



What's Happening at Bluffton Presbyterian Church

January 2021

Growing in Faith • Sharing God's Love

WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Sunday, January 3 – Epiphany, Communion

3 Cents a Meal Offering

Liturgist: Chris Hochstetler

Hymn Singers: Sue Van Eman & Don Brauen

Sound: Jay McCracken / Camera: Ryan Brauen

Slides: Julia Szabo

Acolytes: Brauens

**Sunday, January 10 – Baptism of the Lord,
Ordination/Installation of Officers**

Little Free Pantry Offering

Liturgist: Jayne McGarrity

Hymn Singers: Pastor Karol & Lori Schmidt

Sound: Bob Hursh / Camera: Tammie Hursh

Slides: Diane Winebar

Acolytes: McVettas

Sunday, January 17 – BAMA Christian Unity Service

Liturgist: Phill Talavinia

Hymn Singers: Judy Evans & Julia Szabo

Sound: Mike Rhonemus / Camera: Tenna Rhonemus

Slides: Talavinias

Acolytes: McVettas

Sunday, January 24

Liturgist: Sarah Brauen

Hymn Singers: Linda & Dave Sycks

Sound: Jeff Gillen / Camera: Julia Szabo

Slides: Cathy Carroll

Acolytes: Avery Talavinia and Bowen Hochstetler

Sunday, January 31

Liturgist: Chris Hochstetler

Hymn Singers: Tanya Best & Tenna Rhonemus

Sound: Mike Rhonemus / Camera: Julia Szabo

Slides: Diane Winebar

Acolyte: Avery Talavinia

Sunday, February 6 – Communion

3 Cents a Meal Offering

Mark Your Calendars!

- Jan 3 – Worship Service 10:15*
- Jan 3 – Star Words after worship on Zoom
- Jan 6 – Mission Committee 7:30 PM on Zoom
- Jan 10 – Worship Service 10:15*
- Jan 10 – **Annual Reports due electronically to Cathy:**
- Jan 13 – Deacons 6:30 PM on Zoom
- Jan 14 – Session 7:00 PM on Zoom
- Jan 17 – Worship Service 10:15*
- Jan 19 – Claralice Circle 6:30 PM on Zoom
- Jan 21 – Stewardship & Finance Committee 6:45 PM on Zoom
- Jan 24 – Worship Service 10:15*
- **Jan 24 – Newsletter Items Deadline to Cindy:**
- Jan 31 – Worship Service 10:15*
- Jan 31 – Annual Congregational Meeting after worship on Zoom

*At Ohio Public Health Advisory System Alert Level 3 (red), weekly worship will be livestreamed on Sundays at 10:15 AM. At level 4 (purple), worship will be prerecorded individually and scheduled to premiere on Sundays at 10:15 AM. At levels 1 and 2 (yellow and orange), in-person worship will be offered. Every week, regardless of in-person worship status, online worship will be made available on our [church Facebook page](#) and later posted to our [church website](#).



Pastor's Letter

All through Advent, we spent time with the lectionary scriptures, trying to discern where we belong in God's story. We studied our relationship to God through time, place, memory, and sense of home. At Christmas, we bask in the undeserved honor of the Word of God becoming one of us in Jesus. Throughout the liturgical year, as we study the stories of God's people and of Jesus of Nazareth, we will continue to listen for God speaking to us through these ancient yet relatable and relevant texts.

I love the opening reminder of A Brief Statement of Faith that says: "In life and in death we belong to God." No matter where 2021 takes us or what unexpected events transpire, we can take heart in remembering Where We Belong – in relationship with our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. We recently offered this hymn in worship, but it bears repeating as we continue to contemplate our ultimate home in God:

*Womb of life, and source of being,
home of every restless heart,
in your arms the worlds awakened;
you have loved us from the start.
We, your children, gather 'round you,
at the table you prepare.
Sharing stories tears and laughter,
we are nurtured by your care.*

*Word in flesh, our brother Jesus,
born to bring us second birth,
you have come to stand beside us,
knowing weakness, knowing earth.
Priest who shares our human struggles,
Life of Life, and Death of Death,
risen Christ, come stand among us,
send the Spirit by your breath.*

*Brooding Spirit, move among us;
be our partner, be our friend.
When our memory fails, remind us whose we are,
what we intend. Labor with us,
aid the birthing of the new world yet to be,
free of servant, lord and master,
free for love and unity.*

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In Christ,

Pastor Karol

Epiphany

The season of Christmas begins on December 25 and continues until Epiphany on January 6 (the 12 days of Christmas)! Epiphany is the celebration of God's self-revelation to the world in Jesus Christ. The symbolism of light is important: not only because of the star that guided the magi, but as it relates to the bright dawning of God's self-revelation in Christ. The magi who traveled a great distance to find the Christ-child were responding to the gift first given to them through the guidance of the star. They received God's gift, then offered their gifts to God. We will celebrate Epiphany on Sunday, January 3.



