

The Bell Ringer

Of the Presbyterian Church of Sweet Hollow

No matter who you are or where you are on your life journey, you are welcome here.

December 2023



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From the Pastor’s Nook:

ADVENT MEANINGS

During Advent, which begins this year on December 3, many churches and families use wreaths to symbolize watchfulness and increasing joy as Christmas approaches.

Colors for the candles vary, with some traditions using blue (for hope or creation) and others preferring purple (for royalty, humility or penitence). The four candles that each represent a week in Advent also signify hope, peace, joy and love. (The third candle is often pink.)

In the center is the white Christ candle, representing Jesus as the light of the world. That candle is lit on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. The round, green Advent wreath has special meaning of its own. It symbolizes eternal life and the unending love of God, who sent his only Son to earth to die in our place.

So each Sunday, ask yourselves a relevant question:

- December 3rd—What are you hoping for?
- December 10th—What kind of peace do you need most?
- December 17th—What is bringing you joy right now?
- December 24th—What is providing you with your greatest sense of love?

Blessings to you during this Advent season!



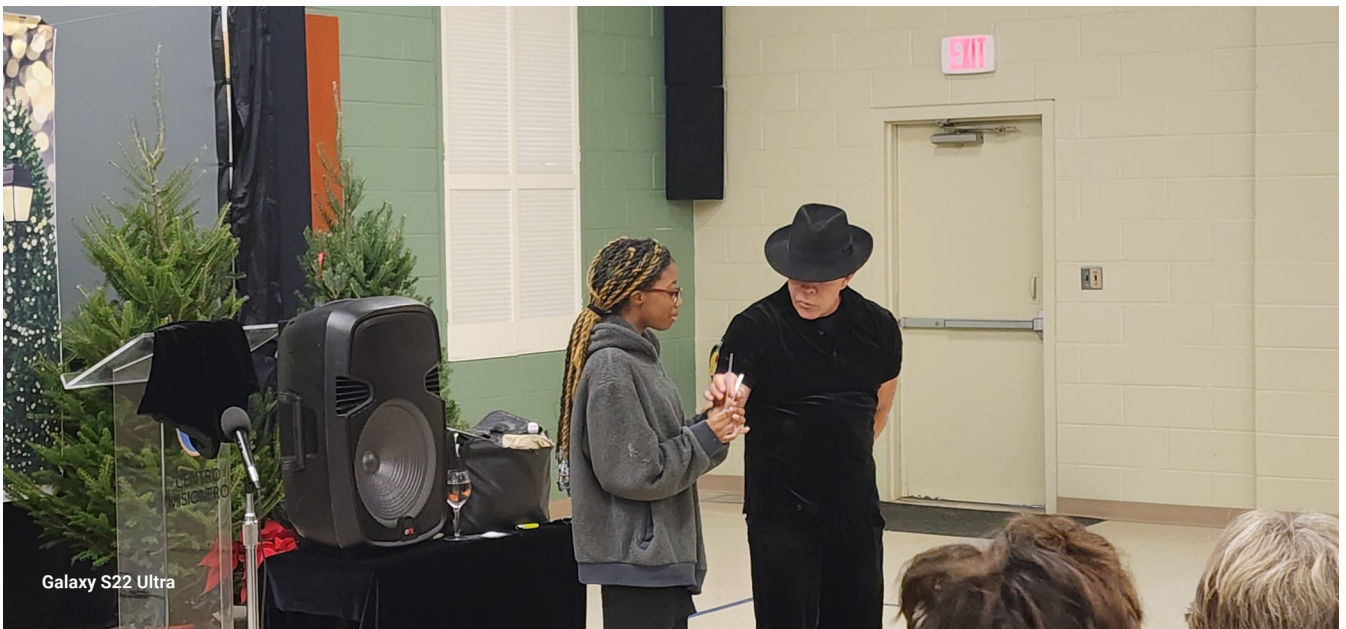
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS...THROUGH CHRISTMAS TEA

2ND ANNUAL CHRISTMAS TEA !!!!!

