

Westminster Presbyterian Women Newsletter

(WPW of Dayton, Ohio) Volume 4: Issue 3 Winter Issue

Presbyterian Women's 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.
-

A Message from the WPW Moderator: Jorja Gladden



Enjoy the little things, for one day you may look back and realize they were the big things. Robert Brault

The above quote kind of says a lot about most of 2020, doesn't it?

Many of you attended the virtual Fall Gathering in September. For those not able to join us, we broke up into small groups in Zoom for about 15 minutes and were asked to share our thoughts about what we missed most about church and what would be the first thing we'd do when we returned. In our group, it seemed everyone missed being with the people and someone said, in essence, they had taken going to church services somewhat for granted. That's how I feel. There are many Sundays we'd miss for one reason or the other – sometimes laziness or tiredness, sometimes we were out of town. There's something about not being able to go because the church is CLOSED - indefinitely! Missing now and then seemed like a little thing before and now it seems like a big thing. Classic case of you don't appreciate what you have until it's gone.

So it goes for so many other things – visiting someone in the hospital or nursing home, getting together with family/friends for a birthday or holiday, taking a vacation you've had planned for a year, going to school or work, getting groceries, seeing a movie on the big screen, eating out at your favorite restaurant, etc. I'm sure you could come up with your own list of things for which you took for granted and now are wishing (praying) you could get back to "normal".

As an optimist, I have no doubt we'll come out of this stronger than ever and some things may be better for it. For instance, many of you know my husband works for a company in Pittsburgh so we had been, basically, living two lives – one here and one in Pittsburgh. That all changed on March 16 when he started working from our home in Dayton and probably will be for some time to come. In August, we let the Pittsburgh apartment go giving us extra money in the bank, less miles on the vehicles, furniture and other items back where they belong in this house. That's been a blessing for us on many levels. Fortunately, we genuinely like each other's company.

Same goes for church. It didn't take long for our services to be virtual thanks to technology and those who know how to use it or, for many, willing to learn it for the first time. Had you even heard of Zoom before all this started? How many Zoom meetings have you been part of since March? Circle meetings, Bible studies, Education classes, and, yes, even the WPW Fall Gathering - all happening via Zoom! Kudos to everyone who is able and willing to do that. Little things have become the BIG things. Even this newsletter and the WPW Directory – is now mostly online saving resources and time. What a blessing to be able to do that. How else would we have stayed connected? Seemed like a little thing when we had services, meetings, fellowship, etc., at the church building. Now it's a BIG thing we can't wait to get back to.

Hopefully, you'll have time to sit back and read this entire newsletter which will show all the big things we, as a group, continue to do despite the pandemic. Things just look a little different. I hope you remembered to order those pecans but, if not, Julie still has some available and we'd love to see them sold so what's left doesn't eat into our profit and we can continue to support our missions. Since we won't see her in fellowship hall after service, send her an email if you'd like to get pecans – or what you already bought is gone and you need more! CWU continues to do their work so make sure you see that article and maybe join in support if you can. As you can imagine, our funds are below what we had planned when the budget was put together last year so, if you are able and so moved, please consider a donation using the form that is also in this newsletter. Donations will help us support those organizations we have pledged to assist such as Kirkmont, Mercy Manor, The Castle, PDA, to name a few. Donations can be mailed to the church or made online (note that credit card donations incur a fee for the church but debit/checking accounts do not). And/or, get ready for the Virtual Cookie Walk on December 13 and donate the amount you would have spent to bake or buy the cookies, candy, etc., usually available for sale and consider it part of your diet plan! Those monies will go directly to the Food Bank as it was decided they need more help now than ever.

There's still so much going on and, even though it's different and we're not able to be together at the physical church, WPW can still “provide unique opportunities for fellowship, study, leadership, and service”, “devote time, energy and talent to the service of others”, “utilize our energy and contributions in local, national and global outreach”, “seek to enrich our own lives as we search to understand what it means to be true Disciples of Christ”, and “invite all women of the church to join us in our quest to improve the world in which we live.”
AMEN!