Star Words for Epiphany

After worship on January 3, the congregation will be invited to join a Zoom call so that each person may receive a Star Word for 2021. What is a Star Word? Like God used a star to guide the magi to find the Christ child, God can use this star to lead us in our seeking Jesus throughout the year. We are invited to ponder what significance this word might have in our lives, and how God might be speaking to us through that simple message.

Baptism of the Lord

At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus presents himself to John to be baptized in the Jordan. The heavens open, the Holy Spirit descends as a dove and we hear the voice of God: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

At this festival of the Christian year, we not only remember Jesus' baptism, but we celebrate our own: the baptism we share with Christ.

Appropriately, this year we will ordain and install our new officers on this Sunday, recognizing a deepening of the call that begins for all of us in baptism.

BAMA Christian Unity Service January 17

At least once a year, Christians are reminded of Jesus' prayer for his disciples that "they may be one so that the world may believe" (see John 17.21). Hearts are touched and Christians come together to pray for their unity. Congregations and parishes all over the world exchange preachers or arrange special ecumenical celebrations and prayer services. The event that touches off this special experience is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, January 18-25.

The theme for 2020, chosen by the sisters of the Community of Grandchamp in Switzerland, is: "Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit." It is the great desire of God, expressed by Jesus, that we might come to him and abide in him. He waits for us tirelessly, hoping that, united to him in love, we will bear fruit that will bring life to all.

We will recognize the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity by sharing a video as part of our worship service on January 17 compiled by the Bluffton Area Ministerial Association.

Poinsettias for Advent and Christmas

During the season of Advent and Christmas, our worship experiences have been enhanced through the beauty of the sanctuary. The Worship Committee would like to thank everyone for their contributions as we all join in offering prayers of thanksgiving for the following loved ones who we remember in this season of Christ's birth...

Robert Angus, Dr. Boyd and Eloise Travis, Violet Deiters, Rev. Harrison Weidman, Marcia Travis Kilgore and Wendy Fleming by Betsey Angus

Richard Evans by Judy Evans

Jack and Dolores McCracken, John McCracken, and Min Lindsey by Jay, Anne, Lindsey and Molly McCracken

Robert and Mary Barnett, Addison and Edith McGarrity by Dick and Jayne McGarrity

Daniel Rumer by Lin Rumer and family

Eldora McDougale, David and Jane Van Eman by Dave and Sue Van Eman

Zoom Instructions for All Church Calls

To join on a computer, tablet, or smartphone: Click this link: XXXX. You will be in the "waiting room" for just a moment before you're in!

To call in on a landline phone or cell phone:

Step 1: Call this phone number: XXXX.

Step 2: When it asks for a meeting ID enter: XXXX and then press #.

Step 3: When it asks for a participant ID, just press # to continue. You will be in the "waiting room" for just a moment before you're in!

Highlights of December Session Meeting



- Approved transferring unspent budgeted funeral dinner funds at the end of 2020 to a new unbudgeted funeral dinner line, thereby making the funds available to assist with the cost of funeral dinners in 2021 and subsequent years.
- Examination of new Elders/Deacons – All new officers shared their faith background and reason why willing to serve. Deacons Chris Hochstetler, Jana McVetta, and Libby McVetta had video/audio segments. Elders Tom Edwards, Dick McGarrity, and Phill Talavinia participated via Zoom. Approved new Deacons/Elders for Ordination/ Installation on January 10. All retiring Elders/Deacons – Betsey Angus, Jodi Brauen, Tenna Rhonemus, Helen Hawk, and Dave Van Eman were thanked for their years of faithful service.
- Judy Bloom Miracle died on December 6 – no services at present time. Approved to move following people to "other list" – Rhonda Moor, Jack Henry Neff, Samuel Neff, Andrew Van Horn, and Jodie Parker.
- Approved hiring Mark Sommers for snow removal to clear church sidewalks/steps, three parking spots for \$75. He will also plow manse if three inches or more. Approved to renew services with First Klass Lawn Care for 2021 for manse and church – same applications and rates as 2020.