Our second annual Christmas Tea was a smashing success!!! We were enthralled by vocalist Lauren Giglio, dazzled by magician Georgie Porgie and twirled around by the pirouetting prowess of Dancing Feet!!!! Thanks to Jill Conroy for her energy and inspiration, to our various table hosts and to the raffle basket donations! This year we raised nearly \$3000 from this spectacular event!!!



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS...THROUGH CHRISTMAS TEA (cont'd)



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS...THROUGH CHRISTMAS TEA (cont'd)



FAITH FORMATION

By Carol Keil



The Lesson of the Amaryllis Bulb

Perhaps you've been gifted an Amaryllis bulb this season. With light, water, and PATIENCE the humble bulb sends forth multiple stems bearing glorious blooms. Almost everything the bulb needs is stored beneath its papery, dry surface. The blooms seem to appear miraculously, as they are timed to bloom in the deepest darkness of winter.

Let's consider the true lifetime of the Amaryllis bulb. To be healthy and strong that bulb was nurtured during the longer days of Spring and Summer. With water and sunlight strong roots and strappy leaves grew to feed and strengthen the bulb. As Fall approached the bulb was allowed a period of dormancy/ rest before being "awakened" and the cycle of life (bloom) began again.

The Amaryllis bulb serves as a metaphor for our spiritual lives. With consistent nurture, the roots of our faith grow deep and strong to support us in times of uncertainty and stress. Participation in the life of our church; the friendships and opportunities to serve, to pray and to celebrate, feed and water our spirits.

A note regarding the Amaryllis: Though best known as a winter houseplant, an Amaryllis can survive outdoors in this zone, where it will bloom in late June/July. **Do wait until Spring to plant it outside.**

Spiritual practices for the season of Advent:

Let the decorations of the season remind us to practice mindfulness:

Christmas lights remind us that **Christ is the Light of the World.**

Wreaths remind us of **God's love, which has no beginning and no end.**

A Dove reminds us to pray for **PEACE** in the name of **Christ, The Prince of Peace.**

This Advent season, in addition to observing the lighting of the Advent candles at church, establish a practice of lighting a candle daily as you pray.

Faithfully set aside a period each day for YOU: write in a journal, read ***Taking Faith Home***, write a note to someone you've been thinking of; **PRAY**, establish a routine of exercise, preferably out of doors!

¹Thanks to Rev Traci Smith's ***Treasure Box Tuesday*** blog for inspiring this column.

WORSHIP NOTES

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP

The month of December is highlighted by worship that focuses on the waiting and expectation of the arrival of the babe that becomes the Messiah, Jesus Christ. On Sunday December 24th, we will be having our 4 Sunday of Advent at our 10 AM worship service that will also serve as our Family Worship Service. Be sure to bring the little ones in for a fun and festive service. Then at 9 PM, we will celebrate the birth of Christ with our Candlelight service of Lessons & Carols, telling the story of Jesus' birth through song and scripture!!!!

DROP IN CHOIR!!!!!! - DECEMBER 24TH

It's not too early to think about Christmas Eve!!!! On Sunday December 24th, we will be having two worship services. One occurring at our normal 10 AM worship service that will be oriented towards families and the other at 9 PM which is our Candlelight Service of Lessons & Carols. At the Candlelight service, we are hoping to gather enough interested individuals to drop in for a brief choir rehearsal that will offer an anthem sung at the Candlelight Service. Let Pastor Wade or Jason know if you are interested or available!!!!

CALLING ALL LITURGISTS!!!!!!

One of the greatest gifts that any of us can have is the gift of helping someone else. As a pastor, there are lots of occasions where I get to experience that kind of giving, particularly on Sundays. During Sunday morning worship, I am SOOOO thankful for those individuals who have taken time to serve as a liturgist. Over the past year those individuals have included:

Frank and Maureen Sansone

Carol Keil

Niaja Mowatt

Laura Fallon

Joan Sommermeyer

Melissa D'Angelo

Lynn Burke

So I would like to say thank you to all of you and encourage any of our regular congregants to do the same!

Also, being a liturgist is not a difficult task. Pastor Wade scripts out all of the readings about 5 days in advance so you have plenty of time to look over items. If you have questions about a name to pronounce, you are always welcome to give him a call! And serving as a liturgist is something that takes just a little bit of time and the commitment is very small.