Mary McKinley - WPW Secretary



I joined the Westminster choir in 1987. Before that, I was the preschool administrator at the First Baptist church in Fairborn. I have been married to Richard for 46 years and we have 2 children and 5 grandchildren.

I retired from teaching first grade several years ago. There was a 10 year break from Westminster choir because I was the president of the teacher's union and was caring for elderly parents. I am back to choir and was back to teaching Title 1 reading until the pandemic forced me

to resign. I hope to be able to return to the schools as soon as a vaccine is available.

God allows us to experience the low points of life in order to teach us lessons that we could learn in no other way.—C.S. Lewis

WPW Pecan Sale

Julie Drumheller/Dominique Myers – Pecan Sales Coordinators



The WPW pecan sale this year faced a headwind with no in-person church services or coffee hour in Fellowship Hall to take orders. The congregation, however, stepped up and ordered nearly as many pounds of pecans as last year. All the pecans that were ordered have been distributed but there are still a few left to purchase. When all the pecans are sold, we will have about \$3000 to add to our local, national and world mission's budget. Thank you to all who supported this fund raising effort. Please contact Julie Drumheller at 937/657-5581 or jdrumheller@woh.rr.com to purchase any of the remaining pecans.

Faith is belief in what you cannot see or prove or touch. Faith is walking face-first and full-speed into the dark. –Elizabeth Gilbert, author

WPW School Kit Project 2020

Culmination of WPW 2020 School Kit Project

Looking for a mission project that reaches reach out to those in need near and far yet keeps you safe at home? This might be just what you are looking for. Last month Westminster Presbyterian Women (WPW) built and delivered to the Ohio Church World Services (CWS) school kit collection point 130 school kits for distribution worldwide.

Through this project, CWS gives children in disaster areas, impoverished communities, and refugee camps the basic tools for learning. School kits, each of which includes a pair of scissors, three 70-count bound notebooks, a 12” ruler, a hand-held pencil sharpener, a large eraser, six new, unsharpened pencils, and a box of 24 crayons, stored in a 12”X14” canvas bag, are the most requested item they provide.



13 boxes, each containing 10 kits



**Stored in Jackson Area Ministries
awaiting shipment to CWS**



The materials for each kit generally cost \$15, plus CWS asks that we include a \$2 processing fee per kit. This fee helps offset the cost of renting space on trucks, boats, and planes, paying for gas, insurance for each shipment and other delivery fees. However, because we bought school supplies during back-to-school sales, we built and covered the processing fee for \$10 per kit (a savings of \$7 per kit).

If you would like to sponsor one or more of these school kits, we would truly appreciate it. To do so is easy, you have merely to donate on line through WPC’s website (select “WPW” or “other” and annotate in the dialogue box “school kits”) or send a check to WPC, marked “school Kits”. Whether or not you have or are now able to sponsor a kit or kits, please pray that each one might bless the recipient thereof. As evidenced by past school kit distributions, each kit WPW lovingly provided to CWS for distribution worldwide will be much appreciated as it will enable the child who receives it to return to their studies.

Thank you so much for your support of WPW’s 2020 School Kit Mission Project!
School Kit Mission Project Leader

Dominique Myers,



Please join the Women of Westminster for the Fall Bible Study!

It is not too late to join!!

The Bible Study for 2020-2021 is certainly timely: ***“Into the Light: Finding Hope Through Prayers of Lamentation”***. Who could have known when this study series was produced a few years ago, that we would be experiencing a global pandemic! God does work in mysterious ways. “When we lament, we move from suffering to faith. In our faith there is hope. We lament in order to hope.” (p.7, *Into the Light*) If you do not belong to a circle, and are interested in participating in this year’s Bible study, please contact one of the Circle Leaders listed on page 9.

Wednesday Evening Circle

WPW Evening Circle is continuing to meet at our regular meeting time: the first Wednesday evening of each month at 7:00 PM via zoom. Our program material is the **Horizons Bible Study**, "Into the Light, Finding Hope Through Prayers of Lamentation." Our study coordinator, Terry Biers, does a wonderful job of focusing our thoughts, in advance of the meetings, with inspiring commentary on the lesson of the month that she sends to us via e-mail.