- Session gave blessing for New Beginning’s request to disband the formal ongoing task force. Ryan and Sarah Brauen were thanked for their leadership over the years.
- Month of November Pastoral Care: 1 Visit, 36 calls and 14 cards sent. Congregational activities: Worship (Planning, Coordinating, Leading), Announcements/Prayers Email; Facebook Posts; Adult Faith Formation Zoom, Youth Bonfire at Brauen’s, Claralice Circle, Youth Group Movie, Graveside service for former member Denver Junior Zimmerly, New Officer Training with incoming Deacons (assisted by Laura From) and Elders, Faith Formation Intern Evaluation, and committee meetings. Community Engagement activities: Bluffton Community Preschool Board Meeting and BAMA Thanksgiving service on Facebook. Presbytery activities: MVP Stated Meeting Zoom, Zoom check-in group with General Presbyter Discipleship Commission Zoom, Ottawa PC Session Zoom. Current Weekly Schedule: Primary Workdays: Tue – Fri (off Mondays); In-Office Hours: Wed & Thurs 10-1.
- Approved Policy if Allen County COVID-19 alert level goes to Purple, then weekly worship participants prerecord individually; building use limited to essential workers only.
- Plan to send annual reports electronically to those with email. **Approved calling Annual Congregational/Corporation Meeting on Sunday, January 31 following worship via Zoom.**



November 2020 Financial Report

General Fund Budgeted Items

Balance January 1, 2020	\$ XXXX
Receipts thru Nov. 30	XXXX
Expenses thru Nov. 30	XXXX
Balance Nov. 30, 2020	\$ XXXX

Thank you for financially supporting the church’s budget.

Per Capita

You are invited to help cover the per capita cost of your membership (General Assembly, Synod, Maumee Valley Presbytery) by making a special donation through our congregation as part of your stewardship practice. The 2021 per capita amount is \$37.23 per active member. Thank you!



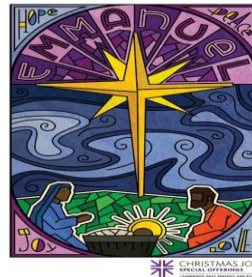
Thank you to the Barnett family and Laura From for their donations to the Deacons this year.

Donated grocery gift cards to Adopt-A-Family from proceeds of the BBQ dinner.

Assembled and delivered small goodie bags to homebound.

MISSION NEWS

Christmas Joy Offering Gifts welcome through January 18



Use the attached Giving Envelope or make an online donation to support the PCUSA Christmas Joy Offering. Fifty percent of the gifts make it possible for students to learn and grow in faith at Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color. The other 50% of gifts provide assistance for current and retired church workers and their families with critical financial needs.

One of the names given to Jesus was Emmanuel which means “God is with us.” Even though we have not able to be together in person, we continue to work together in spirit and in faith. Through gifts to the Christmas Joy Offering, we are together with those who need our love and support.

Greetings from Mission Co-workers

Ian and Jhan Vellengas

Dear friends,

In 2020, the year that seemed to last a decade, it is FINALLY time to start saying “Merry Christmas,” “Happy Holidays,” or whatever you feel more comfortable with. December is also the time when we take a look at and reflect on the year before starting a new one.



The season of celebration is coming and many wonder how we can continue to build and maintain relationships within this new reality. To nobody’s surprise (well, maybe to some), the internet has been an important tool to keep people connected. Many Presbyterians (not known for embracing change), some of whom could not set the time on their car radios, are utilizing online meetings platforms like they have been doing it for years. And with that ability comes new ways to connect. People who haven’t been to church in months are now watching services on Facebook and via Zoom. As for us, and other mission co-workers, online meetings in many ways have enhanced our abilities to reach out to those we are serving. Our partners in Nicaragua, CEPAD, just had a national gathering with all of its communities entirely online, as well as an international encounter with all of its partners in the United States.

Another thing that we noticed is that on average we have more meetings (for better or worse) because of Zoom than we have had in person. And even though a lot of people in Nicaragua have no internet access, many do know someone with a cell phone that has a social media app on it. While it is sad that we cannot meet face-to-face or in groups because of the pandemic, we haven’t lost touch with our colleagues in Nicaragua.

One day this pandemic will go away, and we will be able to enjoy many of the things we did before 2020 happened. We know this Christmas season will be different (the word “different” has been the mantra of the whole year), but we wish and hope that in the mist of everything people get to find rays of light and joyfulness as we try to connect with loved ones, far away relatives, friends and even faith communities. For we are only really apart when we stop caring and reaching for one another.

Lima Rescue Mission

Thanks to all who contributed and who delivered and served pizza and snacks on Saturday, December 26. It is very much appreciated by the workers at the Mission and especially by the men who enjoy the pizza. *Next Pizza Night in January is to be determined. Anyone interested in contributing and participating, please contact Bob Hursh.*

Thank you for Helping Others

Fifteen families donated items to provide food and gifts for two Bluffton-area families. Also, ten no-sew blankets were made this year and distributed to families in need (Adopt A Family, Family Promise, and Guiding Light Ministries).