Would you please consider being a liturgist? Reach out to Pastor Wade if you may be interested or have questions!

THE LITURGICAL COLORS OF DECEMBER ARE PURPLE CHANGING TO WHITE



BIBLE AND A BREW

Would you be interested in joining Pastor Wade for a beer and a discussion about the intersection of our faith and some current events? Look for BIBLE AND A BREW coming soon!!!



Presbyterian Church of Sweet Hollow

(631) 367 - 9249

www.sweethollowpresby.org

Rev. Wade Pond, Pastor

Jason Black, Director of Music Ministries

Lori Kevelos, Church Administrator

Jill Conroy, Treasurer

Beatrice Reiser, Clerk of Session

Elders: Ed Conroy

Melissa D'Angelo

Niaja Mowatt

Frank Sansone

Bea Reiser

December 2023

- 6.....Monica and Paul Van Houten
- 7.... Rebecca Van Houten
- 13.... Fred Chacalos Jr
- 17....Brian Schiffmacher
- 20....Nicole Schiffmacher
- 22...Brianna Conroy
- 26...Laura Fallon, Barbara Martin

National Calendar Days

- 2....Special Education Day
- 4....Wildlife Conservation Day
- 7....Start of Hannukah (through 12/15)
- 7....Pearl Harbor Day
- 8....Brownies Day
- 13...Cocoa Day
- 16...Chocolate-Covered Anything Day
- 18...Twins Day
- 25...Christmas Day
- 26...Thank You Note Day
- 30...Bacon Day

www.nationaldaycalendar.com

SESSION MEETING!

The session meets monthly, typically on the third Monday of each month at 8 PM. Most meetings occur via Zoom. In person meetings occur February/May/September/November. Our November meeting will be held on the 20th. Any member of the church is welcome to attend. Ask Pastor Wade for details.

STEWARDSHIP AND STUFF

End of the Year Giving has Benefits!!!!!!!!!!



Whether for gratitude, the joy of the season, catching up on a commitment or excitement about exceeding your commitment, we are grateful for your year-end giving and want to assist in any way we can.

As a church, we are hoping to receive an extra \$5,000 in year end gift giving on top of your regularly planned gifts.

Giving in sensible and effective ways may help minimize your tax-burden and stretch your charitable dollars. **Here are some opportune ways to give at Year-End:**

Cash – gifts of cash are easy and may be eligible for a federal tax deduction.

Securities – gifts of appreciated assets can be appealing, because long-term gains are not taxed, and the gift is generally deductible from income tax at the full value on the date of the gift (and can offset tax up to 30% of AGI).*

Charitable Gift Annuities – may bring many benefits: support for Church, fixed income for life, and *potential* tax benefits.*

** We hope you will consult your professional advisers on how this gift would fit into your overall plans and your eligibility for tax benefits.*

Only gifts completed by December 31 help to reduce taxes you owe next April.

For more information on giving making a year-end gift please contact **Lori at 631-367-9249 or pcshsecretary@hotmail.com**. Check with your advisors to see how this fits in with your overall plans and ensure that you are eligible for the tax benefits.

Thank You for considering a Year-End Gift!

Your Finance Team – Jill Conroy (Treasurer) Melissa D'Angelo & Pastor Wade.

STEWARDSHIP AND STUFF

Six Key Financial Principles

As part of our mission commitment, the finance team wishes to share some wisdom with you as you prepare for your mission commitment for 2024. Here you will find some wisdom that has been curated from scripture highlighting Six Key Financial Principles, which are summarized below.

We hope you will take time this week to read these principles and Scriptures. They will make a great table devotional for you and your family. By practicing these biblical principles, all of us can find greater simplicity, contentment, generosity, and joy for our lives.

Put God first in your living and giving. (2 Corinthians 9:6-7)

Put God first in your living and your giving. Give your tithe and offering from the “top” of your paycheck, and then live on whatever remains.

Prepare a spending plan and track all expenses monthly. (Proverbs 27:23-24)

Creating a budget means developing a plan in which you tell your money what you want it to do. Tracking your expenses is like getting on the scales to see how you are doing.