Traditionally, we collect household items and gift cards for Mercy Manor at our December meeting. Due to COVID-19, this year we are collecting a special offering for Mercy Manor to help them celebrate the blessings of Christmas. Donations can be made by check (make them out to Westminster Presbyterian Women and note Mercy Manor on the memo line) or electronically. Checks can be mailed directly to our WPW treasurer.

We welcome all who are looking for a circle to join us. Contact Jane Shirley at 937-236-1006 or justjane701@hotmail.com.

LOCAL MISSIONS 2020

The circles are a busy crew; each circle is involved in missions besides the ones you see at our events. This work continues even during COVID!

Coffee, Caring and Crafts

DECA and Eastmont- are knitting hats and scarfs

Little Dresses for Africa- sewed dresses

Brigid's Path- Diana Grimes sewed burp clothes and diaper changing pads

Evening Circle

Mercy Manor- supports

Jane Shirley has an article in this newsletter you must read on their activities this year.

Serendipity Circle

The Foodbank, Inc.- In 2020 as of November have given \$3210.00 plus anonymous gifts.

Friends of the Castle- will be donating.

Sunshine Circle

YWCA Shelter – supports

If any of these missions are important to you, feel free to donate or join a Circle.

Please send a check made out to WPW to:

*Martha L. Bell
436 Brookside Drive
Dayton, OH 45406*

*Donations may also be made online via the church website under WPW
(make note in box on right to which fund you are donating)*



**PRESBYTERIAN
WOMEN**

News From Kirkmont...

Kirkmont Center Had A Really Great Summer

In this last summer, despite COVID 19, **212** Kirkmont campers were able to try new things, make new friends, grow in confidence, faith, and their love of nature.

When Kirkmont's facilities were closed in the spring, Kirkmont's staff kept up daily with changes from the CDC, American Camp Association, and local county health department. The entire staff followed regulations and guidelines rigorously. Some camps did have to be cancelled but Kirkmont kept remaining camps small in population, encouraged social distancing for all camps, and tested campers and staff for symptoms consistently and regularly. None of our campers, counselors, staff, summer staff or weekly directors exhibited symptoms or tested positive for COVID 19. Many pools were closed this summer but not Kirkmont's; it was safely filled with happy campers.

What was new in 2020

- Old canoes placed around camp served as hand-sanitizing stations.
- Ax throwing – the campers loved it!
- Rent-a-Cabent packages for a family to find a safe place in the woods for a range of activities and to escape a quarantined home. 27 families enjoyed the meals and activities.
- Day Camp provided safety and fun while parents were at work. Some day campers decided to stay for overnight camps.
- Homegrown Yoga Outdoor Classes.
- Renovations to Dunaway Lodge.

What are Kirkmont's plans? All the lodges are open. Call (937) 593-2141 to make reservations. Lodges can be used for family and business groups as well as church groups. Kirkmont is planning for spring and summer 2021 right now!

Kirkmont Center did survive financially. Many people responded with recurring contributions and one-time gifts. Thank you for considering a contribution to provide the Kirkmont experience to a larger number of campers and guests next year.

Meet Your WPW Coordinating Team (CT)

Executive Committee:

Immediate Past Moderator	Pat Torvik
Moderator	Jorja Gladden
Vice Moderator	Jennifer DeVries
Secretary	Mary McKinley
Treasurer	Martha Bell
Coordinator of Global Mission	Candace Powers
Coordinator of Local Mission	Candace Powers
Coordinator of Studies/Spiritual Development	Sandy Vining
Coordinator of Publicity	Pam Helsingier
Coordinator of Justice and Peace	Elizabeth Herr
Search Committee	Katie Brennaman / Barbara Wilson Ann Barr /Donna Shell

Circle Leaders:

Coffee, Caring, and Crafts Circle	Sheila Hookey / Julie Arnold
Evening Circle	Jane Shirley
Serendipity Circle	Martha Shields / Barbara Wilson
Sunshine Circle	Julie Drumheller

Other Coordinators and/or Mission and Special Projects Coordinators:

Historian	Jane Rininger
Church Women United Key Woman	Martha Shields / Jorja Gladden
Cookie Walk Chair	Dixie Bowsher/Ddominique Myers
Come to the Table (new name/task)	Ruth Neely / Sandy Vining
Memorial Reception Team & Special Projects	Julie Preisser / Julie Drumheller
Pecan Sales Special Projects	Julie Drumheller/Dominique Myers
Finance Committee Chair	Martha Bell
Staff Representative	The Reverend Nancy Hodgkins

WPW CT Meetings
For 2020-2021:

August 25
October 27
November 24
February 23, 2021
March 23, 2021
April 27, 2021

NOTE: All
WPW CT meetings
are held in
West Parlor
at 5:30 pm Or via
ZOOM

Church Women United is a national ecumenical Christian women's movement representing Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox and other Christian faith communities. Founded in 1941, as the United Council of Church Women, this organization has local and state units across the United States.

The Dayton unit of CWU has approximately 400 members who are members of about 35 churches in the greater Dayton area. Each church has a Key Woman as the representative. There are five at-large gatherings: World Community Day (November), Christmas Tea (December), Emma Murray Prayer Breakfast (March), May Friendship Day (May), and Human Rights Celebration (June). All are free except for the Prayer Breakfast (\$10). The Key Women meet six additional times per year at the CWU Board meetings; each meeting also features one local mission opportunity. Although called "Board meetings," these six gatherings are open to ALL who would like to attend. Mercy Manor (<https://mercymanor.wixsite.com/mercymanor>) was started by CWU and continues to support it. Many other mission projects are supported by this organization. Basic or support membership fees are just \$5 or \$20 — with no obligation to attend meetings.

CWU appreciates the support of WPW members! (See the membership form on the next page.) For more information, visit the local website (above) or contact Key Women Martha Shields or Jorja Gladden.

You will find it is necessary to let things go, simply for the reason that they are too heavy. —Corrie ten Boom

Do WPW mission work while shopping at the grocery store!

See how easy it is to contribute to WPW missions — with no additional time or money! If you're like many of us, we are cooking at home more and more.

Just buy your groceries as usual at Dorothy Lane Market or at Kroger's; WPW will get a check at the end of the year! Your grocery bill remains the same. WPW missions benefits from each grocery's commitment to community!

Ask at your store, or go online and register:



- Dorothy Lane Market: Enter you name, email, and Club DLM number.

<https://www.dorothylane.com/club-dlm/good-neighbor-program/>

Scroll down to click on “Westminster Presbyterian Women.”

- Kroger's: <https://www.kroger.com/account/enrollCommunityRewardsNow/> Just sign in (or create a new account) and click on Westminster Presbyterian Women (Dayton) WC213” and click Enroll. Shop as normal, swiping your Kroger Rewards card.



Every penny helps!

*Contribute to
mission work*

while you shop – at no cost of time or money to you!

WPW Yearbook

The coveted 2020-2021 Yearbook has been sent via email. If you did not receive a copy, please contact Jorja at jagladden59@gmail.com or 937-477-5662. A very limited number of books were printed for those who need a physical copy. If you need a printed version, please contact Jorja.



Church Women United in Greater Dayton: UPDATE

Church Women United is a racially, culturally, theologically inclusive Christian women's movement, celebrating unity in diversity, and working for a world of peace and justice. The Greater Dayton unit (<https://www.cwudaytonoh.org>) is part of the national organization.

Here's hoping that you are one of the twenty-one Westminster staff or members who have joined Church Women United of Greater Dayton in 2020 - 2021.

Some of the missions that we supported last year include: Mercy Manor, The Foodbank, Inc., Dayton International Peace Museum, Good Neighbor House, Homefull, DayBreak, Greater Dayton Christian Connection, and more! We are the "pass-through" for Fellowship of the Least Coin, UNICEF, and other collections. We also support and encourage Church World Service projects. (In October, CWU drove 223 kits to a depot in Indianapolis and another 130 school kits to a depot in Jackson, Ohio. The group of 130 kits came from WPW, thanks to WPW collections and a major time and financial contribution from WPW's own Dominique Myers!) For more details about what these kits entail, please see the Summer 2020 WPW Newsletter as well as the update article in this newsletter.



