



Stephen Ministry
Pat Bartee - Leader

Grief for Cultural Loss

“Be imitators of me as I am of Christ...and maintain the traditions.”
I Corinthians 11:1,2

“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ”
Colossians 2:8

Covid has come and mostly gone. People finally realized what simple steps there were to keep healthy. But, the after-effects on society are more profound.

Because of its' longevity, Covid left footprints. Many bear the physical imprint of disease- headaches, hair loss, fatigue, and heart issues. Our financial life is now based on online transactions as are our buying habits. Our work and play lives are blended with so much work now done at home. We have even blended our days, considering each day as equal to another. We depend on ourselves for information, financial wellness, and social connection and tend to question and critique authority.

Test results show that our children lost steps in their educational concept formation of math, science, and English and, similarly, our empty Sunday School classes tell us our children are lacking important spiritual development. How did we transition to this amorphous state, casting aside traditions and getting our education from the internet?

Granted, God likes newness and invention, but what we have built from Covid times is not a temple. It is more like a house built on sand. How do we return to a life of meaning and joy?

First, we need to return to a spiritual base, however that looks for your family. It may take small steps or one huge step. Occasional online religious services cannot substitute for a planned program of spiritual formation, as in a math class. Children and adults flourish from Sunday school, Worship, and Children's church on a regular basis. Other options include Small Group, Sunday school, Circle and Youth group. If all in a family are involved, the modeling created sets a tone for *what is important to the family*.

If you are single or in poor health, devotional time and prayer time can supplement and enhance worship and return you to spiritual health.

Secondly, we need each other and we need us all, all ages together finding out what God wants us to do to have useful lives. Enjoying small groups and Circle and Sunday School and social events is where we learn from each other. We grow inside when we meet so we can be beacons to the outside world.

Covid has given us time to reflect and reflect we must! Do we like this after-life we have built or is it time to rebuild a more substantial one?

Charlie Gray, Finance/ Administration Elder

...His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master...'

Is Christmas Already Over?

Is it possible we already celebrated another birthday of our Lord and Savior? I guess after Covid nothing may ever really feel the same again or at least it feels that way for many, including me. What a strange year 2022 was. The stock market had a really rough year and sadly the bond market was right there with it. Inflation was up and the Federal Reserve keeps increasing the interest rates. Though the Midterm elections have finally concluded, Russia continues its occupation of Ukraine.

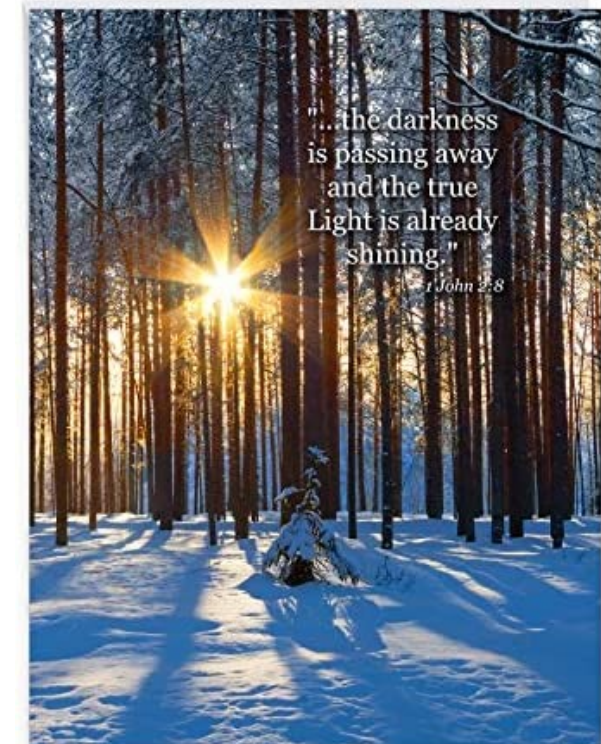
First let's consider the markets, historically the drop in stocks is nothing new. Every four- or five-years stocks typically have a sell off and if the news is bad enough it turns into a Bear market. What is news this year is the Bond market has been clobbered too. Understandable given the multiple interest rate hikes. This is short term bad news for bond holders but long term there is a silver lining: with the rising rates also comes a higher yield with new bond issues down the road. Essentially a perfect storm with little if any place to hide. Somewhat ironically with all the gnashing of teeth over increased gas prices at the pump, Commodities were the only asset class to show any positive return here in 2022. Even so, the Supply Chain is still seriously damaged and we're all searching for alternatives to long lines and long delivery dates this year.

Sadly, per usual the Mid Term Election season pitted the two parties against one another, and the country continues to be very divided. One aspect of neither party gaining control over both the House and the Senate is how the markets interpret these results. This outcome is preferred by the market as there is a feeling less damage will be done when neither side has complete control over policy and decision making.

Perhaps the delays and frustrations in the market are calling us to take note of what matters most in our lives: our family, our friends, our health, and most of all our relationship with Jesus. Each Christmas speeds us up with planning, parties, and presents then slows us down with the "good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11) What an amazing gift our creator gave us on that first Christmas several thousand years ago, a gift that brings hope far greater than market ups and downs. With his birth we all can begin each day as a new creation. Praise be to God!

THE MVPC MEMBERS' GIFT OF WISDOM

WINTER ISSUE 2023



“Let us love in truth and action”*
By Applying our Christian Principles
In Changing Times

****1 John 3:18b***

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**Finding our Role in Creation Care:
Presbyterian Hunger Program
Rev. Isaac Toney-Schmitt
Associate Pastor for Faith Formation**

“Enslaving poverty in a world of abundance is an intolerable violation of God’s good creation... A church that is indifferent to poverty, or evades responsibility in economic affairs, or is open to one social class only, or expects gratitude for its beneficence makes a mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship to God.”

