

the newsletter

Stone Ridge, NY Rev. Caroline Berninger, Pastor

From the Pastor

In a recent sermon I noted that a common theme in several recent readings from the Bible wonder about some basic questions:

- Where did we come from?
- Where are we going?
- And, why is it taking so long?

They're questions that the Israelites asked in the midst of 40 years of post-exodus wilderness wanderings, and they're questions we can ask about our church, as well. The 50 years that RVUMC has been on the hill on Schoonmaker Lane have included a lot of singing, praying, working, serving, living and loving in the community. The community has changed within that 50 years, too; there are fewer children, more older adults, and more second home owners. Regular attendance at worship services and participation in a faith community has declined nationally; and RVUMC is no exception. Other voluntary organizations (fire companies, first aid squads, veterans' associations, amateur sports leagues) are also hurting for active members. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated and accentuated declines that had been happening for a long time.

So, where are we now, in the final stretch of 2023, as we emerge from the pandemic? We continue to provide accessibility to those who are unable to come to worship because of infirmity or distance with a pre-recorded 20-30 minute service each and every week, including readings, prayers, sermon and public domain hymns. It is uploaded to both Facebook and YouTube. If you're not a regular Facebooker, the easiest way to view it is to go to our website (rvumc.org) and a link to the YouTube recording should be right there on the "landing page." As you can see elsewhere in this newsletter, as well as praising the Lord on Sunday in worship, we have finally been able to do more things in person this year, including some of our popular fundraisers such as the Garden Tea and Plant Sale in May, the Car Show on Labor Day weekend (rescheduled due to rain on the original June date), and by the time you read this, the Sauerbraten Dinner on November 4. We expect to sell cookies on December 16th, and to sing the cantata "Night of the Father's Love" on December 23rd. These are all good things to celebrate!

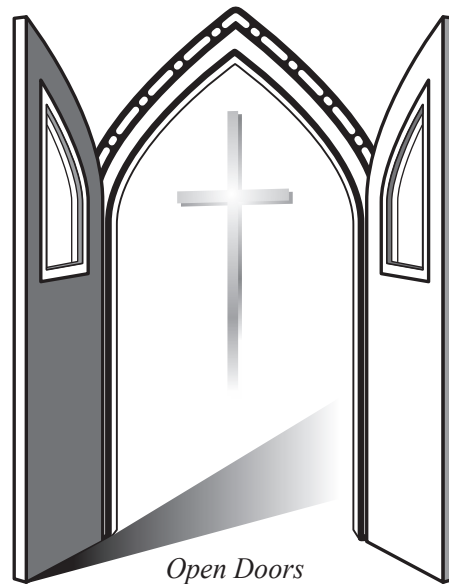
But (you knew this was coming, didn't you?) it is still a hard time for our small church. The opposite of the old

saying "many hands make light work" applies here: "few hands make hard work." And, fewer people in church means less in the way of monetary donations to the church for the ongoing support of the church and our ministry and witness in the world in response to Jesus. In-person worship attendance has not rebounded since the pandemic closure—we seldom have more than 20 people on Sunday morning!—and those who watch our online worship do not, by and large, contribute although there is a "DONATE" page on the website to make credit card contributions through a secure link, and our mailing address has not changed: PO Box 295, Stone Ridge 12484.

With all of these factors in mind, the Pastor Parish Relations Committee concluded at our most recent meeting that RVUMC can no longer support a $\frac{3}{4}$ time pastor, and will request that the appointment be changed to a $\frac{1}{4}$ time one. What this will look like remains to be seen; it is likely that there will be more involvement with our new Cooperative Parish. (In the newsletter one year ago I described the CP in some detail; but at Annual Conference we became part of a new and different grouping, the Hudson Valley parish.) We have already had a couple of CP-wide events that were a lot of fun: assembling 50 Flood Cleanup Buckets—at RVUMC!—in the summer, and then having "Trunk or Treat" and "Messy Church" at St.

James in Kingston right before Halloween.

I'll close with a heartfelt appeal to everyone reading this, as we approach Thanksgiving: Give thanks to God that we have made it this far, give of your money, and give of yourself. As you make your year-end charitable donations, or wonder what to do with RMDs, remember RVUMC, and the other churches and non-profit organizations in your community. Give of yourself, by showing up for your community; it turns out that's not only good for the community, it's good for YOU. A recent documentary on the decline of civic involvement over the past 50 years featuring social scientist Robert Putnam, titled *Join or Die*, notes that being an active participant of just one group—anything from a club to a civic association to, yes, a church—measurably decreases your chance of dying



*Open Doors
Open Hearts
Open minds.*



prematurely. More than one group?—more decrease in early death. And the benefit of participation in groups extends far beyond individual health. The health of society, of our nation, correlates with group involvement. Putnam and his coauthor of the new book *The Upswing* provide lots of data and have good news for us—we CAN turn our country to the better; it's been done before. BUT: the hard news is that a turn to the good is not a spectator sport, and not something that we can do while we are each in our self-made bubble. We can do it; but WE have to Do It. As a We, not as all "I"s. And that's genuinely a tough thing.

RVUMC still stands, and still serves, because of a lot of love: the love of God in Jesus Christ for all of us; the love we have for one another; the love that spills out into a world full of needs. As 1 John 3:18 puts it so succinctly: "let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth." Loving God and loving neighbor are our most important charges, no matter where we are!

Pastor Caroline

Christmas Cantata

"The Night of the Father's Love"



Saturday, December 23rd, at 2:00.