Meetings:

Zoom has been the meeting place for the board meetings in August, September, and October. (Board meetings – which are open to ALL members – typically have a presenter from one of the charities that we support.) There was one in-real-life celebration planned for 2020 - 2021 on November 14 at Sulphur Grove UMC in Huber Heights (with social distancing in place); this celebration was planned to honor two Valiant Women who served CWU. It also was to have honored the recipient of this year's Human Rights Award. Unfortunately, with the increase in COVID-19 cases, the event had to be canceled; please watch for rescheduling updates.

The December celebration of pastoral staff members will be on Zoom on December 9 at 1:00 p.m. There will be three other C.W. U. celebrations (in March, May, and June) whose details will be determined by the pandemic situation. The three board meetings are scheduled for February, April, and May. (Details will be released soon regarding locations on Zoom or In-Real-Life.)

Website:

Details about CWU may be found on the website: www.cwudaytonoh.org. (Please stop by the Photo Gallery!)

Newsletters:

Newsletters are mailed four times a year; in 2020-2021, the plan includes mailings in July, November, February, and April. The newsletters are also posted in full color on the website.

<https://www.cwudaytonoh.org/newsletters.html>

National Mission:

Church Women United is a racially, culturally, theologically inclusive Christian women's movement, celebrating unity in diversity and working for a world of peace and justice.

<https://www.churchwomenunited.net/mission>



Continued on next page...

How To Join:

Membership levels are BASIC (\$5.00), SUPPORTING (\$20.00), or OTHER (more than \$5.00).

(There is no obligation to attend the meetings, but you are certainly most welcome!)

Checks should be made out to “Church Women United in Greater Dayton.”

Contact Jorja Gladden (jagladden59@gmail.com) or Martha Shields (martha.shields@earthlink.net).

Consider adding one or more of these to your Winter 2020 To-Do List!

- Did you miss an issue of the WPW newsletter? Catch up on back issues at:
<http://westminsterdayton.org/adults/presbyterian-women.html>
- Include some scripture and inspirational books on your reading list!
- Explore the list of circles to see if one might be a fit for 2020—2021.
(Call Jorja Gladden at 937-477-5662 for help with this.)
- Offer your name as someone who’d like to serve on the WPW board or committee!
- Add one of the mission projects to your personal calendar and/or your financial contributions. (Contact Jorja Gladden for info.)
- Lead a Bible Study, start a new circle or group etc.
- Make sure these WPW dates are on your personal calendar:
 - Spring Gathering – April 17, 2021 @ 10:00 a.m. Possible Zoom Meeting
 - Order **EXTRA Pecans**
 - Join **CWU** (Send Membership Form to Martha Shields) and attend the CWU Events.



WPW Search Committee

The Search Committee members for this year are Ann Barr, Katie Brennaman, Donna Shell, and Barbara Wilson.

This is the slate of nominations for WPW Officers at this time.

Vice moderator, Dominique Myers; Search Committee, Jean Bindeman and Jane Rininger;

Treasurer, Martha Bell; Coordinator Studies and Spiritual Development, Sandy Vining.

We are continuing to search for someone for the position of Coordinator of Global Missions.

If anyone is interested in serving in this position or you know of someone who has an interest in world mission please contact a member of the search committee.

Cookie Walk – 2020 Version

For quite a number of years, WPW has held an annual Cookie Walk - usually the second Sunday of Advent. The funds raised from this event are then donated to several organizations of our choice.

In this year of Covid 19, we won't be able to hold the Cookie Walk. We may not even be able to hold a church service by that time - so what can we do to help those organizations who rely on our support? The leadership of Westminster Presbyterian Women suggests that each one of you, as members of Westminster, think about what you would have spent buying ingredients to make goodies to sell or what you might have spent buying the cookies and other items and make that a donation to WPW's **VIRTUAL Cookie Walk**.