The Confession of 1967, Book of Confessions, 9.46

Underneath the plans and initiatives to limit further damage to our planet lies another question: Who will respond to the damages already done?

We used the excerpt above from “The Confession of 1967” in a recent worship service focused on the Community Assistance Center and their work responding to poverty in Sandy Springs. We read this excerpt aloud, together, as a stark reminder that God’s vision for creation does not allow for some who have resources and others who do not have resources.

Sometimes conversations about the environmental impacts of climate change dance around the science of it all in a way that feels “indifferent to poverty, [and evades] responsibility in economic affairs.” Flooding in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, hurricanes in the Gulf and Caribbean, droughts in East Africa, sweltering heat in overpopulated cities, overdrawn rivers; these effects of climate change hurt those who already have the least. How should Christians respond to the people who suffer from our changing climate?

The Presbyterian Hunger Program is one way we can join in with a network of churches already working to alleviate suffering for people experiencing the harshest effects of climate change. Through partnerships in the United States and abroad, the PHP works to “approach hunger holistically, using a variety of approaches, including direct food relief combined with root cause work, sustainable development, advocacy, intentional and sustainable living, and education.” The PHP also includes an educational wing with an opportunity for congregations to covenant together as “Hunger Action Congregations” who are active in hunger alleviation, development assistance, hunger education, lifestyle integrity, corporate and public policy witness, and worship.

As Christians we are called to respond with care for creation and compassion for God’s people. Joining in on the work of the Presbyterian Hunger Program is one way to do both!

Further research: <https://www.wfpusa.org/drivers-of-hunger/climate-change/>

<https://www.wfpusa.org/articles/hunger-climate-crises-ten-photos-around-globe/>

**Winter 2023 MVPC Quarterly
PW Moderator Report
Joan Rownd
<http://www.atlpcusa.org/pw.html>**

Presbyterian Women Purpose:

*Forgiven and freed by God in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit,
we commit ourselves*

to nurture our faith through prayer and Bible study,

to support the mission of the church worldwide,

to work for justice and peace, and

*to build an inclusive, caring community of women that strengthens the
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and witnesses to the promise of God’s
kingdom.*

PW participated in the annual Mount Vernon’s Pumpkin Palooza in October complete with a cake walk sponsored by PW. Members baked cakes for the event and the money raised was for our outreach projects during the year.

MVPW Christmas Program and Luncheon with combined Circles was held on Sunday, December 11, 2022 in the Fellowship Hall after our worship service. Donna Maini played the piano along with the singing of Christmas carols and scripture.

Our February mission luncheon with combined Circles will feature Maritza Morelli from Los Niños Primero on February 12, 2023 following our worship service. Everyone is invited.

Day Circle and Sunday Circle continue our Bible Study in January and March with Horizons Bible Study: **Celebrating Sabbath – Accepting God’s Gift of Rest and Delight**, by Carol M. Bechtel, featuring scripture throughout the Old and New Testament. This is a story of how Sabbath is becoming an important part of our life in Christ and an invitation to practice Sabbath in real and practical ways.

Circle of Grace continues to meet in member’s homes and Book Circle meets monthly to discuss books that are chosen for that month.



**Vital Congregations
David Hill, Clerk of Session**

Outward Incarnational Focus – One of the Marks
of Vital Congregations

To be a Vital Congregation, MVPC must work on seven marks that illustrate our vitality as a church. One of these addresses having an “outward incarnational focus.” Incarnational means living in a Christlike manner. The Bible story in Luke 19:1-10 about a tax collector who climbs into a tree to see Jesus tells us a lot about incarnational living. Tax collectors in Jesus’ day had the reputation of cheating people and so were looked down upon by pious Jews. Zacchaeus had become wealthy by cheating those who were vulnerable. Jesus modeled for us how to approach such a person.

Jesus told Zacchaeus he was coming to his house for dinner. This was shocking to pious Jews who did not realize living in a Christlike way means meeting people where they are. Jesus did not expect sinners and those in need to come to him; he went to them. This is a powerful message for us. It is easy to reach out to people who look and live like us. It’s also easy to write a check to send to people in faraway places or even to nearby places where we aren’t comfortable going. Jesus could have sat in the temple day by day waiting for the marginalized to come to him. Instead, he met them where they were. Meeting someone where they are sends a powerful message: “I care about you so much, I will sacrifice time and comfort, and even though I don’t know much about you and your culture or lifestyle, I’m willing to share the joys of life in Christ with you.”

The most powerful learning I’ve ever experienced came during the two years I worked with homeless men at Atlanta Mission. I was frightened and unsure and very uncomfortable because I had never been around homeless people. I was the only financially comfortable person in the group. I knew I could share nothing about my life that would come close to the terrible experiences they had. Yet, there I was working hard to get “incarnational focus” right, working hard to live before these homeless men in a Christlike way. Gradually, I became more and more comfortable because I trusted God to lead me. During those two years, I grew as a Christian and had an impact on the lives of these men sometimes in small ways, sometimes in bigger ways.

We can do this as a church. MVPC has a wonderful outreach program. We give a lot of money and goods to a number of worthy causes. This is easy. Incarnational living means going a step further. Here are some ways we can grow into this kind of living: be an overnight host for Family Promise; donate time to helping at CAC; host foreign students during the holidays; tutor students in schools; volunteer to help with Los Niños Primero. The list is endless. When we do these things, we send a powerful message to those we help as well as to children and grandchildren, neighbors and friends. Let’s do this as a church! Think about the power of 100 plus people all working to be incarnational, working to add hands and feet to our Christian witness. MVPC can be a powerful force in building God’s kingdom. Let’s do it!