Simplify your lifestyle; live below your means. (Matthew 6:19-33)

Because this discipline is critical to the success of any financial plan, it is often a focus found in scripture.

Provide immediately for an emergency fund. (1 Timothy 6:9-12)

An emergency fund is an account separate from checking or long-term savings that is set aside specifically for emergencies.

Pay off all credit card debt; use cash or debit cards, not credit cards. (Proverbs 22:7)

As you are building your emergency fund, begin to pay off your credit card debt and start using cash or debit cards for purchases. If you must use a credit card, be sure to pay off the debt monthly.

Practice long-range saving and investing habits. (Luke 14:28)

Saving money is the Number 1 wise money management principle everyone should practice. There are three types of savings we should have: emergency savings, savings for wants and goals, and retirement savings.

CHURCH GROWTH

INVITE A FRIEND TO CHURCH—Any given Sunday!!!!

One of the easiest yet most challenging aspects of church growth is the act of inviting someone to church!!!!

In our church growth team meeting two weeks ago, the conversation about invitation came up. It is a conversation piece that I have shared in every church that I have served. And there are always a couple of common responses that occur:

“Everybody I know already goes to church,” or “I don’t know anyone to invite” or “everybody I know is attending church somewhere else.” The challenges of these responses are that it takes the inviter off the hook for inviting new people. Unfortunately, these responses are typically based more out of fear than out of fact. Inviting others to anything is a scary proposition. The goal for a church invitation is an invite that leaves space for others to say yes and that doesn’t paint an overly negative or rosy picture.

The challenge is we really do not like inviting individuals to church. The fear of rejection is one of the main reasons. Understandably most of us do not enjoy rejection at any level. Yet, if we are serious about sharing God’s transforming and inclusive love displayed in our little church with a big heart, then inviting others to a place where that can happen is important.

Clues for Inviting Others

1. The invitation should be about a genuine connection and not staged. It is best to invite individuals to an event that has bearing on their life or appeals to their interests. It comes across as a genuine connection and not something staged that comes out of left field. For instance, our Christmas tea is expected to be a fabulous event in December. Invite a friend and buy them a ticket to join you! “I have an extra ticket for our Christmas tea on December 2nd and I would love for you to come with me.” The connection is authentic because they have an interest in sharing time with you while experiencing some music, dance and magic to go along with all of those appetizing teas and treats! If we translate this to inviting someone to church, then we share with them about some of our mission ventures like Cause for Paws, the backpack program and feeding the hungry. The point is the invitation comes across as thoughtful and something that connects with the other person.

(continued on next page)

CHURCH GROWTH

INVITE A FRIEND TO CHURCH—NOVEMBER 19TH!!!!

2. Be specific. Often, when we do invite, our invitations are very general. If I say to someone, “come to dinner at my house on Sunday,” it leaves out important information, like the time of dinner and where I live. A better dinner invitation is “come over at 5 p.m. on Sunday and my address is 123 Main Street, which I will text you so you can Google directions.” The same principle applies to church. Simply saying, “Why don’t you come to my church on Sunday,” is not as specific as “I would love for you to come to the Presbyterian Church of Sweet Hollow at 10 a.m. Our address is 95 Old Country Road, and I will meet you in the parking lot.” Be specific!

3. Be honest about what we know and do not know. Another reason many of us do not invite is that we are afraid someone may ask us questions to which we do not know the answer, such as, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” It is okay if we do not have all the answers. In many cases others are relieved that we do not know everything. This communicates to others that you are not trying to sell them a bill of goods. We all have been in situations where a salesperson was willing to tell us anything to get us to buy the product. To exaggerate the point, imagine a salesperson saying you need this vacuum cleaner (that works well on shag carpet) when they know you only have hardwood floors in the house. This would leave a bad taste in your mouth. Honesty goes a long way and individuals respect those who are upfront with them.