The mission recipient for the funds raised by the VIRTUAL Cookie Walk this year will be **The Foodbank**. For over 40 years, **The Foodbank** has served as the primary source of food for the hunger relief network in the Miami Valley, serving Montgomery, Greene, and Preble counties. The Foodbank works closely with Feeding America, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, and the 12 food banks across Ohio to help solve hunger in our community.

The current COVID-19 pandemic has drastically increased the need for hunger relief. The majority of Feeding America network food banks report seeing a record increase in the number of people needing help, with an average increase of 60% across the country. Between March and June, roughly 4 in 10 people visiting food banks had not received food assistance before the pandemic.

While it is affirming to make donations of canned goods, **The Foodbank** has extraordinary purchasing power and can get more “bang for the buck” from monetary contributions. For example, just \$10 can be used to provide 40 meals. The Foodbank also provides the infrastructure for more than 100 member food pantries, community kitchens, and shelters that serve as the charitable hunger relief network in Montgomery, Greene, and Preble Counties. To learn more, please visit their website at <https://thefoodbankdayton.org/>

We hope you support our VIRTUAL Cookie Walk generously this year!

We hope that you will prayerfully consider what you might be able to donate and mail your check to Westminster (or donate via the online giving page!) - with the notation "WPW Cookie Walk". God Bless You! You have been wonderful in the past and we hope that you will continue your support of this wonderful project.

We hope you support our VIRTUAL Cookie Walk generously this year!



Westminster Presbyterian Women Mission Projects

We are in different times and we are not meeting face to face. As a result, this is impacting the mission collections that are coming into our funds.

Please consider making a donation for any or all of the funds:

Amount

Dedicated Giving (given annually) _____

Goes directly to mission projects locally, nationally, and globally.
Ninety-seven percent of WPW income is used for mission. Mission is our mission.

Birthday Offering (collected at Spring Gathering) _____

Since 1922 Presbyterian Women have contributed more than \$36 million to help improve lives at home and around the world.

Thank Offering (collected at Fall Gathering) _____

Since 1988 Presbyterian Women have granted more than \$26 million to nearly 1700 different projects worldwide.

Number of School Kits @ \$10 per kit _____

We are in the process of building 130 school kits to be delivered to Church World Service (CWS). Through this project, CWS gives children in disaster areas, impoverished communities, and refugee camps the basic tools for learning. Because we purchased the supplies during the back-to-school sales, we can build and cover the processing fee for \$10 per kit. Fall collection.

Least coin (least coins from all over the world) _____

TOTAL _____

Name: _____

Please send a check made out to WPW to Martha L. Bell; 436 Brookside Drive, Dayton, OH 45406

LOCAL MISSION WE HELP SUPPORT HIGHLIGHT

SAMARITAN HEALTH CENTER (Samaritan Homeless Clinic)



Five Rivers Health Centers began on May 23, 2011 as a medical home for the low-income patients of Dayton, Ohio, by providing both primary and specialty care services to patients through the academic rotations for the Wright State University Boonshoft School of Medicine (WSUBSOM) residency and fellowship programs.

Combined Five Rivers Health Centers, currently serves more than 25,000 patients with more than 87,000 visits in the Greater Dayton community. They also offer interpreting services to Limited English Proficiency (LEP) patients.

Five Rivers Health Centers was approved on April 10, 2012 to be a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) Look-Alike and a FQHC on November 1, 2013.

In 2013, they expanded their group even more by adding a Pediatric practice in January and the Five Rivers Dental Center and Pharmacy in September. In August 2015, FRHC experienced additional expansion by adding the Samaritan Homeless Clinic to their mission. Collectively, these sites provide medical, dental, and behavioral health care at eight convenient Dayton locations. In 2017, the Five Rivers Greene County Health Center was added and in 2018, Star Pediatrics was added. Both of these locations are in Xenia, Ohio.