Little Food Pantry

Please donate boxed or packaged items, no canned items during the winter. Bring donations to worship on the 2nd Sunday or drop-off in the church basement fellowship area. Thanks!!!

Weekly Pantry Checkers

Dec 28-Jan 3 – Jodi Brauen

Jan 4-10 – Jayne McGarrity

Jan 11-17 – Pastor Karol

Jan 18-24 – Carole Enneking

Jan 25-31 – Sue Van Eman

Bluffton Community Vacation Bible School

Hold onto your hats—err—shoes! Vacation Bible school planning is already under way. St. Mary's Catholic Church is hosting this year and they are requesting that we begin collecting shoe boxes. So if you get some cool footwear for Christmas, please save the box. We will establish a place in the church basement fellowship hall for donations. Thank you!

Birthdays

January	2	Tyler Hochstetler
	3	Dave Sycks Chad Carroll
	7	Dwight Nichols Barb Fett
	8	Robbie McGarrity
	10	Sue Basinger Addie McGarrity
	13	Chris Gable Matthew Zuehlke
	21	Colletta Mullenhour
	29	Richard McGarrity
	30	Tammie Hursh
	February	1
2		Jodie Parker
5		John Marshall



 Dear Church Family,
 Thank you very much for the generous Christmas gift. What a year it has been! I am blessed to be accompanying you in faith during these challenging times. Thank you for remembering that you are blessed to be a blessing to others; may we continue to do more of the same in the new year!

In Christ, Pastor Karol

Sending gratitude and heartfelt thanks to all of you for your prayers and support to our ministry and the people of Nicaragua. May the Lord grant you and all your loved ones peace, joy, and goodwill.

Jhan, Ian, and Marcella Vellenga
 Mission Co-workers PCUSA – CEPAD, Nicaragua

To the BPC congregation:
 Thank you for the Christmas card and gift. It's such a pleasure to be part of the wonderful music team at Bluffton Presbyterian! Jayne

 Thanks to all for the phone calls, texts, emails, and cards at the time of my father's death and while we were recovering from Covid. Your prayers and support were appreciated.
 Alyce Ann and Lori Schmidt

 To the Congregation,
 My name is Sylvia Morman, I'm Diane Winebar's sister. Diane has mentioned the many times she added me to the church's prayer list for ongoing heart issues and most recently, for an open heart surgery I had. I would like to sincerely thank everyone for the prayers! The surgery was successful and I'm doing well! Diane and Clair are blessed to belong to such a wonderful church. Thank you again!
 Gratefully yours, Sylvia Morman

Dear Church Family,
 Thank you so much for the Christmas gift. I miss everyone and hope we can all be back together soon.
 Thank You & Merry Christmas, Cathy

Dear Pastor Karol, Session, and the Whole BPC Family,
 Thank you very much for the Christmas gift. It was both kind and generous. I miss seeing all of you very much and am looking forward to being all together again. I will especially miss making music and sharing music with everyone on Christmas Eve. I pray you will all stay well and have a blessed holiday!
 Love, Linda

Thank you very much for the Christmas gift! It has been a privilege and pleasure to serve as your treasurer in 2020 and everyone has been very kind and patient during my first year. Julia Szabo

We sincerely thank Bluffton Presbyterian Church for its recent gift of \$80 for the Lion and Lamb Peace Arts Center. Through this gift you have partnered with us to share a message of peace and justice for all people everywhere.

With Appreciation,
 Louise Matthews, Director
 The Lion and Lamb Peace Arts Center

Dear Partners in God's Mission,
 As we embark upon this season of Thanksgiving, we too give thanks "because of your sharing in the gospel." On behalf of Presbyterian Mission, please allow me to express our appreciation to you, your pastor, session, and congregation for your gracious and faithful support. On October 13, 2020, we received \$122.75 for 102 Shared Mission Support.
 Yours in Christ,
 Rev. Chris Roseland
 Mission Engagement Advisor

Dear members of Bluffton Presbyterian Church,



We here at Presbyterian Hunger Program are writing to sincerely say thank you for your gifts. They are a huge help in a hard year, showing both your presence and care, as well as financial undergirding of this ministry that works to alleviate hunger and eliminate its root causes of hunger and poverty.

As people of faith, we're called to notice, pray for, and act in the world around us. And we're called to speak hope, to be beacons in difficult times. We all know that so far in 2020, we are living in the midst of an intense, exhausting, difficult period.

