



TIDINGS

Redeemer Lutheran Church
1545 Chain Bridge Road
McLean, VA 22101

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A MESSAGE FROM PASTOR KESSINGER

Dedicated to the vision of Martin Luther King, Jr. and John Lewis

In my sermon that I offered for the *Blue Christmas* service I shared this thought: As we wait with eager anticipation to receive the vaccine to combat the coronavirus, there is no known vaccine that will combat what troubles our nation save God in Christ. Most of the issues that we face as a country have deep roots and as a result it is difficult (at best) to address them effectively. But that is no reason to resign ourselves to inactivity. In my article this month I hope to raise some awareness of what Redeemer is doing around concerns for racial equity and why we have made this a focus of our ministry. I offer it to you as we celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day on January 18th. The legacy of John Lewis is also fresh in our minds.

Our work started more formally as a result of the outcry that took place at the end of May after the death of George Floyd. It was an opportune time to act so a group of us met over Zoom on June 4th. We came up with a name for our group (*For Love of God and Neighbor: Anti-Racism Ministry Team*) and met weekly for the first two months. Most of our initial time together was spent expressing what we were feeling as we watched cities go up in flames. Violence was breeding more violence. It took me back to Chicago in the middle of the 60's which was another turbulent time in our history.

Open and honest dialogue was important to us but eventually we knew we needed to move forward with concrete steps of action. It has been a challenge to know what to do because the issues we talked about were both individual and systemic. It is easier to call out our own racist behaviors and work hard to correct them. In comparison systemic racism is daunting. It includes the policies and practices entrenched in many of our institutions including the church. It often results in the exclusion of certain groups and individuals. Our extensive conversations led us to better define the terms that we use, such as white privilege and white supremacy, unintended biases, and economic disparities.

Grounded in Scripture: Any conversation we had about justice needed to be grounded in the Word of God. We know we are to act as individuals and as a church based on the mandates we receive in Scripture. In our work we are reading the ELCA Social Statement – Race, Ethnicity, and Culture – which starts with confession and works towards advocacy and action. It calls us to make a firm commitment to God to be an active participant in his kingdom. It calls us to be a public leader, public witness, and advocate. This has always been the call of the church but one that often lies dormant. Each of our congregations need to evaluate what we can do in the name of Jesus Christ in the context that we are in.

As an example of how we ground the social statement in Scripture we recently read the section entitled *Facing Obstacles: A Time to Confront Racism*. In the statement we read how all of us sin and fall short of the glory of God. Racism is a sin and a violation of God's intention for humanity. It fractures and fragments both church and society. It infects and affects everyone. It hinders us from becoming who God calls us to be. When we confront racism and move toward fairness and justice in society all will benefit.

And then from Galatians 6:1-10 we read that we are to restore people to wholeness in a spirit of gentleness. We are to bear one another's burdens. We are not to grow weary in doing what is right. Whenever we have the opportunity we are to work for the good of all.

Share Resources: We will be updating our website to include a page dedicated to the work of the *Anti-Racism Ministry Team*. We are overwhelmed by the number of resources that are available to keep us engaged in this ministry. Once more it will be important for each of us to find our passion and to pursue it. If your passion is in advocacy there are easy ways to be connected with the ELCA Advocacy Office which is located in Washington, D.C. If your passion is to learn more how the economy and environmental issues are contributing factors to racism then we have members on the ministry team who are knowledgeable in these areas and are eager to engage in those conversations.

Engage People in the Broader Conversation: In the fall two books clubs were started to broaden the conversation beyond our ministry team. Both groups finished reading *The Devil in the Grove* and will start in January reading *Between the World and Me*. It would be awesome to have another small group develop to read the same resource or one that the group selects. Each of these books has become a place to start. It is our hope that with each book selection the conversation will deepen and be transformational. Another book that has been highly recommended is entitled *Caste*.

Coming Up . . .

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is on January 18, 2021. Due to the restrictions in place we will not be able to volunteer our time as people may have done in the past. Instead this would be a wonderful opportunity to make it an educational day for ourselves and/or our families. For our children we can help them better understand the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. For adults, we can spend some time prayerfully considering what we can do that would contribute to the efforts for racial equity.

For Lent

Watch for an announcement of a further **Call to Faith**. During Lent (before we enter into a time of prayer) we will offer opportunities for a Bible study that includes conversation around the migration of God's people, the separation and inclusion of God's people, and the commandments given to us by Christ that define the laws of God that pertain to social justice.

