final remaining plot, please contact Heather Koball for more details
hkoball@fpcweb.org or 732-491-2268

UPCOMING EVENTS

APRIL

14. Habitat Pancake Breakfast Fundraiser

Social Center, after the 9:30 worship service
All proceeds fund the 2024 Habitat trip.

15-18. Drop Off for Spring Rummage Sale

Social Center Mo and We 9AM - 5PM, Tu 9AM - 7PM, Th 9AM - 3PM

Got too much stuff around the house? Donate your used items to the spring rummage sale.

17. Prayer Shawl Crochet and Knitting Circle

Session Room, 7PM

Beginners welcome! Contact Jen Thompson jenni4.thompson@yahoo.com or Gillie McKie gilly@mckie.com for more information.

19-20. Presbyterian Women's Rummage Sale!

Social Center, Fr 4PM - 8PM and Sa 9AM - 3PM

There are many volunteer opportunities, with perks such as being able to shop early! Contact Cindy O'Neill, mimabook@aol.com, and Lori Kellner, lgkellner@gmail.com

21. Waste Erase Second Hour Forum

Chapel, following the 9:30 worship service

Learn about composting and what the church is doing to reduce food waste. There will be three prizes raffled off, including a home composter, for those who attend the forum.

24. Board Games with the Deacons

Social Center, noon

Join us for an afternoon of lunch and games. Bring a brown bag lunch and your favorite game. Games will also be available to share. If you are interested, please call Sue West, 732-556-7511. If you need a ride, please call the church, we have volunteers willing to drive others.

28. Cemetery Second Hour Forum

Chapel, following the 9:30 worship service

Join Pete Bellisano, Laura Draper, and Karen Keithler to learn about the cemetery history, learn about tombstone cleaning, and hear about Graveyard Tales, a new book by Pete Bellisano.

MAY

5. Community Dinner

Social Center, 5PM

Join us for a delicious home-cooked meal. Invite a friend, all are welcome!

11. Habitat Car Wash Fundraiser

Church parking lot, 9AM-12PM

12. Youth Sunday

9:30AM Worship service

Our youth lead the worship service.

15. Prayer Shawl Knitting Circle

7PM, Session Room

19 Senior Choir Concert

Sanctuary 4:00 PM

Join the Senior Choir as it presents the concert program for the upcoming tour! 45 minutes of beautiful music. All are welcome. Tickets: \$15 available at the door and after worship May 5, 12, and 19.

22. Board Games with the Deacons

Social Center, noon

27. Men's Breakfast

Social Center, Mo, 7:30AM

JUNE

2. All-Church Sing

Church worship service

Former choir members, graduates of the youth choir program, and anyone else that likes to sing—whether in a choir or not—are invited to join the Music Ministry at 9:00 AM to present an easy, accessible anthem that all four choirs and guests will sing together during worship.

2. All Church Picnic (Deacon's BBQ and Sunday School Picnic)

Social Center and Ballfield, after 9:30 worship service
We hope to see you at our annual end of year picnic!

9. Community Dinner

Social Center, 5PM

15. Habitat Car Wash Fundraiser

Church parking lot, 9AM-12PM

24-28. Vacation Bible School

We are excited to welcome back this year's theme : Galactic Blast : A Cosmic Adventure Praising God! We will welcome children from Kindergarten to 6th grade. Our drama team, dance team and enthusiastic youth and adult volunteers are working hard to create an amazing week of praising God, fellowship and fun.

JOIN US FOR HABITAT 2024, JULY 21-27

Join us for our annual Habitat for Humanity trip to Roanoke, Virginia to build houses for families in need! There is still room on the trip for high school age youth and adult chaperones. Please call the church office, 732-491-2300, for more information and sign-up forms.

The Habitat group will be holding three fundraisers for the trip. We encourage everyone to attend! If you can volunteer for the events, even better! Contact Heather Koball, hkoball@fpcweb.org, if you would like to help.

Fundraisers

April 14, after the 9:30 Worship Service, Pancake Breakfast

May 11, Car Wash

June 15, Car Wash



VOLUNTEER FOR THE COMMUNITY DINNERS

Our first two Community Dinners were a great success! Gather with us in community and enjoy a delicious home-cooked meal. All are welcome. The next two community dinners are **May 5** and **June 9**

The Community Dinner team is always in need of volunteers and supplies. Please contact Gilly McKie (gilly@mckie.com or (908) 405 2299 if you can help out!



AN INVITATION TO YOU!