Your contributions are a sign of hope. Because of you, churches and organizations are able to distribute more food to people who are hungry and also to do education and advocacy to help ensure future food security for vulnerable communities. Because of you, global partners living in places of war, violence, famine, drought or flooding have better access to safety, health, and basic needs. Because of you, activists working on root causes of hunger who have been targeted, threatened, or worn out, know that they are not alone.

The people, churches and organizations that we relate to in this work also bring hope to this world, and they show signs of how love, mercy, and justice can break through difficult moments in history to shine brightly. We are grateful for them, and grateful for you, and grateful to have this calling entrusted to us by God, who holds the whole world in caring hands.

Thank you, Rebecca Barnes
Coordinator, Presbyterian Hunger Program

BPC Prayer Chain

If you have a prayer request, please contact Craig Bowman (XXXX). PLEASE leave a message if no answer. Or call the church office (XXXX) with your prayer request, and we will pass along the information. If you would like to add someone else to the prayer chain, please be sure to get their permission first. Names and circumstances can be kept confidential, if desired. God knows for whom we pray. If you would like to be part of the chain or would like more information, please contact Craig or another deacon.

Prayers of Sympathy for:

Ben Miracle and family as they grieve the loss of Judy Bloom Miracle who died on December 6.

Kay Ziessler and family as Kay's brother, Denver Junior Zimmerly, died November 29; he was a former BPC member.

Prayers for all the families of the more than 1.6 million individuals worldwide (more than 317,000 people in the U.S.) who have died from this virus.

Prayers of Joy for:

Mike and Tenna Rhonemus who are going to be grandparents twice in 2021! Amanda and Casey Layer are expecting in April and Danielle & Cody Rowland are expecting in June.

Prayers of Healing for:

Jim Basinger (Jodi Brauen's brother in Michigan) was in the hospital with severe pancreatitis after having chest pains at work.

Christine Amstutz Moore (Gayle Marshall's friend in Indiana) who was hospitalized and on oxygen due to Covid-19.

Lori Schmidt's neighbors whose 2-month old granddaughter, April, was diagnosed as totally deaf; encouraging update that she will be getting hearing aids in to adjust to noise prior to surgery in July.

Jeff McKanna (related to Bev Begg and neighbor to the Marshalls) was in an accident and has many broken bones.

Lin Rumer's daughter Natalie Koch and family in Cincinnati. Update: Abby is back up and on her feet feeling normal again, Todd is still recovering but getting better, and Natalie is struggling with oxygen levels, breathing, and coughing. Hopefully she will start improving soon. Continued prayers for all in their healing process.

Molly Pontius (Lori Schmidt's friend in Arizona) as her body is rejecting her heart transplant. She is in LA for medical treatment. Also, Molly's brother Todd Deters has a long recovery ahead from Covid-19; he is very weak.

Prayers of Healing continued for:

Julene Walters (Jodi Brauen's friend) who has esophageal cancer and will be having surgery.

Jill Rumer (Lin Rumer's daughter-in-law) who had successful surgery and is now home resting and recuperating.

Marie and Ron Gallaher (Bev Begg's sister and brother-in-law). Ron is home on hospice.

Ken Ruckzo (McCracken family friend) who has brain cancer that has spread to other organs.

Those who live alone or in care facilities and less able to engage in meaningful connections with others, including Marilyn Bullock, Peggy Hursey, Sally Reeder, Hazel Rodabaugh, Dortha Radabaugh, Sheila Hurlburt, Jeanette Warren, and Ralph and Donnie Middleton.

Those affected by recent acts of violence and natural disasters around the world.

New Communications Position

Based on the recommendation of New Beginnings and Session approval, the Personnel Committee will pursue hiring an hourly, part-time staff position focused on communications. Primary responsibilities are:

1. Manage internal congregational electronic sign designs.
2. Facilitate the electronic sign request/approval/publishing process*.
3. Create graphics and layout for the weekly congregation email.
4. Provide communications/graphics support and development to the congregation.

4-6 hours per week is initially forecasted with the potential of up to 10 hours per week. [Click here](#) for more details.

If you or someone you know has an interest, please reach out to Lori Schmidt or Sarah Brauen.

** Internal and non-profit community signs will be approved by a designated church member.*

Habitat for Humanity - Lima Area News and Needs

News: A family has been selected for our build in Delphos – a mother and three children. We are waiting on a few lot modifications, but we still hope to begin construction soon. Check our website for updates on when we will need construction volunteers. The ReStore remains open Thursday - Saturday for shopping and donation drop-off. Our COVID-19 protocols continue in place for the protection of our staff, volunteers, and customers. Tuesdays and Wednesdays are also available for volunteer help, but without customers so that we can clean the facility more thoroughly and offer a safer work environment for any at-risk volunteers.

