

December 2020

Sixth Sense

From the Pastor

Advent is the season of the Christian year to pause and look, with complete honesty, at the darkness that envelops the world. It is a season that holds space for grief; that reminds us that not only are we wounded by the evil in the world, we are also perpetrators of that brokenness, through our unkindness, impatience, and selfishness.

But this year, I don't need anymore reminding about shadows and sinfulness and the complete collapse of human systems in a global pandemic crisis. Since March when we first began to quarantine, it feels like we have been trapped in a never-ending Advent, wracked with loneliness, pain, depression, and needless suffering. In our home, we "need a little Christmas, right this very minute." We will be decorating the tree earlier. Escapism looks a little less unhealthy to us this year.

I don't know how you observe Advent, but I do know that whatever you do, there will be something about it that is missing. We accept the desolation for what it is. The losses are deep, not the least of which is being unable to congregate safely in our sanctuary for this most sacred celebration.

At the beginning of Advent, our holy Scriptures speak often of the end of trouble. That the sufferings of the present are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed. Give yourself permission to savor joy when it comes. Feel the sadness, then let it go. The pandemic is not going to last forever. We are learning things about ourselves, and growing as people, even in this season that seems so futile. If there is anything to remember in this particularly poignant Advent of 2020, it is that nothing, absolutely nothing, separates us from God's love.

Come, Lord Jesus!

Vincent

We will continue to keep our building closed due to the ongoing public health concerns. All events and activities, including services of worship, remain temporarily suspended. Session will monitor this situation and in-person worship will resume when deemed feasible.

For continuing updates and to access our online worship experience, visit sixthchurch.org



SIXTH
presbyterian
CHURCH

December Worship and Preaching

December 6 – Mark 1:1-8,
"Emancipation
Proclamation"

December 13 – John 1:6-8, 19
-28, "The Fixin' One Is on
the Way"

December 20 – Luke 1:46b-
55, "On the Road to Home"

December 24 – Luke 2:1-20,
"He's Home!"

December 27 – Rev. Myra
Kazanjian preaching



What the Pastor Is Reading

*Always a Guest: Speaking of
Faith Far From Home,*
Barbara Brown Taylor

Uncanny Valley, Anna
Wiener

*Celebrating Abundance:
Devotions for Advent,* Walter
Brueggemann

Updates from the Stewardship Committee

As of the writing of this newsletter, we have received 75 pledges totaling \$272,184 toward our campaign goal of \$340,282. If you have not sent in your pledge card please remember to mail it in or email Amy Whipple (office@sixthchurch.org) with your annual pledge amount.

If you use eGive or want to use eGive for your pledge fulfillment, please follow the instructions below:

1. Go to the Sixth Presbyterian Church website and click on Donate Now
2. Click on Sign In if you have an account or need to create an account
3. If you have an account fill in your e-mail in password
 4. If you need to create an account, click on Register for an Account and follow the instructions for registration
5. Once you have Signed In or Register, click on Recurring
6. If you already have an account, you will see your giving history, select you current recurring amount
7. Select the pencil/pen icon to edit your recurring payment
8. Change if needed: Any new Amount; Frequency; Day, and End Date. Fund should be: General Pledge
9. On this page you can also change/add the checking, money market or savings account that you have authorized
10. Once you have completed any updates, Click on Save
11. You are finished updating or adding your eGive Payment, thank you!

If you have any questions don't hesitate to contact Amy Whipple in the Church office at 412-421-2752 or office@sixthchurch.org, or Beth Hazlett (Stewardship Chair) at 412-370-9940 or efhazlett@icloud.com

December Birthdays

December 5	Alexandra DeJong	December 20.....	Louis DeLucia
December 11.....	Nils Hammer		Carolyn Freeman
	Peter Watt-Morse	December 24.....	Carol Emerson
December 12.....	Mary Ellen Watt-Morse	December 29.....	Jesse DeLucia
December 14.....	Jack Brennan		Ethan Greenley
	Jacob Watt-Morse		Allison Sennott
December 15.....	Lara Miller		Carlisle Turner
December 16.....	Ellen Gaul		Sterling Turner
	Joan Markert	December 30.....	Benjamin Bates
December 18.....	Mark Bertolet		

November 29: Light a Candle of Hope

- Share: What you are thankful for?
- Have some hot chocolate or tea together
- Send a card or a thank-you note to someone from your family
- Pray for a family member that lives far away.
- Add someone new to your Christmas card list



Choose Your Own Adventure

Each week during Advent, light a candle and then pick one, some, or all of the activities.

December 6: Light a Candle of Love

- Share: When have you felt God's love this week?
- Participate in or watch a virtual church service
- Watch a Christmas movie together
- Read together from a Christmas Story book
- Pray for someone who is isolated or lives alone.



December 15: Light a Candle of Joy

- Take a treat to a neighbor
- Share: What brought you Joy today?
- Take a walk at night and look at the stars
- Make a blanket or pillow fort and hide inside together
- Share: What make you laugh this week?

