

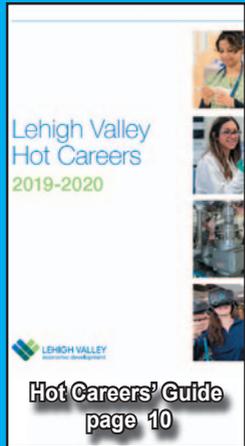
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Two Slate Belt Area Church's Join Together

By Frank Brooks, Member of Lehigh Presbytery Lead Team Elder at the Christ Presbyterian Church of the Slate Belt
BANGOR - Most churches face issues surrounding declining membership and attendance. According to the latest surveys from the Pew Research Center conducted during 2018-2019, there has never been a greater generational gap in those attending church. The decline in participation has resulted in two immediate effects that impact the very operation and mission of local churches. One problem is that lack of participation also means a drop in funding. Funding is something that every church uses to keep the operations up and running. The far more important second effect is the bigger problem, where the funding drop also means a retreat from community mission efforts, as the church then starts to switch into survival mode for its very existence.

One of the strategies that churches have been using is to develop strong central or "hub churches" that are able to carry out their mission. Tod Bolsinger in his book *Canoeing the Mountains*, writes about Christian leadership and how the need to adapt is everything.



Here is a story about how two churches underwent this adaptive process and now are looking towards the future. The two churches, I am referring to are the Presbyterian Parish of Bangor and Roseto

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2020 HOBY Leadership Training Program



Kaylee Holland

By Marilyn Mehas
BANGOR - June Jones Education Chair of Bangor Womens Club GFWC is proud to announce that Kaylee Holland a sophomore at Bangor Area High School has been selected to represent Bangor at the 2020 HOBY Leadership Training Program this Spring. Kaylee is the daughter of Bron and Kerry Holland. She is on the varsity softball and field hockey teams. She is a member of the morning announcements team, and for two years has been an active member of Bangor's Student Government.

Holland is a member of the Bangor choir and chamber choir, she was also a cast member in the school's 2019 musical production of *Mamma Mia!* Kaylee's older brother Colton attends East Stroudsburg University, her older brother Ben attends Bloomsburg University, and her younger sister Brynn is a freshman at Bangor.

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Jill Mathews, Norman Matthews

Dinky's Ice Cream Parlor Expands

By Michael Ortoski
BETHLEHEM -

Dinkys Ice Cream Parlor will be opening their new location, 312 E. 3rd St., Bethlehem, sometime in February 2020. Norman Matthews (aka Mr. Dinky) and Jill (aka Mama Dink) have been waiting a long time to find the right location to open up their second store, "we feel we have found it in Bethlehem" said the couple.

The couple came upon their new location while they were driving to Wind Creek Bethlehem and signs advertising luxury student housing on the upper floors caught their eye. When they saw space available on the ground floor, each thought it would be the perfect location to expand their retro-themed ice cream parlor.

"The new location is going to expand on the existing menu that we already have at our Bangor location. We are going to be offering a variety of different burgers, Italian ices and adding vegan ice cream to the menu. It will also have Mama Dinks homemade ice cream sandwiches and cookies as well" said Jill Matthews.

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Two Slate Belt Area Church's

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and Faith United Presbyterian Church both located in the Slate Belt area of Northampton County. These two churches were made up like a handmade patchwork quilt, as both congregations underwent mergers and blended members from other faiths. This is the story of the struggle that these two churches underwent during a process to merge both congregations and, how along the way, rediscovered their shared past and desire to engage in Christian mission and be able to care for their members and community.

Six years before the final merger was approved, there was a recognition that the Bangor & Roseto church had plateaued in membership and Faith United church was expanding its membership base. The Bangor & Roseto church had a newly renovated building with all the boxes checked for those desirable features, plenty of open space, ample parking, and a fully accessible church. Yet, the Bangor & Roseto church was experiencing declining membership for any number of reasons. Faith United church faced a lot of obstacles at their location, including being directly located along a busy highway. Members competed with residents for those limited parking spaces, as the Faith United church was surrounded by a densely populated neighborhood. The Faith United church building was also an issue, being over 100 years old made accessibility very challenging. Yet, Faith United church had gained members in spite of losing their older members attendance as they struggled to access the building.

Talks were held on a possible merger, but there always seemed to be an issue that separated both

churches from pursuing taking those next steps. Faith United church even explored the possibility of constructing a new building, but then the economy took a wrong turn and the idea was shelved. The seed of partnership however was planted in both congregations and over the next six years both sides inched towards the realization that the Bangor & Roseto church was located on a wonderful pastoral site with fewer people attending, and that the Faith United church was a crumbling building with a little more people attending.

The new novel by Jay Parini titled *The Damascus Road*, came to my mind as the story about Saul of Tarsus being transformed into a believer, as he traveled along the Damascus Road. Saul of Tarsus had his defining moment when Jesus spoke to him. His path forward was lined with many people there to lend a guiding hand as he took those steps into becoming who we know to be Saint Paul. I was struck at the similarity of these two churches hav-

ing their own Damascus Road moment where the way forward becomes clear. Realizing, that the Damascus Road is a path to travel along and not how long the journey may take.

There were so many individuals involved in guiding these two churches along the path, On Nov 3, 2019, there was a great gathering of members from both churches who planned to close one chapter and celebrate the starting of a new journey together. Where there was once two churches, now stands the new Christ Presbyterian Church of the Slate Belt. The new church is holding Sunday services at 10:30am, is actively searching for a new Pastor, and planning for a bright future with the community. We invite old friends of both churches, new friends, and others that are on their own Damascus Road journey that perhaps our Christ Presbyterian Church of the Slate Belt should be a stop along your way.



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