Needs:

1. We have a real need for volunteers at the ReStore. Please consider volunteering as an individual or come with a group.
2. We are starting to plan 2021 monthly meals for our volunteers. If interested in helping, please contact us.
3. Join our affiliate sustaining/ongoing No Place Like Home Club for a donation of just \$10 a month.

Please contact us to volunteer or donate:

(phone) 419-222-4937,

(website) www.habitatlima.org

(email) habitatlima@habitatlima.org

New Beginnings Update

New Beginnings grew out of a church assessment activity several years back. After several years of meaningful contributions to the church, the group will disband. New Beginnings members are on other committees so the works of new ideas and beginnings will continue through the core committees of the congregation.

The electronic sign effort will continue to be led by Dick McGarrity, Tenna Rhonemus, and Sarah Brauen. Additional help would be appreciated and if you're interested in helping us, please reach out to Sarah or Dick!

Thank you to everyone who has participated in New Beginnings over the years including those already mentioned and Diane Winebar, Bob and Tammie Hursh, Lin Rumor, Dave Sucks, and Ryan Brauen.

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY JAN 18-25, 2021 DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER GUIDE

Day 1, Called by God: “You did not choose me but I chose you” (John 15:16a)

- **Genesis 12:1-4**, The call of Abraham
- **John 1:35-51**, The call of the first disciples

Meditation

The start of the journey is an encounter between a human being and God, between the created and the Creator, between time and eternity.

Abraham heard the call: “Go to the land I will show you.” Like Abraham we are called to leave that which is familiar and go to the place that God has prepared in the depths of our hearts.

Along the way, we become more and more ourselves, the people God has wanted us to be from the beginning. And by following the call that is addressed to us, we become a blessing for our loved ones, our neighbors, and the world.

The love of God seeks us. God became human in Jesus, in whom we encounter the gaze of God. In our lives, as in the Gospel of John, God’s call is heard in different ways. Touched by his love, we set out. In this encounter, we walk a path of transformation – the bright beginning of a relationship of love that is always started anew.

Prayer

Jesus Christ, you seek us, you wish to offer us your friendship and lead us to a life that is ever more complete. Grant us the confidence to answer your call so that we may be transformed and become witnesses of your tenderness for the world. Amen.

Day 2, Maturing internally: “Abide in me as I abide in you” (John 15:4a)

- **Ephesians 3:14-21**, May Christ dwell in our hearts
- **Luke 2:41-52**, Mary treasured all these things

Meditation

The encounter with Jesus gives rise to the desire to stay with him and to abide in him: a time in which fruit matures.

Being fully human, like us Jesus grew and matured. He lived a simple life, rooted in the practices of his Jewish faith. In this hidden life in Nazareth, where apparently nothing extraordinary happened, the presence of the Father nourished him.

Mary contemplated the actions of God in her life and in that of her son. She treasured all these things in her heart. Thus, little by little, she embraced the mystery of Jesus.

We too need a long period of maturation, an entire lifetime, in order to plumb the depths of Christ’s love, to let him abide in us and for us to abide in him. Without our knowing how, the Spirit makes Christ dwell in our hearts. And it is through prayer, by listening to the word, in sharing with others, by putting into practice what we have understood, that the inner being is strengthened.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, may we receive in our hearts the presence of Christ, and cherish it as a secret of love. Nourish our prayer, enlighten our reading of Scripture, act through us, so that the fruits of your gifts can patiently grow in us. Amen.

Day 3, Forming one body: “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12b)

- **Colossians 3:12-17**, Clothe yourself with compassion
- **John 13:1-15; 34-35**, Love one another

Meditation

On the eve of his death, Jesus knelt to wash the feet of his disciples. He knew the difficulty of living together and the importance of forgiveness and mutual service. “Unless I was you,” he said to Peter, “you have no share with me.”

Peter received Jesus at his feet; he was washed and was touched by the humility and gentleness of Christ. Later he would follow Jesus’ example and serve the fellowship of the faithful in the early Church.

Jesus wishes that life and love circulate through us as the sap through the vine, so that Christian communities be one body. But today as in the past, it is not easy to live together. We are often faced with our own limitations. At times we fail to love those who are close to us in a community, parish or family. There are times when our relationships break down completely. In Christ we are invited to be clothed in compassion, through countless new beginnings. The recognition that we are loved by God moves us to welcome each other with our strengths and weaknesses. It is then that Christ is in our midst.

Prayer

God our father, you reveal to us your love through Christ and through our brothers and sisters. Open our hearts so that we can welcome each other with our differences and live in forgiveness. Grant us to live united in one body, so that the gift that is each person comes to light. May all of us together be a reflection of the living Christ.

