

Manor Minutes
Volume 16 Issue 20
May 16, 2025

- Choir Practice – May 22, 6:30pm

Stay up to date at www.fairhillmanorchurch.org/calendar



Fairhill Manor will be celebrating **Graduate Sunday** on June 8. If you are graduating or you have a family member who is, please contact the Church Office to let us know. You can call the office (724) 225-8610 or send an e-mail to fairhillmanor@yahoo.com with the name of the graduate, school they are graduating from, and their relationship to Fairhill member.

Information is needed by **June 1**.



Karen will be on vacation **May 22 – May 27** for her son's wedding. If you need to call the Church Office at (724) 225-8610, please leave a message and Rev. Chris or Pastor Gena will get back to you as soon as possible. Feel free to contact them on their cell phones as well. (Pray for nice weather as the bride to be wants an outside ceremony.)



Thank you to everyone who donated to **Blanket Sunday**. You can still give contributions for \$10 Church World Service blankets to Connie Sheller.

Thank you

Donna Stenski would like to thank everyone for the cards and prayers during her convalescing. She really appreciated all of the good wishes.



May **God** continue to
bless us; let all the
ends of the earth
revere him.

Psalms 67:7, NRSV

Fairhill Manor Christian Church
(*Disciples of Christ*)
351 Montgomery Ave.
724-225-8610

Rev. Chris Stillwell, Senior Minister
Rev. Gena Sheller, Associate Pastor
Elders: Connie Sheller, Bread
Gene Sheller, Cup

May 18, 2025 – 10:15am

Prelude

Sam Johnson, organist

Welcome

Pastor Gena

Call to Worship

Serena Dube

Leader: From the highest heavens to the deepest seas,

People: Let all creation praise the Lord.

Leader: From the rising sun to the waning moon,

People: Let all creatures praise the Lord.

Leader: From the new heaven and new earth,

People: Let everything that draws breath praise the Lord.

All: Come! Let us worship.

Opening Hymn

“All Things Bright and Beautiful”

Sam Johnson, organist

All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small, all things wise and wonderful, in love God made them all. Each little flower that opens, each little bird that sings, God made their glowing colors, and made their tiny wings.

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Pastor Gena

Living God, you are alive and active in our world and in our lives. Thank you for calling us to get up and come together this morning. Whether with reluctance or hesitation or fear or joy, we are here, and we give you thanks. Come and speak to us this morning; let us know the comfort of your presence as we sit together. Draw us to yourself, even if we aren't sure we belong here, even if we don't think we know you well enough to qualify. Help us to sense your joy in the curiosities of our hearts and our determination to plant ourselves where hope is found. May we follow our hearts to you as we worship.

All-knowing God, forgive us when we compare ourselves with each other, wishing we were more like someone else, vying for more of your love and affection, judging ourselves by how others seem to know and love you more. We know that each of us is the one you love. You are working in each one of our lives in different and wonderful ways. Help us to trust you with our lives, turning to you for guidance and direction. When we see how you are working in the lives of others, turn us from jealousy toward celebration. And make us ever more sensitive to your directions, your movements in our own lives.

Thank you for experiences which lead us to new understandings. Thank you for those who have revealed you to us, who have helped us to see you moving in our lives, who have helped us to understand what you are teaching us. Thank you for those who have taken the time to listen to our hearts, to walk with us on our journeys. Develop in us a hunger to know you more, a thirst to understand your word written in our lives and in the pages of Scripture. Give us new excitement in knowing Jesus.

Thank you for this community of faith, for the bonds of trust we form here in which we can learn from one another, challenge each other, study the Scriptures together, and practice loving each other and learning to live with each other.

We pray for our world, that peacemakers may emerge wherever there is conflict. Give our leaders wisdom in making decisions on behalf of all of us. Give us the insight and courage to uproot injustice and plant your love for all in its place.

We pray for all who are in need of comfort this day. Comfort those who mourn, lift up those who are sick, strengthen those awaiting words of hope. Come and surround with your love and peace those we have named aloud and those we name now in our hearts...

And now may we find your joy bubbling up within us that we may find ourselves on our way rejoicing, having been here with you and with our friends, pondering your word and sharing with each other. May we find ourselves rejoicing on the way, proclaiming the good news of your love everywhere we go, with our words, our choices, our welcome and our care. We pray all of this in the name of the one who is always on the way with us, our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, who teaches us to pray, saying....

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Prayer Response:

“Glory Be to the Father”

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.

