



Congregational Life by Iris Hymel

Our Thanksgiving Potluck was a great success. Many thanks to everyone.

The Coffee Fellowship Sign Up is posted. Dates are open until the end of the year.

December 17—mark your calendars. Ugly Christmas Sweater Day and a bake sale.

Please consider bringing your favorite baked goods. Anything goes: cookies, cakes, brownies, breads, pies, anything you like. If you like it, so will everyone else. Please bring it for display and I have boxes for each person who wants to buy goodies. There will be a payment jar and you can put any amount you feel your choices are worth. You may also add to the jar if you don't purchase any goods.

In January, our Beloved Pastor Brian will be preaching his last sermon to the New Hope Congregation. On that day, we will have a fellowship party to honor him after the service. More details will follow after Christmas. We are heartbroken to lose him, but everyone wishes him and his family all the best in this new chapter of his service to God's people.

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PASTOR'S CORNER

What a year it has been, but it is not over yet. December is upon us, and that means Advent and Christmas are here. I know people are putting up the Christmas trees, hanging the lights, finding the stockings, and for the families with small children, or large children in my case, breaking out the Elves on the Shelves. Presents are being purchased, and meals are being planned.

Christmas, arguably, is the most community centric holiday of the years. I am well aware that people gather for Easter, Thanksgiving, the Super Bowl, and other times, but Christmas surpasses them all. There are multiple parties. Friends and families gather at different times, and in some cases for extended periods. Churches decorate together while finding a variety of projects to work on for the good of the community. Cities and towns celebrate together, and let us not forget the lighting of the national tree in Washington. Christmas, while being about the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is built upon communities at all levels.

We are all part of multiple communities. We exist within a family, for the most part. Then we belong to smaller communities. Some of us dwell in retirement communities, play with our friend circles, worship in a faith community, and we all live in cities, states, and a nation. No one lives and exists in a vacuum.

So here is another reality. While we all need communities, those same communities or circles need us. As a pastor I have observed that some people simply come on Sunday to worship, but do not participate anywhere else. I am well aware that there are limitations to what a person can do, but there are quite a few who have abilities and skills that go underutilized. Think of a hospital where the doctor does not help. Reflect on the military unit where the soldier, sailor, or other person does not contribute. When we do not participate in the community, in the world, the world suffers.

Each of us has a purpose in life. That purpose is a lot more than breathing and eating. It might be something as simple as preparing communion. It might be more challenging like serving on session. For the teacher, it is to teach. For the leader, it is to lead.

A congregation simply cannot exist, or grow, without all parts of the body fully engaging and functioning. Think of the marathon runner with one leg, or the baseball player with one arm. Certainly there are exceptions in life, but for the most part, we all need each other.

Friends, Christmas is about community, specifically God's community. This is not just a time to celebrate the Word becoming flesh, but also to renew our commitments to one another to be active in each other's lives in order that we may be made stronger in faith, in health, in Spirit, and more. It is a time to look at each other and say, "I love you," without the common, "but," following it. It is time for us all to give the most valuable gift we can give, our time and energy.

Friends, family in faith, I know that each of us is facing challenges. I know we all have questions and doubts. I also know that together, and with Christ, we can overcome and conquer anything the world can throw at us, and then have enough left to celebrate that Silent Night.

May your Advent/Christmas season be filled with joy, love, peace, hope, and most of all, Christ. Amen.

Building Congregational Vitality by Debra Caldwell



The news is not good. We're losing our pastor and New Hope is facing a deficit of tens of thousands of dollars next year!

As our congregation has aged it has steadily declined for years. Remaining members have tried to give more to keep the church going but are reaching their limit.

With the decline in numbers and finances, we have also had a decline in elders and volunteers. Those who continue to serve are overworked and overwhelmed.

Most of our budget is used to 'keep the lights on' and pay salaries with little used for mission. Many of our members drive from other places to come to the church while the community around us drives by without a glance. We don't know our neighbors and they don't know about us.

A church should be a place that invites the community in, connects with, and loves the people around them.

Two years ago, several members of the congregation met in a series of classes with Brian to talk about change. A core group, that become the Congregational Vitality Committee, continued to meet, study, pray, and discuss the way forward. We have worked to revitalize New Hope, increase membership and income, and find new sources of revenue. We have been successful in increasing visibility both on site and virtually. We have become a Matthew 25 Church and affiliated with More Light Presbyterians and Covenant Network to reach out to our community. We are planning to apply to become an Earth Care congregation to affirm our commitment to being good stewards of the Earth. We applied for and received grant funding to start a Wednesday Evening project which would include a Supper Fellowship, inclusivity studies, contemporary worship service, and game/movie night.