Day 4, Praying together: “I do not call you servants any longer... but I have called you friends” (John 15:15)

- **Romans 8:26-27**, The Spirit helps us in our weakness
- **Luke 11:1-4**, Lord, teach us to pray

Meditation

God thirsts for a relationship with us. God searches for us as God searched for Adam, calling him in the garden: “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9)

In Christ, God came to meet us. Jesus lived in prayer, intimately united to his Father, while creating friendships with his disciples and all those he met. He introduced them to that which was most precious to him: the relationship of love with his Father, who is our Father. Jesus and his disciples sang psalms together, rooted in the richness of their Jewish tradition. At other times, Jesus retired to pray alone.

Prayer can be solitary or shared with others. It can express wonder, complaint, intercession, thanksgiving or simple silence. Sometimes the desire to pray is there, but one has the feeling of not being able to do so. Turning to Jesus and saying to him, “teach me,” can pave the way. Our desire itself is already prayer.

Getting together in a group offers us support. Through hymns, words and silence, communion is created. If we pray with Christians of other traditions, we may be surprised to feel united by a bond of friendship that comes from the One who is beyond all division. The forms may vary, but it is the same Spirit that brings us together.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, your entire life was prayer, perfect harmony with the Father. Through your Spirit, teach us to pray according to your will of love. May the faithful of the whole world unite in intercession and praise, and may your kingdom of love come. Amen.

Day 5, Letting oneself be transformed by the Word: “You have already been pruned by the word...” (John 15:3)

- **Deuteronomy 30:11-20**, The word of God is very close to you
- **Matthew 5:1-12**, Blessed are you

Meditation The Word of God is very close to us. It is a blessing and a promise of happiness. If we open our hearts, God speaks to us and patiently transforms that which is dying in us. God removes that which prevents the growth of real life, just as the vine grower prunes the vine.

Regularly meditating on a biblical text, alone or in a group, changes our outlook. Many Christians pray the Beatitudes every day. The Beatitudes reveal to us a happiness that is hidden in that which is unfulfilled, a happiness that lies beyond suffering: blessed are those who, touched by the Spirit, no longer hold back their tears but let them flow and thus receive consolation. As they discover the wellspring hidden within their inner landscape, the hunger for justice, and the thirst to engage with others for a world of peace, grows in them.

We are constantly called to renew our commitment to life, through our thoughts and actions. There are times when we already taste, here and now, the blessing that will be fulfilled at the end of time.

Prayer Blessed are you, God our Father, for the gift of your word in Holy Scripture. Blessed are you for its transforming power. Help us to choose life and guide us by your Spirit, so that we can experience the happiness which you want so much to share with us. Amen.

Day 6, Welcoming others: “Go and bear fruit, fruit that will last” (John 15:16b)

- **Genesis 18:1-5**, Abraham hosts the angels at the Oak of Mamre
- **Mark 6:30-44**, Jesus’ compassion for the crowds

Meditation When we let ourselves be transformed by Christ, his love in us grows and bears fruit. Welcoming the other is a concrete way of sharing the love that is within us.

Throughout his life, Jesus welcomed those he met. He listened to them and let himself be touched by them without being afraid of their suffering.

In the gospel account of the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus is moved with compassion after seeing the hungry crowd. He knows that the entire human person must be nourished, and that he alone can truly satisfy the hunger for bread and the thirst for life. But he does not wish to do this without his disciples, without that little something they can give him: five loaves and two fish.

Even today he draws us to be co-workers in his unconditional care. Sometimes something as small as a kind look, an open ear, or our presence is enough to make a person feel welcome. When we offer our poor abilities to Jesus, he uses them in a surprising way.

We then experience what Abraham did, for it is by giving that we receive, and when we welcome others, we are blessed in abundance.

Prayer

Jesus Christ, we desire to welcome fully the brothers and sisters who are with us. You know how often we feel helpless in the face of their suffering, yet you are always there ahead of us and you have already received them in your compassion. Speak to them through our words, support them through our actions, and let your blessing rest on us all. Amen.

Day 7, Growing in Unity: “I am the vine, you are the branches” (John 15:5a)

- **1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:21-23**, Is Christ divided?
- **John 17:20-23**, As you and I are one

Meditation On the eve of his death, Jesus prayed for the unity of those the Father gave him: “that they may all be one... so that the world may believe.” Joined to him, as a branch is to the vine, we share the same sap that circulates among us and vitalizes us.