First Scripture Lesson

Psalm 67

Von Lacock

Anthem

“Like a River in My Soul”

Choir

Children’s Message

Pastor Gena

Sometimes it’s hard to know how or what to pray. Sometimes it’s nice to have a pattern to follow. There is nothing magic about these ways of praying. After all, praying is talking to God and listening to God. Sometimes we use words. Sometimes we are just quiet. Sometimes we don’t know what to say, so we can just say that: “God, I want to talk to you, but I’m not sure what to say.”

One pattern I use a lot when I’m praying is ACTS. A is for adoration (praising God). C is for confession (telling God we are sorry). T is for thanksgiving. S is for supplication (asking God for what we want).

We can say these four parts in a different way: “Wow!” “Oops!” “Thanks!” “Please!”

“Wow” is a great word for adoration. If we are honest, life is a “wow” experience. In prayer we acknowledge that. We are in awe of creation, the power of love, the presence of God in our lives. There are so many things to be in awe of!

“Oops: is a good word for confession. Sometimes we make mistakes, we hurt others, we miss the mark. So, we take a moment to think about what we have done and to say sorry to God.

“Thanks”, of course, is thanks.

And, “please” is just that. We ask for what we want and need, and for the wants and needs of others. We don’t demand answers from God or tell God what to do. We simply tell God our needs and requests, and then we trust God.

Let’s think of a “Wow!” “Oops!” “Thanks!” and “Praise!” together and then pray to God.

Second Scripture Reading

Acts 15:1-18

Rev. Stillwell

Sermon

“Tradition and Innovation”

Rev. Chris Stillwell

I love to try new things. I often go to new restaurants or new places to find new experiences and new delights. I like to listen to new music to hear new songs. One time I was flabbergasted by a friend who said that she doesn’t like to listen to music that she had never heard before, and so I asked her, “How do you discover new songs?” “By accident,” she said.

I laughed and still laugh, but I must acknowledge that I am not as different as her after all, because I also love the comfortable and familiar. I love to go to the old places that I enjoy again and again, and when I go to an old, favorite restaurant, for instance, it is sometimes hard for me to order something new because what if I don’t like what I ordered, and I spend my meal thinking of the old dish I have had a hundred times?

The truth is that we are all to some degree creatures of habit and creatures of exploration. There is nothing wrong with that, and I think it is probably best to be these things in balance. Every day is a chance to explore and experience new things, and if this dog isn’t learning new tricks then this dog’s day is done, but always we carry with us the reverence of the past and the things that have brought us comfort.

At the same time we must always remember that there is a first time for everything, so the meal that you love, the TV show you have seen a million times, the place you visit every summer, the friend who has been through it all with you, at some point was unfamiliar to you, and if you had not stepped out in faith and taken a chance you might never have known the joy that they have brought you.

This is no truer than in the church, and not just this church, but the Church universal and of all times. In the passage we have read in the book of Acts some very big changes are being debated. The Apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, have gone out into the Roman Empire to preach the gospel, and many have responded. This is indeed good news, but many of them have different customs and beliefs, and the question is how much should new converts change or abandon their old selves to fit in with the those who are already believers. How much does a person have to change before they can be considered a member of the church? How important are tradition and innovation to the life of the church?

At this point in the early days of the church the success of Paul and Barnabas in Asia Minor made it clear that Christianity could not be confined within the borders of Palestine, and this raised the practical question, if Gentiles are to become Christians, must they become Jews first? In other words, must they follow the law, become circumcised? The increasing number of Gentile converts under leadership of Paul and Barnabas demanded an answer, and so a council was called.

The leaders of the church were aware that it was an explosive topic. It might have seemed to an outsider as just a debate over religious ritual, but in the largest terms the issue was, is Christianity a national religion or a universal one? Is its Jewish setting a frame apart from which it has neither meaning nor power, or is it a picture? Is it the soil which gives the gospel its sustenance or is it a cocoon which once it has served its creative purpose must be left behind in the interest of growth? If it’s the latter, then the Jewish ceremonial law must be abandoned for the church to fulfill its role as a worldwide religion.

This specific question has been answered, but the debate goes on from one generation to another, and in that debate, we recognize many familiar features. Like many councils, it was divided into traditionalists, innovators, and those in the middle. The leaders of the traditionalist group are not named. As we look back upon the scene, we are likely to think that there was nothing to say on the side of the traditionalists. History has proved that they were mistaken, but there was, and there nearly always is, in every debate, something to be said for the traditional side. In the first place, the old established ways of a community have a strong and valid claim upon it. The tried way is the best way, until it is proven otherwise.