Is New Hope at the end of its life cycle? Session will meet with a representative from Presbytery to discuss options as we move forward. What do you want to do? Die gracefully? Or do you want to be part of a process of change and revitalization? The committee looks forward to hearing from you. Our next meeting is scheduled for 4 PM, Wednesday, December 13.

Words of Worship

By LAVITA GOLIGHTLY

WORSHIP ELDER



Breaking News Alert: Tomorrow is December 1st! That means there are 24 more shopping days until Christmas! AND, 24 more days until we celebrate the birth of our Savior! I hope your shopping is almost, if not already completed. I'm getting there! As Steven Colbert would say, "Meanwhile"

This Sunday, December 3rd is the first Sunday of Advent and communion Sunday. The sanctuary will be decorated for Christmas. We hope to see all of you there to celebrate the lighting of the first Advent candle and the singing of Christmas hymns. This is the Sunday of HOPE, . . . Our hope in Christ and our hope for a better world and future for all of us.

I would like to point out that if you will look to the table on the sanctuary floor nearest the pulpit, you will see an empty crèche. Empty, as it awaits the animals (stuffed) that should fill it. While shopping for your family, please remember that there are hurting children in Katy and in the greater Houston area that would be comforted by an animal that you can donate for that cause. Let's all look forward to a filled crèche and an opportunity to spread Christmas joy.

Last thoughts: as the days until Christmas approach, remember to take time each day to breathe and reflect. There are Advent reflection guides in the back of the sanctuary on the table. Please take one and give yourself the gift of time each day to prepare your heart and mind for the coming of the day of celebration for the birth of the most Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace, Emmanuel, God With Us.





Presbyterian Women
By Iris Hymel, Moderator

Your Presbyterian Women continue to meet on the first Wednesday of the month to study the *Sacred Encounters* Horizon Bible Study Series. We participated in the Seafarer's Box Mission Project by packing and wrapping the gift boxes.

We would love to have you meet with us. We meet in person in the Parlor and by Zoom if you are unable to join us in person. Please let me know and I will send you an invitation. All you have to do is click the invitation link I send. If I can do it, believe me, so can you.

Merry Christmas to all.



MISSION AND OUTREACH

Thank you to everyone who donated items for the Ministry to the Port of Houston HISC Christmas Shoebox Program. PW ladies wrapped the boxes and wrote Christmas notes.



The New Hope Garden Club elected officers and planned a busy schedule of presentations and tours for Spring. In January, we will have a workshop on Starting Seeds and a presentation on Spring Vegetable Gardening.

Our Christmas Joy Offering aids current and retired church workers and their families in times of need and develops future leaders at Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color.





YOUR SESSION AT WORK

Linda Owens, Clerk to Session

Session met on November 15, 2023 and

we celebrated:

- plans to assemble and wrap Seafarer's boxes.
- the MUD district moving forward with plans to relocate our water meter on our property and construct a water plant.
- the MUD district's looking into rebates of our high water bills due to a leak and possible help with the resulting plumbing repairs.
- New Hope becoming a Matthew 25 church.
- New Hope becoming a More Light Church.
- New Hope becoming a Covenant Network Church
- receiving two grants for a total of \$3,000
- clothing being delivered to Clothed by Faith and food to Katy Christian Ministries.

And we worked on plans to:

- paint the front door.
- relocate the original New Hope sign to the street.
- hold an ugly sweater contest on December 17, 2023.
- host a Giving Hearts event in February of 2024.
- look into free ads on Google.
- become an Earth Care church when applications open up in January of 2024.



The session welcomes your prayers of support as we work to raise funds and build awareness of our church.

GREETINGS FROM THE C.D.C



“Christmas felt so christmassy this year. I know that isn’t a word but I couldn’t think a better way to describe the feeling of excitement and pure joy from the children and staff at our little school. The lights seemed brighter. The decorations seemed more festive. Each teacher decorated their door and added lots of cheerful holiday touches in their classrooms.

The weeks in December were packed full of activities. The children came dressed in pajamas for Polar Express

Day. Cocoa and popcorn were on the menu. Pastor Brian hosted his final Chapel with a message of love and peace and rousing sendoff of “God is good.... all the time”!

The children outdid themselves at our annual Christmas program raising their voices in celebration and excitement for the arrival of their most favorite person – Santa! Hurry up Santa!

January will see the return of our children and staff from Christmas break. We will celebrate the color blue, invite our dads for donuts, wear our cozy pajamas and bring our favorite teddy bear or stuffed friend for PJ & Teddy Bear Day. Registration the forthcoming school year will open. Tell your friends and neighbors about the best little school in Katy!

Cheers ☐

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