Our work has only begun. It is my hope and prayer that we will grow personally from our time together and that we will be able to enact change and be part of the solution. If you have any interest in being a part of our ministry team please let me know. All are welcome!

In Christ –
Pastor Sandy Kessinger

JANUARY

IN-PERSON SUNDAY WORSHIP

Traditional Service – 9 am
Contemporary Service – 11 am

Week of January 3
Wednesday, January 6

Thursday, January 7

Week of January 10
Sunday, January 10
Tuesday, January 11
Wednesday, January 13

Deadline for Annual Reports
Wednesday AM Bible Study – 8 am
Wednesday PM Bible Study – 7:15 pm
Mutual Ministry Meeting – 7 pm

Confirmation Workshop – 4 pm
Congregation Council – 7:30 pm
Wednesday AM Bible Study – 8 am
Wednesday PM Bible Study – 7:15 pm



Week of January 17
Monday, January 18
MLK Day

Tuesday, January 19
Anti-Racism Ministry Team – 7 pm

Wednesday, January 20
Wednesday AM Bible Study – 8 am
Wednesday PM Bible Study – 7:15 pm

Week of January 24
Wednesday, January 27

Wednesday AM Bible Study – 8 am
Wednesday PM Bible Study – 7:15 pm

Week of January 31
Sunday, January 31

Practice Session on Zoom
In Preparation for Annual Meeting

Coming in February
Congregation Annual Meeting
Confirmation Workshop
Ash Wednesday
Wednesdays in Lent

February 7 (1 pm)
February 7 (4 pm)
February 17
Starts February 24

Minutes of December 14, 2020 Meeting of Redeemer Congregation Council Teleconference via Zoom

Present: Mitch Brown, Secretary Karen Detweiler, President Laura Duval, Stephanie Hunter, Ellen Kennedy, Pr. Sandy Kessinger, Matthew Kratz, Florence Ofili-Toviho, Nathan Paukovits, Vicar Hephzibah Penumaka, Roberta Pittman, Will Ubben, Treasurer Rob Wenk. Special Guests: Linda McConnaughay and Tammie Ward-Dahl

Excused: Liz Holzapfel

Opening Devotions: Pr. Kessinger opened with a devotion on Sunday's Lesson from John.

Adoption of Agenda: The agenda was adopted as sent out in the read-aheads. Our meeting focused primarily on Redeemer's After-school and Preschool Programs.

After-school program: Linda McConnaughay presented the current situation regarding the after-school program.

- **Comparators:** Linda noted that other area programs are facing the same challenges we are.
- **Budget:** Linda presented the "rebooted" budget, which would start on August 1. It is effectively the same budget she had developed for the 2019-2020 academic year and proposed to Council last year. It would relaunch Summer camp. She already has deposits from families who intend to return in the Fall.
- **Bus:** The program is currently maintaining but not using the bus. It just went in for safety check. If the local public schools go to the planned hybrid program, they would not be able to use the bus as it would not be cost-effective.
- **Trends & Expectations:** Recently, some parents signed their children up for after care very late in the process, even during the first week of school. Linda anticipates that a lot of families will go back to "normal" as the pandemic eases and schools resume "normal" service. She will have to rebuild her staff due to attrition (getting married, moving to new jobs, etc.). She especially seeks music teachers.
- **Advertising and Market Analysis:** Linda would like to do a mailing with postcards. Because she is marketing to millennials, she wants to update the websites for format, user friendliness, and continuity with the Preschool's look and feel. The primary effective reference is personal referrals. There are brochures in the lobbies of the feeder schools.
- **Grants:** Linda has applied for the most recent round of CARES grants.
- Roberta Pittman offered a motion to pass the After-school budget. Nate Paukovits seconded. The budget passed unanimously. President Duval complimented Linda on the administrative gymnastics she has done this year to keep the program going throughout this very challenging year. She noted the support parents have expressed for the program.

Redeemer Preschool: Tammie Koenig, the Director of the Preschool, was invited to present the current situation for the Redeemer Preschool.

President Duval opened by congratulating Tammie on the CARES grant award. Tammie thanked Council and her Preschool Board for supporting the program.

The preschool successfully reopened this fall with no COVID incidents to date. Some preschools that closed have pushed their reopening back to April of 2021 or to next Fall.

On October 5, Council asked for some detailed program information to enable preparation for the January registration period and to address some concerns that were shared at the 2020 Annual Meeting.

Tammie prepared several documents in advance of the meeting that were shared with Council members.