For more information, please check out their website:

<https://www.fiverivershealthcenters.org/locations/samaritan-health-center>

“People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”



FALL GATHERING DURING A PANDEMIC

It wasn't the same yet it was perfect given the year. About 30 of us filled a few computer/tablet/phone screens on Wednesday, September 23 via Zoom and shared in fellowship virtually. No grocery shopping, slicing, cutting, chopping, cooking, baking, mixing, decorating, setting up, or cleaning was needed. We all joined in prayer, fellowship, information and learning – still together in faith even if not in person. Those in attendance seemed genuinely happy to see each other. It warmed my heart to see so many join. I know some who would normally have attended the in-person event may not have been able to be there for a number of reasons, but I'm sure there were some who joined that may not have come to an in-person event.

Dominique Myers gave a wonderful presentation showing what all goes into the school kits. Candy Powers, Coordinator of Global and Local Missions, shared information about Thank Offering and a few organizations that had been selected as recipients this year. We then had some "table talk" thanks to Nancy and her technological wizardry with breakout rooms of about 5 people each. We were asked to share our name, what we missed most, what we'll never again take for granted, and the first thing we will do when we are able to get back together. It was great to chat with a small group, maybe meet someone new, and share our feelings/thoughts about what the church means to each of us – just like when we sat at round tables in Fellowship Hall in years past.

Then, just like years past, Richard gave us a very enlightening overview of the Horizon Bible Study, "Into the Light: Finding Hope Through Prayers of Lament". He has great way of bringing the study to life and setting the tone. He shared so much more information, than is in the study itself, to help with explanation of what to expect. It was especially helpful as I think many of us struggled with the difference between lamenting and complaining. The meeting closed with a wrap up and prayer. It was a wonderful evening. Make sure you put the Spring Gathering on your calendar. It is planned for Saturday, April 17 at 10:00 be it Zoom or in-person.

Gift Giving Guide for the Perplexed

Gift giving: What do we love about it? What feels wrong about it? What do we mean to express in our gift giving? How can we move toward gifts that truly convey (that is to say, carry) our love to the people and things that we value? These are questions that are probably better considered in April or October, but we could begin to ask them now.

Say “I need to get ready for Christmas” out loud in a group of your peers and you may well hear a number of groans. Why is that? What takes the fun out of Christmas? It may well be the way in which our expectations and/or obligations have grown so far beyond our resources. Many of us feel pressure to spend more money, more time, more creativity, and/or more sensitivity than we possess, or else (we believe) we risk harming the Christmas experience of the people we love. Women in particular often find that we are primarily, or even solely, responsible for fulfilling our families’ expectations for a “magical” Christmas.

But let’s stop a minute and consider which Christmas magic our family and friends actually long to experience. If we read the signs being sold in every seasonal decor display in America, we will notice that the key words are Joy, Wonder, Magic, Snow, Family, and Cocoa. We don’t see signs that say “Celebrate Consumerism!” or “Busted Budgets!” From a quick survey of Christmas card themes, we would conclude that singing carols, building snowmen, decorating the tree, and baking cookies are how our neighbors spend most of their time in December. But that’s not my experience. Imagine we took seriously someone’s hilariously honest Christmas letter:

Dear Far-flung Friends and Family:

Well, sure hope you get this by the 24th. We had to pay to have it printed three times because I kept misspelling my mother-in-laws third husband’s name wrong. Anyway, we woke up the day after Thanksgiving and dove into the misery that is Advent. The tree had been infested with mice, so we had to get a new one. The kids insisted that if Santa is real, he knows they absolutely only want a new laptop each. Half of our Christmas baking recipients have become gluten-free vegans, but we know they feel very left out when they are not accommodated. Everything we gave last year, and everything we received, has either broken, run out of batteries, been pitched, or been dropped off at the Goodwill. We are considering just having Amazon deliver everything directly to the landfill this year. It would save some money on non-

recyclable wrapping paper.

Well, that's about it. May the joyful celebration of Christ's birth sustain you into the new year. If it does, maybe you could call and tell us about it. We'll be staying up a little late to fight about our Visa bill and will appreciate a distraction.

Love,

Us

This is a description of an emergency, and all too familiar. What is the prescription? How do we make it better?

First, identify what the goal is: to understand that Christmas is the eruption into human life of a family relationship with God.

Second, identify the role of gift giving in understanding that relationship: we share open-handedly, open-heartedly, of what is precious to us with God's people.