When a system has prevailed for several centuries, it cannot be relegated to the scrap heap without considerable proof on the part of the innovators that it has a worthy and more adequate successor, and the dispute which we are considering, the Law of Moses, has been the spiritual and moral pattern of the people for generations. It was both an ethical and a ceremonial law which were combined in the act of circumcision which, in a sense, was the cornerstone of the whole system. If circumcision went then the traditionalists believed the law would go and then what? One leak in the dam is enough to destroy the whole thing. So naturally, there were serious minded people who thought twice before they were willing to approve of a move as radical as that. After all, the Law of Moses had held the people together in spite of exiled foreign occupation. It had given them the character to resist the immorality that was all around them. It was their backbone, so to speak. And backbones are not to be removed, nor is it an easy thing to substitute one for another.

What a poor substitute for the Law of Moses, the love of Jesus Christ, must have seemed to the leaders of the traditionalist party. The followers of Christ were just a handful of men and women of whom no one had ever heard, but they were increasing in number every. The way of Christ was new and untried, traveled only by ardent but inexperienced men and women. What match was that for the well-worn, proven way of Moses? The burden of proof therefore rested on the followers of the new way, as it always should.

Not only was the way of Christ a new way, but to the worldly, wise elders who stood by the old way, it was a naive way, innocently trusting in the power of love and renouncing everything that was contrary to love. What chance did a religion like that have in a world in which men could behave like wild beasts? That was the question that must have been on the minds of the traditionalists as they tried to see their way through this debate. Men, they argue needed law as well as love. Let go of the law and you leave the people with no backbone, like a building without a steel frame.

Furthermore, Jesus himself was circumcised, according to the account of the debate. According to Matthew, Jesus came to fulfill the law, not to destroy it. He came to point out the full meaning of it, not to relax it, but to raise the standards and to make it a part of a person's inner life as well as a part of their daily routine. He attended the synagogue and went to the temple. When he arrived in Jerusalem, he took part in the Passover meal. Furthermore, he was a product of the Law of Moses and behind him were the priesthood of prophets who had enriched the law. You can no more uproot Jesus from the soil of his Jewish ancestry than you can uproot a flower from the soil and expect it to live so the traditionalists might have argued.

It is enough to point out that in the everlasting struggle between the traditionalist and the innovators; the truth is never all on one side. We are likely to dismiss the case of the traditionalist as a reactionary interested only in preserving the status quo or their own power. They are the enemy of progress and the champion of the small and narrow minded. Sometimes it is that, but on other occasions, the traditionalist has a real point to make, forcing the innovator to think twice before throwing away something which they think they have outgrown.

The innovator's side of the case was ably presented by Peter. His record was not altogether clean, but Peter's heart was usually in the right place. It does not surprise us to find him the spokesman for the innovator's case, even though we know that he did not always succeed in practicing the principles in

which he preached. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he tells of Peter's disappointing behavior in Antioch. At first Peter did not hesitate to eat with the Gentile Christians. As usual his impulse was a good one, and he acted upon wholeheartedly, but when the representatives of the traditionalist party arrived from Jerusalem, Paul writes, "Peter drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party." Paul said to Peter, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" It may well have been Paul's rebuffs that prepared and strengthened Peter for the test the next time it came.

How many innovators are there like Peter? Their hearts are in the right place. Their intentions are good. They believe the right thing, but when opposition appears, they obey in advance. It is easy to be an innovator as long as you travel in the company of innovators, but when you stand alone innovator in the midst of rapid traditionalists then how easily the pious traditionalist platitudes slip off the tongue. Human beings want to be thought well of, and it is hard for a person to take the disapproval of friends or community. They will do almost anything to win goodwill. They will even go so far, at times, to betray the things they believe in, the person they love. Therefore, those who wish to innovate, beware. Remember Peter.