Survey: Tammie surveyed congregation members with and without young families. She also surveyed a small number of people who had inquired about, but not registered at, the preschool. The response was about 25% of those to whom the survey was sent. In general the results showed that parents requested more class days and longer care days, but not a full day care type scheduling.

Recommended Way Forward: Tammie recommends that they continue to offer the ½ hour extended coverage and expand that to the 2.5-year-old children. She would reassess after the January enrollment period.

Status and Anticipations:

- The marketing efforts are starting to work and will be important to future success.
- They do look annually at program changes to meet parents' needs.
- The pandemic shows the need for early childhood education and skills development.
- Since 2009 the Preschool has been working to expand outdoor activities which will be impacted by the Sunrise construction.
- NIAS program accreditation could boost the program.
- Day care (a 12-month commitment that affects all facilities use and requires two-shift staff) is not recommended at this time based on the survey data.
- Philosophical decisions are part of the process.
- Our 2001 occupancy permit designates us as a child-care facility. If there is an expanded building program, day care could be factored into it.

Questions: Council engaged Tammie in some specific questions:

- Do you know if any of the other programs are for-profit? Tammie thought there was at least one.
- Cost range? Church-based programs tend to be in the lower cost tier. Brookfield, Langley, and Country Day were higher. The local preschool directors' group does surveys annually, although not this year. Redeemer tended to be on the higher end of the church schools.
- Program and enrollment: Tammie had looked into adding a 2.5-year-old class. Currently we have 27 students in two cohorts that do not mingle. Adding a third class would be challenging. We have limited substitutes. We had families in the 3-4 class, and we had a waiting list, but we could not expand.
- In terms of the survey did we hear from anyone not currently associated with Redeemer? Tammie did not know; some were alumni families or had inquired within the last three years. Tammie noted that she did not have a way to reach other families who have not inquired.

Other Council Questions:

- We asked Tammie to share the difficulty of acquiring teachers. Tammie said it has been hard; we reached out to closing schools to see if their staff would come over. In one case she interviewed a teaching team and called back after reference check to make an offer, and the candidate had already received and accepted an offer. Some teachers are uncomfortable teaching amidst COVID. Some candidates have become teachers for COVID-19 pandemic "pods." Some staff want to return in the Fall.
- We asked about the preschool directors' process for surveys and salary ranges. Tammie said they do it as datapoints. There are many variables and comparables to consider. Chesterbrook UMC had a preschool but it recently closed. McLean Montessori has a large new facility. Our facility is now 20 years old. It recently had a leak at the entry door (just fixed). Tammie stated that we need to ensure our building is maintained.
- Tammie was asked how much an outside survey provider would cost. She was confident that such services exist, but she did not have insight into specific costs.
- In addition, the program needs help with website revision. Redeemer had asked if congregants would assist but there were no volunteers. They could hire a website developer or hire someone to coach & advise Tammie and Linda. Tammie noted that the Preschool Board provided valuable contributions to the data call.
- Council asked about using the RLC provider, Clover. Tammie was under the impression that the site would have to go down for a week. Roberta Pittman built the original website based on WordPress, the platform Redeemer used to use. It was not feasible to move it from WordPress to Clover. Tammie includes Redeemer happenings in her weekly newsletters.

Preschool Expenses:

- President Duval noted that Council had been concerned about numbers and trendlines in anticipation of questions for our February Annual Meeting. Tammie continues to operate under the Memo of Understanding dating back to 2011. There was a financial loss last year due to COVID. The preschool team is constantly monitoring costs and demand.
- With COVID we have an anomaly. The 2021-22 Program Year with extended program days and hours may change the trendline. The survey process needs to become routine so we continue surveying new preschool age families in the congregation so we can have data to work with. Every five years or so we should get an independent survey of where we are and where the market is going. Tammie noted that the Evangelical Lutheran Church has an evaluation tool we could use; it was last done ca. 1992, when the program was only 20 students.

Preschool Budget Discussion:

- Tuition did go up when the extra half-hour was added. The practice has been to increase tuition in alternate years. Council recommended that we reconsider the practice. Salary increases are occurring every year and should be passed along.

The Preschool budget was passed unanimously.

Pr. Kessinger's Report: Nothing to highlight.

Vicar Hephzibah's Report: Focus is on meeting in-person with the youth, but as that is not possible, there will be a Zoom game night. Cards went out to the youth and we hope it will help ensure good turnout. Hephzibah will begin writing the guide for Lay Leaders.