December 20: Light a Candle of Peace

- Donate food to a food pantry
- Make a birthday cake or treat for Jesus
- Donate hats, scarves, gloves, and socks to a shelter
- Share: Who helped you today? Did you help anyone?
- Put out seeds, fruit, or bread for the birds and squirrels



December 24: Light a Candle for the Christ Child

- Read together the narratives from the Nativity Story found in Matthew 1: 18 through 2: 23 and Luke 2.

About Advent



I've been sorting through Advent calendars and devotionals to send out for families to use at home. As I look through all the possibilities, I am getting overwhelmed and think that perhaps the best thing we can do for ourselves this year is to keep things simple. We are zoomed out. We are frustrated with having to print this document, download that, and log in there. As we approach Advent this year, I am personally drawn into the idea of slowing things down and participating in the waiting. I am going to revisit the book called "Learning to Walk in the Dark" by Barbara Brown Taylor and embrace the darkness.

There are also two phrases I have been thinking about recently that I will try to use as a guide during this Advent season, and maybe they will be meaningful for your family as well.

"Take your time." "What works?"

Both sentences come from my friend and former first-grade teacher, Mr. Nyswaner. "Take your time!" was his mantra to the class as we were practicing reading and writing. I hear him say that often in my head when realizing I have been making silly mistakes and forgetting things because I am in a hurry to get something done. (Side note: I also remember that he would promise us that if we were good listeners and were taking our time with our work, he would reward us by doing a headstand on Fridays.)

Over the years I have called Mr. Nyswaner for guidance on working with kids and parents. In one extremely helpful conversation about managing disruptive behavior, he told me to stop asking parents what they "do" at home and start asking parents what "works" at home. Always focus on what works, he said.

This year I am sending out a choose your own adventure-themed Advent calendar. The idea is to light a candle together with your family on the Sundays in Advent and then choose from a list of suggested ideas throughout the week or create your own. Or not! The idea is to take your time this advent season and focus and embrace what is working. What is bringing your family joy and comfort? When you identify those things focus on them – and do more of that!

For those of you that may want to lean into Advent a little more, I am also sending a weekly Advent devotional and coloring sheets (for kids and grownups!) created by Illustrated Ministry. Due to copyright restrictions, they are now available for us to post and download. Please let me know if you would like additional copies of the coloring sheets or the devotional to share and I will mail them out.

Peace and Blessings to you all as we end this crazy year. I can't wait until we can all be safely worshipping together again!

–Jenny Newman

Children's Sunday school will be taking a break!

There will be no Sunday school December 20, 27, and January 3. We will resume via Zoom on January 10th at 10 am.

Youth Group

Zoom sessions for Youth Fellowship will be held at 6 pm, December 3, 10, and 17.

All Zoom meeting links are sent via email. Contact Jenny Newman if you need a link: Jennyrunew@gmail.com

Our annual Sunday School Christmas Pageant will be presented virtually during the live-stream worship service on **December 13th** at 11 am.

Here are a few suggestions for devotionals and daily readings for Advent! Ask your favorite local bookseller to order one for you.

A Weary World: Reflections for a Blue Christmas by Kathy Escobar: Escobar provides twenty-eight daily reflections paired with prayers and practices to honor our struggles during the holidays.

Advent for Everyone: A Journey with the Apostles by N.T. Wright: Biblical scholar and author N. T. Wright provides his own Scripture translation and brief reflection, helping readers understand Advent in the wider context of God's love. Each week discusses key themes for the season: thanksgiving, patience, humility, and joy.

Always a Guest by Barbara Brown Taylor: While this is not an Advent devotional, this collection of stories and sermons of faith, grace, and hope will do well for weekly or daily reading.

The Advent Story Book by Laura Richie: *The Advent Storybook* offers a simple question at the end of each story that helps readers engage in understanding the bigger story God wants us all to know – the good news of Jesus.

Unwrapping the Names of Jesus by Asheritah Ciuciu: This devotional leads readers through the four weeks of Advent (Hope, Preparation, Joy, and Love). Each week includes an interactive family devotional that equips readers to celebrate Advent together, offers five daily reflections that focus on that week's name of Jesus, and includes suggestions for fun-filled family activities or service projects.

God With Us by Katie Pawlack: *God With Us* makes the celebration of Advent simple, memorable, and Gospel-focused. Daily readings correspond with twenty-five symbols from the Old and New Testaments. Short prayers and extension activities provide a flexible and engaging approach to celebrating Advent. Following in the tradition of The Jesse Tree, in the days leading up to Christmas, a tree, banner, or branch is decorated with ornaments depicting symbols from stories in the Bible that point ahead to the lineage and birth of Christ, the long-awaited Messiah. Images of hand-embroidered felt ornaments accompany each day's reading. The appendices at the back of the book list the verses referenced for each reading in full, as well as images of each day's ornament or symbol that can be photocopied and made into ornaments.

