

THE TIDINGS

Shelter Island  Presbyterian Church

September 2020 Newsletter

From the Pastor's Study

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way."

This is how author Charles Dickens begins his novel, [A Tale of Two Cities](#), set in London and Paris before and during the French Revolution. It perfectly captures the tenor of that time and at the same time speaks perhaps for all times in which peoples, nations and societies find themselves "betwixt and between."

If you remember I used this quote to describe the place in which the Israelites found themselves as they made their way from Egyptian bondage to freedom and into an unknown future. They were leaving what they had known without a clear vision of where they would wind up and what would become of them. They were 'betwixt and between' and this 'betwixt and between' place always brings out the best and the worst in everyone. I suppose you could say that the best and the worst in all of us is not so much shaped by circumstance but revealed by it. It will certainly be true for those Israelites as we shall see as we continue our journey with them to the promised land.

We also as church together, find ourselves in a "betwixt and between" time, don't we? We thought we knew what was what. We knew what to expect and what would come next. Our lives were fairly ordered, and we found comfort in the knowing. There was certainty. And then along came a tiny virus that in quick order reminded us all that certainty, at least our human attempts at certainty, is a myth.

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In many ways we find ourselves adrift, in a waiting pattern. Much like planes stacked up over a busy airport in a storm, waiting for permission to touch down safely on firm ground, we do not know how long we will be in that holding pattern. We do not know what our future will hold once we do come in for a landing. We are truly as individuals and as church together “betwixt and between.” Waiting for our lives to restart, waiting for a new pastor to walk with you into a new future, waiting to go back to a time of certainty and safety and control.

This space we now occupy can be as Charles Dickens wrote, a time of wisdom as well as foolishness, a season of light as well as a season of darkness, a spring of hope as well as our winter of despair. We will experience all these things until we touch down on solid ground once again.

So be gracious with each other and with your family and friends. Let’s encourage each other to create a space in which hope and light and belief and faith and certainty, not in ourselves, but in the one who holds out a certain and glorious future beyond our ability to fathom, can come to be. This ‘betwixt and between’ time has reminded us upon what our hope rests and for that we begrudgingly can even be grateful for its presence in our lives.

The apostle Paul said it best, I think.

*“For I am convinced that neither death nor life,
nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come,
not powers, not height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, Our Lord.”*

In that love is the firm ground upon which a certain future is held out for us.

That future is set because we are called by name, we are summoned, we are His.

When we pass through any “betwixt and between” time, He is with us. Everything will be alright, because it has always been alright and always will.

Sometimes we just need to be reminded of what we already know to be true.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Bob



Many thanks to the Sweet Island Dulcimers for providing special music for the Church on August 23.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2020 BY ELLEN GOVE

I was asked to be one of three Commissioners to represent Presbytery of LI at the June 2020 General Assembly to be held in Baltimore. However, due to the COVID-19 virus pandemic, this years' Assembly was moved to a Zoom platform. Although I was disappointed in not going to Baltimore to participate in the Assembly, there were positive and negatives to having the Assembly remotely—the Presbytery saved time and money in terms of traveling and lodging expenses. I saved traveling hours and reduced CO2 emissions and we also saved some trees without printing documents. Instead of six days, the Assembly was held in the comfort of my home for three days and I even became more technically savvy! On the negative side, I felt there was a lack of connection/fellowship with other commissioners and I missed the live worship/praise services.

The 2020 General Assembly opened with a Native American custom—East, North, West, and South tradition form of worship. This was entwined with indigenous people and Presbytery USA. It is the Assembly that I said “yes” to, but this was an Assembly that God provided for us—one of great technology, from the East, North, West, and South. This is something new and bold together that allows the PCUSA Church's vital work to be done.

Some highlights for me: The evening prior to the opening of GA 2020, I attended a remote Bible Study. The topic, Lamentations 5:20-21 in which the leader shared that as of today there is no vaccine for the pandemic and racism. Since 1619, the virus of racism began & there is still no vaccine! There is hope in lament—a desire for new beginnings that God will restore one day.