Approval of Minutes: Nate Paukovits moved approval and Florence Ofili-Toviho seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Treasurer's Report: Rob Wenk reported no major changes since the Council President sent out the Congregational Letter. We have received \$56K in additional contributions. We will continue to keep the message out there and press on through the end of the calendar year.

Annual Meeting Preparation: President Laura Duval, Vicar Hephzibah Penumaka, and Secretary Karen Detweiler are working to prepare for the Annual Meeting via Zoom. There will be Coffee with Council sessions before the Annual Meeting to ensure that people can ask questions and verify that they are comfortable using Zoom.

Health Equity Team: COVID-19 precautions have shifted with the Governor's order effective Monday.

- We are confident that our Health Equity Team has established routines that are even more conservative than those required by Virginia so we plan to continue with in-person worship as Pastor noted in the service this weekend.
- We will amend procedures as needed:
 - ◊ We now have only one side of the congregation coming up for communion at a time to maintain social distance.
 - ◊ For Christmas Services, we will have 5, 7, and 9 PM. We are almost at capacity for the 7 PM by reservations. Everyone needs to go through the sign-up page. There is still room at the 5 PM service.
 - ◊ We continue to need help wiping down pews between services. We will ask congregants who attend service to please linger and help if possible. Mark Cronin is coordinating the greeter schedule.

Year-End Financials: As noted above, we have received additional funds. Per the IRS guidance, Council needs to approve the portion of pastoral compensation that goes to housing allowances. Rob presented the resolution. The Council voted in Spring to suspend merit increases so Pastor Kessinger's compensation for next year will be the same as last year, including \$35K as housing allowance. This motion passed unanimously.

Nominating Committee: We have formed the Nominating Committee for new Council and Endowment Committee members.

- Matthew Kratz is chairing the committee with Florence Ofili-Toviho as the other member from Council. Sabine Detweiler and Robin Taylor are other members on the committee.
- Two potential candidates have been identified as prospective Council members to be presented to the Congregation at the Annual Meeting. The committee is seeking a third candidate.
- Peter Shumway has agreed to serve as the Youth Member.
- Gene Morrow has agreed to serve on the Endowment committee and one Endowment Committee position remains open for nomination.
- The full slate will be presented to Council for approval at the February Meeting.
- Candidate biographies will need to be sent by the candidates to Carol D'Amico for inclusion in the Annual Report.

Ministry Reports: None.

Closing Prayer: Pastor Kessinger led Council in the closing prayer.

Adjournment: President Duval adjourned the meeting at 9: 25PM.

Next meeting of Council: January 11, 2021

Next meeting of Executive Committee: January 5, 2021

A Message from Vicar Hephzibah

Happy New Year! After a challenging year in 2020, it finally feels great to say 2021. I love new beginnings. There's something about starting over, especially when it is filling my newly bought planner with things I would like to do or accomplish for the year. There are new possibilities for exploring places, people, foods, and the list goes on.

One of the things I usually do on New Year's Eve is I spend the day cleaning every aspect of my room, getting rid of things I don't need, doing laundry, and even organizing my computer and phone. After I am done, I attend the New Year's Eve prayer service hosted by one of the churches in our community back in NY. During this service, we share testimonies of all the things God has done for us and sing hymns of praise after each testimony. We do this for as long we would like to be in the church. The moment we ring in the New Year, we take a small break to greet each other and all our loved ones with good wishes. We continue the service with prayers for the new year and how we would like to grow spiritually in our faith journey. I enjoy spending the last hours of the old year and the hours of the new year spending time in prayer. It allows me to marvel at all the wonderful things God has done in my life, for the church, and the world. It also allows me to think about the ways I have grown in various challenges throughout the year. As a result, I have an idea of what areas in my life that need growth.

Last year has been a challenging year. In January, we entered a new year and new decade with so much hope. We were looking forward to making new memories and trying new things. We wanted to experience what 2020 would bring us. Then things took a rough turn, first with the fires in Australia and then the pandemic. The pandemic forced small businesses to shut down costing the livelihoods of many. Month after month, we held on to hope for a vaccine where we could reunite with loved ones and do all the things we planned to do for this year. Finally, we have a vaccine, and it seems like things are slowly turning around even if the cases and death toll are still on the rise. This year has taught us that we need to reprioritize what we consider important in our lives. Although the pandemic reminded us of the frailty of our morality, it taught us what sacrifice looks like. The pandemic taught us the importance of self-care, especially as our anxieties arise when we need to step outside for chores or visiting loved ones.