Rehearsals Saturday mornings 10 am

Sympathy

to the family of Catherine Coddington

September 5, 1927-July 17, 2023

CONGRATS!

to Dawn Shirak and Hasan Hasanbeck

Married in NYC

Friday, October 13, 2023

Sympathy

to the family of Berton Delamater

April 30, 1932-August 27, 2023

Trustee Report

It's been another tough year, we have had a few breakdowns at the church and some other repairs that were scheduled. Not everything has gotten done that we would like to have done due to manpower and finances.

Breakdowns:

A few more sections of the Sanctuary floor have come loose and needed to be re-secured, the new flooring in the Jones room has had some issues, was fixed by the flooring company but is still having issues and needs to be attended to again, The electric panel had an issue with the main breaker but has finally been taken care of by High Falls Electric. (thank you Bob Ham)

An Air conditioner was donated to the church for use in the Jones room by Bob VanWagnen of Magic Touch Autobody Repairs in High Falls. We also received a donation of a new lawn tractor for the church from the Rose fund, another blessing as we didn't have the funds to buy one. Another blessing was to receive funds to repair the old tractor to be used at the parsonage to keep that property maintained.

Two projects that did not get done this year are repair of the front entrance steps, and the sidewalk across the front which is a trip hazard.

That brings me to things still to do and requests for help either time donated or ways to raise the funds to do these projects.

Front stoop steps. The two steps at the front entrance have come loose from the base and the base is deteriorating at both front corners.

Sidewalk. The sections of the concrete sidewalk are heaving up and causing trip hazards. It would be recommended to remove all sidewalk sections and replace with new or change to blacktop walkway and to include the handicap parking area at the end of the walkway at the base of the tree. This would also be the time to raise the low spot in the parking lot that floods the walkway and covers it with mud.

Bell Tower. The tower still needs a few pieces of trim around the bell openings and the inside area to be painted, also to have an electric line run underground to the tower to supply power to the star and also for spotlight when needed.

Conclusion:

As you can see, this is a lot of work that needs to be done and is a safety concern, especially that the majority of us are senior citizens with mobility issues. I am open to all suggestions as to how we can accomplish this in a timely manner. The sidewalk being, I feel, priority #1.

Respectfully submitted
Thomas Fiore

What's happening with the UMC?

General Conference 2020 will finally take place in May of 2024 in Charlotte, NC.

Updates on the denomination can be found at www.umnews.org, and www.umc.org.



Treasurer Report

We have paid all bills, apportionments and benefits on time, *but* to do so, we have had to dip into investment/long term funds. We have not always been able to pay Pastor Caroline precisely on time, but currently are back up to date.

There were several bright spots including substantial fund raising (spearheaded and guided by the Fiores especially), which then amounted to around 7% of our income. With group activities more open, use of the church increased to about 1% of our income from the pandemic era of nothing. There was generous giving beyond pledging, which amounted to almost 9% of income. These were indeed bright spots.

The *sobering facts* and reminders are that expenses just keep rising. For several years, this church has *annual budget shortfalls*, and we have to access investments meant for long term to cover those deficits. Those funds are dwindling, and it is likely that the church will need to take additional funds out in the next calendar/fiscal year. The current investment account(s) summary balance is about \$72,250. Some of that total is designated to a specified category or need, so is not always for general fund usage. Needed church building and parsonage repairs have sometimes been put off due to our financial strain.

Submitted R. Taylor,
Treasurer, RVUMC Oct 22, 2023

WELCOME!

Welcome! To Harper Elaine Fiore,
daughter of Tim and Stephanie.
Harper was born at Vassar Hospital
on August 9, 2023.

Christmas Eve Candlelight service:

7 pm Sunday December 24.

Second Sunday Suppers:

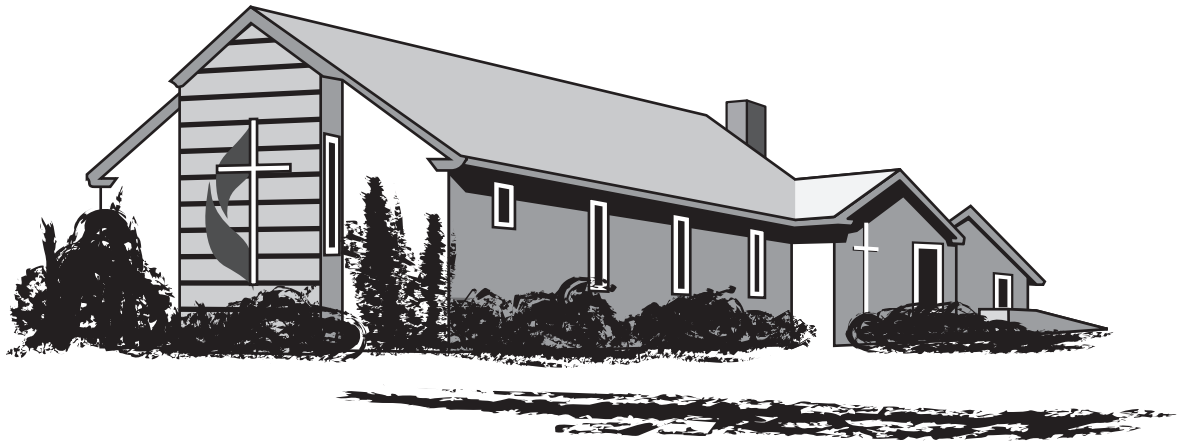
We moved the time to 2 pm over the winter—
and liked it so much that we've kept it there.
Check website rvumc.org for details and updates.
Next one scheduled for November 12.

If you would prefer to receive this Newsletter by EMAIL,
please send an email to rvmethodist@gmail.com.
Put "newsletter" in the subject line.

Make sure to include your Name and email address.

***Please Don't Forget
our Neighbors in need
and We can make a difference!***





RONDOUT VALLEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
Box 295
Stone Ridge, N. Y. 12484