We would like to invite our congregation to share this years VBS registration form with your family, friends and neighborhood children. Our VBS leaders would like to embrace new and old friends this June. We have space for 150 children. Last year we were happy to invite 100 into our sanctuary. Let's all work together to grow this year's VBS! Forms may also be found on our website. Fpcweb.org



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF METUCHEN

2024 Vacation Bible School

Galactic Blast

June 24- June 28, Mon-Thurs 9:00-11:45, Fri 9:00-10:30 am

Register by:

JUNE 17

Ages: Entering K-6th Grade
Cost : FPC Members \$25 per child,
Maximum \$50 per family
Non Members \$25 per child

Send form with payment to FPC Office:
270 Woodbridge Ave. Metuchen, NJ 08840
Checks payable to: *First Presbyterian Church*
Questions? Contact Nancy Leardi at
(732) 491-2264 Email: nleardi@fpcweb.org

PLEASE FILL IN ALL REQUESTED INFORMATION TO REGISTER YOUR CHILD.

Parent(s) / Guardian(s)Name: _____

Address: _____ City/ Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Email: _____

Parent Cell 1: _____ Parent Cell 2: _____

Your Church: _____

Who will pick up your child? _____

Emergency Contact Other than Above (Name and Phone): _____

CHILDREN (First and Last)	NICKNAME	GENDER	BIRTHDATE (mm/dd/yyyy)	GRADE (Fall 2024)
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

PHOTO AND VIDEO CONSENT

I understand that my child(ren) **may be** photographed, videotaped and/or recorded as part of the Children's Ministries activities or classes and these may be included in publications, website and other social media platforms of the First Presbyterian Church.

____ Yes, I do permit the use of photographs

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

NOTE: WE ARE NOT PEANUT FREE. If there's a food allergy, please provide your child's snack each day.

Medical conditions/food allergies/special needs we should know about: _____

MEDICAL INSURANCE INFORMATION (Please complete properly, including Covid Release Form.)

In the event that my child (listed above) becomes ill or sustains an injury on any authorized and chaperoned event from Vacation Bible School at First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen, I the undersigned give my permission to the church and or VBS staff to take whatever steps are necessary to stop any bleeding and to administer first aid.

In the event that I cannot be reached, I consent to emergency treatment for my child, which may include emergency care, hospital care and the administration of drugs or medicine to be rendered to my child upon the advice of a duly licensed physician and/or surgeon. I will not hold the church, its staff nor its volunteers liable in the event of injury or illness involving my child except in case of gross negligence.

Medical Insurance Company _____ ID # _____

Primary Insured Name: _____ Group ID# _____



We continue to be committed in supporting the work of Church World Service around the globe through just and sustainable responses to hunger, poverty, displacement, and disaster. Below are forms for CWS Blankets for Mother's Day and CWS Tools for Father's Day. Honor your loved ones while supporting CWS.

The contribution per blanket is \$5.00. Please submit to the church office by the deadline date your completed form and payment; checks made out to the First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen with a note on the memo line: CWS Blankets or CWS Tools.



MOTHER'S DAY, May 12

CWS Blankets Form: Submit by May 1st

Your Name: _____

Phone/Email: _____

For Bulletin Listing of Donors (Please print)

Given by: _____

IN HONOR OF: (Name and address of honorees)

IN MEMORY OF:



FATHER'S DAY, June 16

CWS Tools Form: Submit by June 3rd

Your Name: _____

Phone/Email: _____

For Bulletin Listing of Donors (Please print)

Given by: _____

IN HONOR OF: (Name and address of honorees)

IN MEMORY OF:

SPRING 2024 PARISH NEWS

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF METUCHEN
270 Woodbridge Avenue, Metuchen, NJ 08840

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION
US POSTAGE PAID
NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ
PERMIT 746

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

The information contained herein is for Church use only. Individuals using this information must receive permission of the Session of the First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen, NJ

Stay up to date with just one click!

We are now using Mail Chimp to bring to you the latest church happenings. Sign up to make sure we have your correct email address.

Visit the church website, send an email to fpc@fpcweb.org or use your cell phone to go directly to the link using this QR code.

We promise not to spam you!



First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen is a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Parish News Submission

Items for the upcoming newsletter may be emailed to
hkoball@fpcweb.org

Church Office

270 Woodbridge Avenue, Metuchen, NJ 08840
Office Hours: Monday - Friday 8:30 am to 4:30 pm
Telephone: (732) 491-2300
Email: fpc@fpcweb.org

Sunday Worship Service 9:30 am

Online Sunday Morning Worship 9:30 am

Livestreamed on FPC Metuchen Facebook