Fortunately, Peter learned his lesson, and according to the account in Acts he came out for the innovator position in the Council of Jerusalem. He cannot forget his experience with Cornelius. He saw then and there, that Christianity was a far-reaching religion. He had the insight to perceive its universal nature, even though he didn't always have the courage to admit it in public, neither did he forget his encounter with Paul, the outspoken and fearless one. So by the time the Jerusalem Council met, he was ready to stand up in public and say that God had given the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles, just as God had given it to the Jews, and that no unnecessary obstacles should be placed in the way of the Gentiles who wish to become Christians. As usual, Peter came out on the right side, and the Masters confidence in him was not misplaced,

It was not so much the argument of Peter that carried the day, as it was the report of Paul and Barnabas. They did not argue. They simply told what had happened as they preached the gospel to the people of Asia Minor. One can imagine how the people began to sit up and take notice as the talk shifted from theoretical, abstract considerations to the accounts of two men who watched God work miracles through preaching the gospel and bringing life to those who had since given up all hope of life. It was as if they had said, this matter is not simply a matter for you to sit here and discuss like a mathematical formula. It's a matter of life and death. It is something that is taking place in the lives of human beings. God is doing something new, and it must be given the freedom to grow. You cannot hamstring it with your ceremonial laws, however useful they once were. This is the gift of God, and it is for all.

As it so often happens, the decision was a compromise. It represented the point of view of those who were the middle of the road. No one was better suited to express this point of view than James. He was a traditionalist by nature, but he had a fair and open mind and wanted to see the gospel spread. There's so many a new movement that has been saved by traditionalists who have judicious minds. Their sense of fairness saves them from being reactionaries. They would never be the spur or the spirit of a movement, but they might well make it possible for the movement to get underway.

The positive point that Paul came away with as a result of the council was that circumcision was not to be required of Gentiles. To that extent, the verdict was a victory for the innovators. Jewish Christians were not exempt from circumcision, and the Gentiles were required to observe the minimum moral law and to keep some of the food laws out of respect for the feelings of the Jewish Christians who might be associated with them. The important thing to remember is that the result was a compromise. History usually moves forward in that way.

It was enough, however, that they let Paul go ahead and continue to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, for Paul believed that the love of God would eventually break down every barrier that humanity had erected

between themselves. It will wipe out social, racial and economic differences and distinctions between human beings. The wonder is not that the others didn't see it. The wonder is that Paul, with his traditionalist background, saw it so completely and so soon.

Over and over again, the church has had to face the same kind of questions. In simplest terms, it is a question of deciding what is essential, and what is not. What is the frame, and what is the picture. Our customs and traditions are important for institutional continuity and for doing things in the church "decently and in order." But customs followed for their own sake can stifle needed change and quench the flame of the Holy Spirit.

A pastor friend of mine once told me about being in a church meeting. He said, "I knew it was time for me to move on when I heard someone say the seven last words of the church, 'We've never done it that way before,' and I realized it was me!"

The church is gathered to hear God's life-giving promises and the Good News of God's great love for us in Jesus Christ. In this way are to honor the past, of which Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, are foundational, but we exist primarily to serve the future by ensuring that the Church grows and that the Good News spreads. Our job, therefore, isn't to try and capture the Spirit and keep it in a bottle, but to find out where the spirit is moving and join it in its work.

Call to Offering

Donna Stenski

If we truly believed God dwells among us, would we live differently? Would we love differently? Would we give differently? Truly I tell you, God dwells among us even now. Let us share our faith and our love accordingly, as we collect this morning's offering.

The Doxology

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow! Praise God, all creatures here below! Praise God above, ye heavenly hosts! Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Dedication of Offering Prayer

Rev. Stillwell

God of mystery, you promise us a life of blessedness, if only we would learn to love, as you have loved us. May the gifts we bring before you this day be a sign of our commitment to love one another well. Amen.

Invitation to Communion

Rev. Stillwell

So many people brought so many items to our rummage sale, and I am thankful for their generosity, but I also began to notice the incredible relief and sheer gratitude some people experienced when they dropped off their old stuff. It was like the old toys, ancient golf clubs, and decorative throw pillows were taking up space not only in dusty corners of the attics and garages but also in their souls. They would drop off their stuff, tell their stories about a few items, and it was as if their spirits had been unburdened, as if they were the luckiest people on the planet that day, that they could finally get rid of this stuff. They had been given this outward sign of the inward grace of being set free from their possessions.

Living our faith is a lot like a rummage sale. Periodically it is important for us to rummage through our theology and our worship and our prayer life in order to get rid of the things that no longer serve us. We must examine ourselves and take a look at things that we are holding on to thinking that we still need them but realizing that we do not.

This may include things that are antithetical to our faith. We so often hold on to grudges, jealousies, old hurts and wounds, not because we think that Jesus wants us to, but because we want to. In these moments we should, in the words of Christ, "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions."