Third, identify what we already do that helps, and what we already do that hinders. (This is personal, and longer, and can be assisted by taking a clean sheet of paper and on one side putting what seems easy and warm at Christmas time, and what seems exhausting and cold on the other.)

Fourth, have the courage to talk about this with the people closest to you. They may (really, almost certainly will) welcome the chance to speak freely about the subject. Ask, "Separate from the ways that Covid-19 is causing us to alter Christmas, how are you feeling about Christmas preparations? Do you think our celebrations or gift-giving traditions need to be tweaked?"

Fifth, see the true needs of those nearest you. Connection is the rarest commodity in many of our lives. Time patiently spent reading to children, helping neighbors with yard tasks, and walking with relatives through hard questions of life is a gift that will be treasured and which will bring giver and recipient alike more near to God.

Sixth, dream about one or two swaps that allow you to make donations to improve the world, while demonstrating that you really see the people you love. This year, instead of giving all your book club friends a ten or twenty dollar candle,

you could donate that money to a literacy program for Afghan girls. That gift might honor your friendships and your love of reading more. Or perhaps instead of ordering a meat and cheese and sweets box for your foodie niece and nephew in Brooklyn (who may well be gluten-free vegans by now), you could make a donation to The Food Bank or to the Gem City Market in honor of them and their love of food. For a young midwife's graduation gift, a donation to a program that supports Black and Indigenous midwives is pretty awesome. I have a friend who always sends me a note about the donation she has made in my honor, in which she tells how she sees the same values in me that she is supporting with her money. It is a huge compliment to me each time, and the gift that always fits in my house.

Wondering about other ways we might put peace and social justice in our gifts?

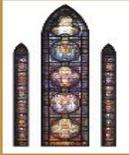
- ❑ Ask yourself “is there a local business that provides what I’m looking for?”
- ❑ Align the donation with the person: send money to an arts organization to honor your dancing cousin. Give to the International Rescue Committee to honor your refugee friend.
- ❑ Consider the materials used and the distance traveled by the goods you give. Buying second-hand and buying American helps with that, as does limiting the amount of plastic we give.
- ❑ Supporting fair trade coffee, tea, and chocolate helps protect child workers.
- ❑ Sustainable and organic practices in the harvest or farming of wood, wool, cotton, linen, and food gifts protect workers, the environment, and water supplies. Look for those products.
- ❑ Give to a microlending organization like kiva.org, and share the information so that family can follow how the money is being used, repaid, and reinvested. This is surprisingly fun and interesting.
- ❑ Resist the urge to overdo. Set limits on yourself if necessary, and heed requests from the parents of children not to give lots of gifts. The parents want their children to be happy to see you, not to ask “what did you bring me?” Help them with that, and with the overabundance of stuff on all the living room floors of America.
- ❑ Finally, ask yourself “how likely is this gift to become excess stuff, excess belly fat, or excess trash?” Avoiding the temptation to ‘just get something’ is so difficult, but for a gift to reflect the peace and joy of Christmas to your friends and family the gift should not cause suffering. We early 21st century Americans are not so good at limiting ourselves, but we will be heroes to the coming generations if we learn to do it, and to do it with love.

But what if EVERYTHING feels like a struggle?

It is hard for contemporary American women to accept, but the fact is, Jesus didn't suggest you run yourself ragged at Christmas. The most direct thing Jesus ever said about hospitality was that paying attention to his teaching was far more important than fussing over a party in his honor. The Prince of Peace intends for you to wrap yourself in awe and hope; to know yourself as unworthy as the shepherds were, and to respond to his arrival in our midst, from your heart, with curiosity and praise. So if you are exhausted, or struggling to see the value in approximating a Christmas like last year's, or daunted by the expense or energy that gift giving demands, here is a cup of spiritual cocoa for you: You can let Christmas come without believing you must labor it into being. You (and your loved ones) can look at other people's lights, eat cookies someone else baked, and accept presents as true presents, not tokens exchanged in a mandatory system of trading. If you set it as a challenge, to learn the art of receiving gifts, you will be honoring the Peace of Christ in one of the ways we sometimes forget to learn.

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