Racism and COVID-19 were not slated to be on the 224th GA Docket. There were many items that were removed from the Assembly Committee on Business Referral, but these two items were added to the 224th docket after much discussion. An entire afternoon was spent on discussing racism. A lengthy discussion followed about not only what the action should be, but also about who should be covered by it. I found it interesting that more time was spent on racism than almost all the other actions. The actions on racism issues are clearly influenced when the GA elected a Native American woman and an African American man as its co-moderators. Likely the fact that its moderator team was mixed racially, influenced the GA to take actions beyond the publicly popular Black Lives Matter movement that has dominated the national news. The GA clearly supports the BLM platform, but this GA clearly felt that all people, except white people, like me need to be included in the tent. The GA spent several hours trying to get the list complete enough. An Open Letter to Our Nation's Lawmakers on Systemic Racism from The Poor People's Campaign was presented. Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, Stated Clerk of the GA shared that he had signed off on this open letter.

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BUILDING & GROUNDS REPORT

We were very fortunate to rent the Manse for July, August and September to a responsible, lovely family. This helps the church financially since weekly giving is down and we have not been able to hold any of our fundraisers since March. Thank you to Dan Binder, his crew, and Debbie Binder for preparing the Manse for rental.

Building & Grounds informed Session that we needed to replace the two air conditioning units in the Sanctuary and also the unit in the church office. Two quotes were received, and Session approved Flanders Heating & A/C to replace these units. Also, it is recommended by NYS Guidelines for COVID-19 to install Air Scrubbers to air conditioning units to sanitize and improve the air quality. The cost of this will be taken out of the capital fund budget.

We continue to seek donations for replacing the windows in the sanctuary. Building & Grounds is working with Riverhead Building Supply on the project. If you would like to donate towards this project, please speak to Peter Vielbig, Treasurer

DEACONS' REPORT: BRENDA BERGMAN

The Deacons have sent out several cards of sympathy and “thinking of you” sentiments. Roswitha has done a spectacular job with Sunday service preparations and little goodie bags. We share them with absentee members after the Church service. Please let us know of any needs by calling Brenda or any Deacon.

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FROM THE TREASURER, PETER VIELBIG

As always, and with much gratitude and blessings, we thank our steady and generous congregants and friends who have continued meeting their pledges. Without this support we would not be able to meet all our financial obligations. We had been able to take advantage of the Payroll Protection Program loan and therefore kept our employees paid during this strange time in our Church's life. We have also been the beneficiary of several gifts from estates, trusts, and wills which allowed us to fund some of the air conditioning replacement. We also rented the Manse this summer which helped pay for its upkeep and much-needed repairs including a new garage door. All in all, we should be able to meet our future obligations and finish up the year in relatively sound financial health.

I was further impressed that our opening service on Friday included a Native American Ceremony and on the final day of the Assembly we held an 8 minute 45 second time of silence.

Racism is in the news every day. Our Mission Team hosts a Social Justice Book Club which is open to the entire SI community. On July 23rd we held a book discussion on the book, White Fragility by Robin DiAngelo. We had approximately 30+ folks in attendance. To me, this is a good thing because when we have more conversation, we have more awareness and ultimately change can take place. I am proud of SIPC for providing an opportunity to discuss social justice issues.

Throughout the Assembly, I was most impressed with the passion that was expressed from my fellow commissioners on this topic. Because of their compassion and desire to make change, I have become more aware and knowledgeable on the topic of racism and proud to belong to a community of believers (PCUSA) that want to be part of the solution.

A discussion on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic was held. The theme was from Lamentations 5:20-21—*Why have you forgotten us completely? Why have you forsaken us these many days? Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old.* From the moment of Creation to today's unprecedented pandemic known as COVID-19, God has called the church to embody the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who is the Word made flesh. In this time of global catastrophe, the church must rise to answer the call, offering its life as witness in word and work, heart and hand, in prayer and practice for the healing of the world God so loves. This moment requires a response from the church to a world drowning in a great flood of suffering, fear, and death, compounded by this pandemic. The challenge before us is not so much about adjusting to a new normal in the days ahead, but how we will continue to grow as new humans in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the context of a destructive virus, how will we say and show the great ends of the church? We must declare ourselves to be a community of faith, of hope, of love and reconciliation, of Gospel witness. During this time, we acknowledged and mourned with those who mourn the loss of precious lives, for the disruption of human relationships, and for those who suffer the pain of isolation. We urge prayer and care for neighbors near and far so that all may be accorded respect as those created in the image of God. We seek to imagine creative ways to celebrate our life together with our Triune God, whose presence has never been dependent on physical buildings or human timetables.