4. It is important to invite with expectant hope. Do not invite with a defeatist attitude. There are times when we so underplay the invitation it comes across as if we really do not want the other person to come. For instance, a friend saying, “My family reunion is on Saturday. It probably won’t be fun, but you might want to come if you have absolutely nothing else to do.” This is not a compelling invite! But it’s equally important not to go to the opposite extreme and be overly effusive. The goal is an invitation that leaves space for others to say yes without painting an overly negative or rosy picture.

Inviting others to anything is a scary proposition. This is especially true for church because of the personal nature of faith. I believe it is helpful to make a genuine connection, be specific, be honest and avoid shading the picture too bleakly or too rosily. Ultimately, we are inviting others to experience a transforming relationship with God.

Ultimately, keep asking. Most people need to extend an invitation at least 7 times before receiving that first yes! And in doing so, you may make a difference in someone’s life!

MISSION & MORE



Mittens & More Tree

We're blessed to announce that the *Mittens & More Tree* has been placed in the front of the sanctuary, awaiting donations of children's gloves, mittens, hats and scarves to benefit the children of Tri-CYA (Tri-Community Youth Agency).

Please bring your donations in on any Sunday and place them on the *Mittens & More Tree* up through **December 17th**, at which time the items will be blessed and then delivered to Tri-CYA for distribution to the children whom they serve.

You may also drop off your donations to the Church Office during office hours, Monday through Friday between 8:00 AM and 12:00 PM. Please call Lori in advance at 631-367-9249.

Thank you all for bringing warmth to those in need.



MISSION & MORE

TOYS OF HOPE TOY DRIVE

****Make a Child's Holiday*

*One They'll Always Remember****

Please bring in new, unwrapped toys starting 11/19/23 up through Sunday, 1/7/24, to benefit Toys of Hope, a Huntington Station based organization providing joy to children in the community through their toy ministry. Toys will be blessed on that date & then delivered.



Prayer Corner

by Carol Keil

“Look up, you whose gaze is fixed on earth, who are spellbound by the little events and changes on the face of the earth.

Look up to these words, you who have turned away from heaven disappointed.

Look up, you whose eyes are heavy with tears and who are heavy and who are crying over the fact that the earth has gracelessly torn us away. Look up, you who, burdened with guilt, cannot lift your eyes.

Look up, your redemption is drawing near. Something different from what you see daily will happen. Just be aware, be watchful, wait just another short moment.

Wait and something quite new will break over you: GOD WILL COME.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Holy One,

In this Season of Advent, we pray with mindfulness and HOPE, for PEACE, JOY, and LOVE to be present in all we do and say.

Grant us PATIENCE as the worries of the world swirl around us.

AMEN

Find our website and social media links!

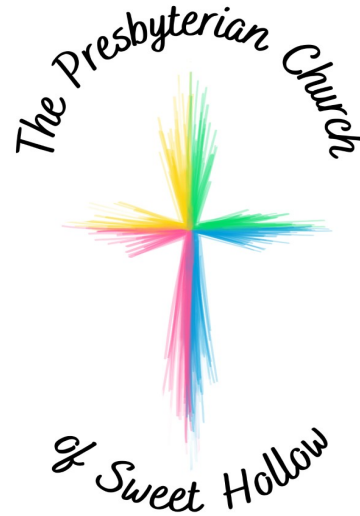
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<https://youtube.com/@presbyterianchurchofsweet1401>

<https://www.instagram.com/presbysweethollow>



Session Notes:

The session is glad to share with you that there are a couple of changes on the way to help make us more efficient in our day to day operations.

The lights in the CEB Hall are due to be replaced with brand new LED lighting. The lighting will benefit the church by being more efficient for energy consumption and a substantial portion of the costs are covered by grants designed to help with some green initiatives.

The church is switching its internet and phone provider services to a higher speed, more reliable and more cost-efficient service. During this time of transition, Thursday December 7th, the church will have a service interruption on that day.

Bell Ringer Delivery: To have your copy of the Bell Ringer delivered by e-mail instead of on paper, please call the office, e-mail <peshsecretary@hotmail.com> or Pastor Wade. You will receive your copy faster, the pictures will be in color, it will save the cost of paper and toner, and it will reduce the time needed to print, collate and label your copy. It will also save the cost of postage if you are not in church to pick up your copy.