Every year I pick a scripture text to set the tone of my faith journey. After the incidences of last year, I choose this text in Ephesians 4:22-24. Paul writes to the church in Ephesus the following: *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.* This verse perfectly encapsulates the challenge I have for this year but also my identity as a Christian, especially on the day of my Baptism. As we start the new year, it would be great if we reflect on the promise we made to Christ in our baptism and confirmation. Therefore, one way we can do this is by thinking about how we would like to grow spiritually. How can we strengthen our relationship with our Lord and with our neighbor?

Even though it will take a long time to return to the lifestyle we are used to, I hope we will incorporate the lessons we have learned last year through intentional and meaningful actions this year. May God bless you and your family in this new year. Peace in Christ, Vicar Hephzibah Penumaka

For Those Who Need Help with Rent or Mortgage Payments due to Covid

If you or someone you know is at risk of losing your home due to Covid-19, the Commonwealth of Virginia has funding available through its Rent and Mortgage Relief Program. (Virginia's eviction moratorium law runs out on December 31st.) This money is only available to people who cannot pay their rent because of the impact of the virus on them, such as losing their job, etc. While the eviction moratorium ends at the end of this month, there is money available in 2021 to help people who can't pay their mortgage - renters and landlords - so the word needs to spread. Also, immigrants that do not have the proper documentation to be in this country are eligible to receive this assistance too. More information can be found through the links below.

Eligibility determination can be found at :[Virginia Rent and Mortgage Relief Program \(RMRP\) | DHCD](#)

Landlord applications on behalf of tenants can be found at: <https://www.vhda.com/Pages/Home.aspx>

Scholarships Available

There are scholarship funds available for students in the congregation who are pursuing studies in music and/or dance or to assist with the student's spiritual growth. These funds became available through a special gift given to Redeemer from charter members of the church. If you are interested, please send an email to church@redeemermclean.org with the details of your specific situation and we will respond back to you as soon as possible.



Donald Daus	1/1	Arcel Castillo	1/17
Kevin Maul	1/1	Phyllis Peter-Mallard	1/17
Marion Lockhard-Schultz	1/2	Elias Tiffany	1/17
Sharon Tonsager	1/2	Joseph 'JoJo' Warren	1/17
David Truslow	1/2	Justin Bornmann	1/19
Hayley Wenk	1/2	Kelly Kight	1/19
Melissa Gorsline	1/3	Caden Stuart	1/19
Charles Lettow	1/3	Niels-Oliver DeChaine	1/22
Daniel Bader V	1/4	JoAnn Mueller	1/22
David Young	1/4	Jean Speegle	1/22
Justin Young	1/4	Nathaniel Tiffany	1/22
Kelly Dewberry	1/5	Edward Berendt	1/23
James Prince	1/5	Amelia Dutrow	1/23
Jessamin Straub	1/5	Mark Hughes	1/23
JaLyn Tiffany	1/5	Julian Mentzel	1/24
Annelie Wiklund	1/5	Emma Mykityshyn	1/24
Judy Prince	1/6	Jenna Raimondi	1/24
Karlen Bader	1/7	Grace Chambers	1/25
Judith Kastner	1/7	Emma Horn	1/25
Greg R. Adams	1/8	Natalie Horn	1/25
Griffin Stieg	1/8	Dan Retter	1/25
Christine Bader	1/9	Rebecca Behravesh	1/26
John DeLeonardis	1/9	Benjamin Epstein	1/26
Darlene Lebedev	1/9	Benjamin Campet	1/28
Frederick Muhlenberg	1/10	Caroline Elliot	1/28
Tessa Skochko	1/10	Cindy Goodman	1/28
John Corvari	1/11	Forrest N. Stieg	1/28
William Dutrow	1/11	Kevin Dempsey	1/29
Edwin Pan	1/11	Nicholas Elbert	1/29
Christopher Armstrong	1/12	Adem Sevimli	1/29
Madeleine Engel	1/12	Anika Crone	1/30
Sebastian Salzman	1/12	Gretchen Odegard	1/30
Tessa Stoll	1/12	Katie Romhilt	1/30
Rekha Arness	1/14	Bob Speegle	1/30
Martha Blue	1/14	Jake Dunleavey	1/31
James Sullivan	1/14	Katherine Miller	1/31
Madison Barb	1/15	Luke Niles	1/31
Matthew Duval	1/15	Jeffrey Pishner	1/31
Amara Okorie	1/16	Anna Villagran	1/31