This was an amazing experience for me, and I am honored to be part of the 224th General Assembly PCUSA Church.

MISSION TEAM REPORT BY LYNN FRANKLIN

Since the onset of the COVID-19 restrictions, our team has not yet met formally. However, many members of the team and church have been very involved in Shelter Island community initiatives during this time.

Our **SIPC Better World Book Club** did convene in July to discuss our reading of White Fragility by Robin DiAngelo. The timing turned out to be critically important, and some 30 people from Shelter Island joined in-person in a distanced gathering for a heartening rich and open discussion. Our next book choice is **EVERYDAY UBUNTU: Living Better Together, The African Way** by Mungi Ngomane with foreword by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. We will plan to meet some time in October, date pending. Please let the church office know if you wish to have your name added to our mailing list.

The **KIVA program** led by John Kerr remains active. Our 27 members have made 830 loans for a total of \$24,575 in 70 out of 76 countries involved with KIVA. So far this year we have loaned \$2,900 and still hope to reach closer to the \$5,800 we loaned in 2019. Anyone who would like help can be in touch with John Kerr: jakerr@rocketmail.com

We are hoping to be able to continue our mission work with **Maureen's Haven**. Marianne Baird has been in touch with them. So far, all volunteer efforts are still on hold, although clients are being served by the staff, and no one has contracted COVID thankfully.

FROM ELDER HEATHER REYLEK

I wish that we could all sing “Will I See You in September?”, but it seems like our church services will have to continue in our safe, careful method of social distancing during this COVID-19 time in our lives for who knows how long. I miss my church family. I miss each and every one of you. I miss my choir members, the hymns, the anthems, and the fellowship. It is a little sad, but your Church Elders want you to be safe and it is. I have attended our modified church service most of this summer. It is very different. It is very safe, but it's not the same. I also watch services on Facebook and the website. It is very different, but, of course, it's also very safe. Thank you to Dan Binder, Marianne Baird, Pastor Bob, Roswitha Wissemann, Linda Betjeman and our soloists and others for making do with the way things must be for now.

So, many of you are wondering how the Pastoral Search is coming along. We are very fortunate to have a solid Joint Search Committee that is slowly, but surely going through the possible candidates. Ellen Gove, Marianne Baird and I represent Shelter Island Presbyterian Church. The other members are from First Presbyterian Church Southold. Greg Doroski and I are Co-Chairs of the committee. We all work quite well together. There are many similarities between our churches. We meet via Zoom and use our email to get the work done. Here is a little bit of the process:

We match candidates with our congregations in the Presbyterian Church (USA) Church Leadership Connection Database. Upon further review, our joint search committee from Shelter Island Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Southold identify possible candidates and decide if we should interview them (usually by Zoom). We also watch many sermons to see if their spoken word “speaks to us spiritually.” It is an unusual call involving flexibility and skills to fit the needs of both churches. You may recall that we are seeking to fill a part-time lead pastor position at Shelter Island and a part-time associate pastor position at Southold, to make one full-time ministry position. While both of our congregations do have a historical connection, and actually worshiped together a few centuries ago, we currently operate independently. We expect this search to take a few more months, so bear with us. It is an important decision and we are very fortunate to have Pastor Bob keeping us grounded and guided during this interim period.

In closing, I would like everyone to stay in touch. Call a friend or neighbor. Read a good book. Listen to some wonderful music. Be good to yourself. Let us all stay safe, stay well, and be kind as we move forward with our much-loved church.

NEWS FROM SESSION BY ELLEN GOVE

Session has been meeting quite a bit since the pandemic began in March. We have been meeting remotely making sure the business of the church is carried out. We voted in April to video tape our worship services and upload the video to our website and Facebook page. Thank you to Dan Binder and his daughter, Alexandra Binder, for taking on this task so that members, shut-ins, and former members could join us in worship. Pastor Bob, Linda Betjeman, and Rose Wissemann would enter the sanctuary on a Saturday morning to tape the service.

Session approved to resume to hold worship in the Sanctuary July 13th. We are thankful for Dan Binder, Laura Nelsen and Marianne Baird who put together a plan for safe reopening. Worship is a bit different...at this time, singing is not recommended, however, we do have guest musicians who perform each Sunday. Hymnals are put away for now and we have a safe traffic pattern in place. Thank you to all the bakers who put together a baggie filled with goodies each week to distribute to folks. We do look forward to when we can hold fellowship after worship.