Then there are the things that did serve our faith at one time. These might include theology inherited from others that doesn't fit us any longer. Sometimes these things are the hardest to part with because they are gifts we received from others, and we believe that we should keep them with us forever lest we dishonor those who gave them to us. When this happens, these gifts meant as blessings become burdens. In these moments we should give these things over to Christ who said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

When we have let go of what no longer serves us hopefully we will regain a renewed appreciation of what still does and we will want those things more. We share in this meal every week so that in our worship, after we pray, and sing, and hear the word, we will have time to listen to God speaking to us telling us what we need to let go of, and what we need to keep and treasure. As we share in this meal let us let go of what we do not need so that we will truly treasure that which we do.

Communion Hymn "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy" Sam Johnson, organist
There's a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in God's justice, which is more than liberty.

Prayer for the Bread & Cup Connie Sheller
Father, "The Light of the World," show us how we can shine brighter for you to others who long to know you. You created us to love everyone. Give us the strength and courage to do that. Bless this bread and cup, as we partake, knowing it represents your broken body and shed blood for us. Amen

Words of Institution Rev. Stillwell
For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
(1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Sharing Holy Communion
You will receive the bread and cup together. Please hold them; we will take each together as one body. Disciples of Christ believe in an Open Table. All who profess Christ and follow Him are welcome to share His meal. Gluten free wafers are available in the Narthex.

Call to Discipleship Rev. Stillwell
This is the promise of the gospel: God already knows you. God already loves you. God has already gifted you. God has already called you. You are invited—to deepen this knowledge, to feast in this love, to cultivate these gifts, and to follow this calling. There is a place for you among the people of God in this community of faith.

If you have come to know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior and you would like to profess that you intend to begin a life of faith, learning to walk in his way of Love, you are welcome to contact one of the Pastors to take this step. If you would like to join this part of the Body of Christ at Fairhill Manor Christian Church, to covenant to journey together in this life of faith, please reach out to one of the Pastors to learn more. We all take these moments to rededicate our lives to following Jesus.

Closing Hymn "Great is the Lord" Jody Mullis, pianist
Great is the Lord and worthy of glory. Great is the Lord and worthy of praise. Great is the Lord, now lift up your voice, now lift up your voice: Great is the Lord, great is the Lord.

Benediction

Rev. Stillwell

Christ has given us a new commandment. We will love one another well. God guides us to love the stranger. We will love one another well. The Spirit blesses with a new vision. We will love one another well.

Puzzle!

For this cryptogram, use the clues
to decode Proverbs 27:1, NIV.



CLUES:
O = D, T = O

$\frac{\text{O}}{\text{T D}}$ $\frac{\text{OT}}{\text{F DO}}$ $\frac{\text{O}}{\text{E D B P O}}$ $\frac{\text{T}}{\text{B E D Y O}}$

$\frac{\text{TO}}{\text{O D U D H H D L}}$, $\frac{\text{O}}{\text{Z D H}}$ $\frac{\text{O}}{\text{G D Y}}$

$\frac{\text{O}}{\text{T D}}$ $\frac{\text{OT}}{\text{F DO}}$ $\frac{\text{O}}{\text{N F D L}}$ $\frac{\text{T}}{\text{L R B O}}$

$\frac{\text{B}}{\text{T B G}}$ $\frac{\text{U B G}}$ $\frac{\text{E H A F M}}$

Proverbs 27:1, NIV

Answer: Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.
Proverbs 27:1, NIV

THIS WEEK'S PRAYER REQUESTS

Do you have a prayer request or need help? Please feel free to contact Rev. Chris (412-956-6590) or Pastor Gena (724) 263-0033 directly and confidentially. Or scroll down on the opening page of our website (www.fairhillmanorchurch.org) to "Requests for Prayer or Help." There you can send an email which will go directly to Rev. Chris. We are One Body in Christ!

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Donna Bakaitis
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John Samida
Valerie Shetler
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Wayne Starnes
Cathy Stewart
Beth Teagarden
Jane Teagarden

In the Military

Lance Dague	Andrew Gregg
Terrell McClain	Zachary Keene
Brandon Lipscomb	Sarah Lipscomb
Travis Ringer	Emily Chase
Dylan Demain	Noah Rudolph

The brave men and women who serve our country make incredible sacrifices every day. We are forever grateful for their service and dedication. Please remember the military members that are deployed and away from their family that they may return to their homes safely.