Each tradition seeks to lead us to the heart of our faith: communion with God, through Christ, in the Spirit. The more we live this communion, the more we are connected to other Christians and to all of humanity. Paul warns us against an attitude that had already threatened the unity of the first Christians: absolutizing one’s own tradition to the detriment of the unity of the body of Christ. Differences then become divisive instead of mutually enriching. Paul had a very broad vision: “All are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.” (1 Corinthians 3:22-23)

Christ’s will commits us to a path of unity and reconciliation. It also commits us to unite our prayer to his: “that they may all be one... so that the world may believe.” (John 17:21)

Prayer Holy Spirit, vivifying fire and gentle breath, come and abide in us. Renew in us the passion for unity so that we may live in awareness of the bond that unites us in you. May all who have put on Christ at their Baptism unite and bear witness together to the hope that sustains them. Amen.

Day 8, Reconciling with all of creation: “So that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11)

- **Colossians 1:15-20**, In him all things hold together
- **Mark 4:30-32**, As small as a mustard seed

Meditation

The hymn to Christ in the epistle to the Colossians invites us to sing the praise of God’s salvation, which encompasses the entire universe. Through the crucified and risen Christ, a path of reconciliation has been opened up; creation too is destined for a future of life and peace.

With the eyes of faith, we see that the kingdom of God is a reality that is very close but still very small, hardly visible – like a mustard seed. However, it is growing. Even in the distress of our world the Spirit of the Risen One is at work. He encourages us to become involved – with all people of good will – in tirelessly seeking justice and peace, and ensuring the earth is once again a home for all creatures.

We participate in the work of the Spirit so that creation in all its fullness may continue to praise God. When nature suffers, when human beings are crushed, the Spirit of the risen Christ – far from allowing us to lose heart – invites us to become part of his work of healing.

The newness of life that Christ brings, however hidden, is a light of hope for many. It is a wellspring of reconciliation for the whole of creation and contains a joy that comes from beyond ourselves: “so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.” (John 15:11)

Prayer

Thrice-holy God, we thank you for having created and loved us. We thank you for your presence in us and in creation. May we learn to look upon the world as you look upon it, with love. In the hope of this vision, may we be able to work for a world where justice and peace flourish, for the glory of your name. Amen.

2021 Operating Funds Campaign Update

Thank you to everyone who has turned in a 2021 operating budget commitment card. Each card that is turned in is represented by a colorful leaf on the Live Courageously tree. If you have not had a chance to turn in a commitment card yet, please prayerfully consider doing so and help fill out the Live Courageously tree! The next time you “dart” into the church, stop by the sanctuary to check out the tree’s progress!



Through Dec. 16, we have 26 commitments for 2021 operating funds totaling \$79,630. For 2020, we had 39 commitments totaling \$109,038.

2021 Operating Funds - Bluffton Presbyterian Church

Live Courageously!

...take hold of the life that really is life – 1 Timothy 6:18-19

I/We thank God for the continuing opportunity to sustain and grow the ministries of Bluffton Presbyterian Church by generously sharing my/our talents and financial resources. I/we commit to give financial resources to the church operating fund as follows in 2021:

\$_____ weekly, or \$_____ monthly / quarterly / annual (please circle one)

(signature[s])

(name[s] printed)

Thank you for your commitment. Please check here if you prefer to not receive an acknowledgement: ____ Please note that this commitment can be changed at any time as circumstances arise by notifying our Treasurer, Julia Szabo.

Bluffton Presbyterian Church
112 N. Main St., P.O. Box 149
Bluffton, OH 45817
XXXX

blufftonpc.org

Sunday Worship: 10:15 AM

OFFICE HOURS

Pastor: Rev. Karol Farris Schilling

Phone: XXXX

Email: XXXX

Primary Work Days: Tuesday – Friday

In-Office Hours: Wed & Thurs 10-1

Secretary: Cathy Carroll

Email: XXXX

Office Hours: Tues & Thurs 9-12

Treasurer: Julia Szabo

Email: XXXX

Faith Formation Intern: Adam Shanaman

Email: XXXX

Organists: Jayne McGarrity and Sue Van Eman

Choir Director: Linda Sycks

Nursery Helpers: Kori Phipps and Shawna Anderson

Custodian: Roger Brodman

2021 Church Officers

Session

Clerk of Session – Lori Schmidt

Buildings & Grounds – Lynda Best

Faith Formation – Dick McGarrity

Fellowship – Tom Edwards

Finance & Stewardship – Clair Winebar

Mission – Carole Enneking

Nominating – Tom Edwards

Personnel – Lori Schmidt

Worship – Diane Winebar

Presbytery Commissioner – Lori Schmidt

Members at Large – Sarah Brauen and Phill Talavinia

Board of Deacons

Moderator: Laura From

Assistant Moderator: Jana McVetta

Members: Tanya Best, Craig Bowman,

Chris Hochstetler, Libby McVetta