In August, Session approved to hire Kimberly Atkins to video tape and upload services each Sunday. We also approved the purchase of a Panasonic Camcorder Camera to get a better-quality recording. We are in the process of learning what this camera can do. We ask that you be patient with us during this process.

The Presbytery of LI, Committee on Ministry voted to give all Presbyterian Churches Pastors off on Labor Day Weekend (same as we did Memorial Day Weekend). The Presbytery will be taping a worship service for all churches. It will be uploaded to our Facebook page and be put on our website. **There will be no in-house worship Labor Day Weekend. Our summer hours end Labor Day Weekend. Worship will be at 10:00 AM beginning September 13th.**

For those who are not aware: Gertrude Bourne, long time member, passed away the beginning of August. Her graveside service was on August 13th. Our prayers go out to her family. Please continue to pray for Serina Kaasik who recently had surgery and Marilynn Pysker had who is also recovering from knee replacement surgery.

A NOTE ABOUT SESSION MEETINGS BY LAURA NELSEN: ZOOM! The new way to communicate online, conduct meetings, exercise classes, and visit with family and friends. During these strange and unprecedented times, ZOOM, an online virtual site has become the new normal for many of us, including the SIPC Session. Before we were all quarantined, Session met in person at Fellowship Hall once a month to discuss the business of the Church, the needs of the congregation and all manner of issues. Now, once a month, we all turn on our computers, phones, or tablets and can “meet” online and talk to each other! Each meeting has a meeting number with a password that each Session Member is given beforehand and when entered, an online page opens and suddenly we are all together! Meetings last anywhere from an hour to two and all manner of Church business is discussed and usually resolved. Thanks to technology we have had the necessary communication to keep our Church running smoothly during the pandemic. Although I am thankful for ZOOM (and just a little bit in AWE of this phenomenon) I look forward to getting back to normal and meeting in person!

MUSIC MINISTRY REPORT BY LINDA BETJEMAN

When we entered the “closing of church” phase of COVID at SIPC, no one knew what to expect. I think our experience in the last five months has taught us a lot about the importance of communal worship. It was certainly beneficial to begin recording our services first at Southold Presbyterian, then in our own beloved Sanctuary, but has improved even more with our controlled opening of the Church for Worship beginning the last week in June. An important lesson has been the importance of singing in Worship. Since we have been unable to sing as a congregation since the beginning, many people have expressed the need for this as well as having a Choir to lead music in Worship. We look forward to the day when we will all feel safe worshipping in the Sanctuary together with music once more an integral part of the Sunday celebrations!

COVID also forced us to cancel many concerts --the Juniata College Chorus, Linda Bonaccorso, Basically Baroque, and Friends of Music. We cannot plan the annual Community Chorus Christmas Concert, and do not yet know when we can resume Choir rehearsals. I want to thank all of those who have volunteered to sing or play solos for worship these last three months. Your participation has lifted our spirits! Hopefully by our next newsletter we will have good news of more music on the horizon. In the meantime, keep singing alive in your home, in your car, on your walks, wherever you are!

MISSION STATEMENT

We envision the Shelter Island Presbyterian Church as a spiritual heart of our small island community—a congregation that keeps its doors open to all and offers service and support to friends, neighbors, and visitors from beyond our shores.

We will encourage the spiritual growth of our Church's people in Jesus Christ through worship, service to others, stewardship, study, and fellowship with one another. We will work to increase our spiritual engagement with youth, young families, and our growing senior population.

Inspired by God's Word, we look forward to our future with faith and confidence in God's purpose for us.

AS WE BELIEVE, SO WE DO.

IMPORTANT!

Session has approved the Senior Center to hold **Vaccination Days** on **Tuesday, September 15 and Friday, October 2 from 8:30 AM to 4:00 PM** in our Church parking lot. This will include Flu, Shingles, Tetanus/Whooping Cough and Pneumonia vaccines. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and safety measures, the Senior Center is unable to open to run this clinic as in the past. Their parking lot is too small to safely accommodate a drive-thru vaccination day. (Another date in October will be scheduled soon.)

PLEASE NOTE: Sunday Worship Service now begins at 10:00 AM.

Services can be viewed on the Church's Facebook page and on the website at: www.sipchurch.org.

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PLACE
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