What We're Reading / Watching / Listening To / Doing

Peter Gilmore: At the moment, binge-watching *The Crown* with Bridget. Mentally oiling the guillotine as I watch. Especially liked the scene where the Queen advises her sister to marry her commoner lover in Scotland...because the Queen doesn't control the church there. Presbyterianism for the win.

Pam Howe: My Christmas tradition is to have my grandkids and various others including my children's cousins come to my house on Christmas eve morning for a cousin's party. The kids each get to decorate their own gingerbread house. They are now old enough that they are designing and creating the house itself too. Then everyone has lunch and presents are given out. Unfortunately, this probably is not going to happen this year. Will need to think up a creative alternative.

Lori King: Reading *Divided We Stand: The Battle Over Women's Rights and Family Values That Polarized American Politics* by Marjorie Spruill. It has been fascinating reading, especially this year, as I see how often plans for publicly funded child care and health care showed up, and yet, we are still so in need of both during this pandemic year.

Linda May: Watched *The Queen's Gambit* on Netflix

Heather Vallone: Re-watching *Fringe*

Amy Whipple: Watched Up's annual week-long, every-episode *Gilmore Girls* marathon. Malakai and I are enjoying *Charlotte's Web* and, soon, nightly Advent stories.

Sixth Church and God's Creation



Being an Earth care congregation can take many forms. It can affect what we do at the church and what we do at home. I think it is great that we have ways to recycle many products (at least when we can go to church). However, the whole acronym is to reduce, reuse and recycle. I decided to look into ways to reduce the amount of plastics used in the home. In August, Nora Johnson and I bought a variety of products that did not use plastics to see how we liked them.

Overall, many of these products are a bit more expensive than their counterparts that can be bought locally, but the tradeoff of not creating plastic waste may be worth it.

This is by no means all of the products out there. I have continued to search and am in the process of buying more items to try.

Here are our results:

Bathroom:

Toilet tissue_ 100% recycled toilet paper from Who Gives a Crap (wedo@whogivesacrap.org)

This toilet paper rolls come individually wrapped in paper in a cardboard box. 50% of the profits goes to buying toilets in various underprivileged countries. They also have **tissues and paper towels** that I have just ordered. Both Nora and I liked the toilet tissue.

Handkerchiefs (hello@lastobject.com) Several people I know are using handkerchiefs instead of tissues. I found a nifty container called LastTissue that is great for carrying the handkerchiefs in your bag. It is a silicone container that holds 6 handkerchiefs. There is a slit at the bottom where you pull out a clean handkerchief. You open the top to put in the used handkerchief. There is a silicone barrier sewn on one of the handkerchiefs that separate the dirty ones from the clean ones. This way you always have a clean handkerchief and the dirty ones are contained in one place until you are ready to wash them.

Toothpaste tablets (bitetoothpastebits.com) These are tablets that you gently chew and it turns into a foam that you brush your teeth with. The tablets come in a refillable glass jar. They also make **tablets for mouthwash** which we did not try.

Nora liked these tablets a lot and would definitely buy them again. I was ok with them but am not sure I would want to use them all of the time. Kirk did not like them at all. Regular toothpaste seems to surround the teeth better than the tablets. They would be great to use on vacation or camping trips.

Minted Waxed Silk Dental Floss (info@shopetee.com) This came with a glass container and two spools of dental floss. Both Kirk and I liked this floss and would buy it again. You can buy just the floss but it is a little hard to find it on their website.

Shampoo and Conditioner Soap Bars (hello@theearthlingco.com) I really liked the idea of using bars that needed no plastic bottles. However although I liked how my hair looked and felt, I developed an itchy scalp when I used them. I wrote to the company to ask if they knew what I might be allergic to but received no answer. I have just ordered another type of bar shampoo from Etee to see if they work better.

Deodorant (we@byhumankind.com) This deodorant comes with a refillable container. It works pretty well. I had been using **Native deodorant** but it came in a plastic container. They have just come out with a paper container on some of their scents so I will be trying this next.

Laundry Room:

Stain and Odor Laundry Detergent Pods (info@dropps.com) This is a powder that comes individually wrapped in a plastic-looking wrapper. This wrapper is made from polyvinyl alcohol which is considered a biodegradable polymer. It can be made by synthetic sources or plant oils. It is considered marine safe if it is a vegetable oil-based polymer. However I read that the starting compound is ethylene gas which is made from oil. So even though it worked well, Nora and I are looking at other options. I just ordered from Blueland (hello@blueland.com) tablets that come in a metal refillable box but have no PVA in them. It is still much better than using plastic jugs for your detergent.

Wool Dryer Balls These are to be used in the dryer to soften the clothes and reduce static. They help but I really missed fabric softener. I am looking for other alternatives.

Laundry Detergent Sheets (hello@kindlaundry.com) I really liked these sheets. They worked well and had a shorter list of ingredients than other laundry detergents had. However, although it was not as obvious, it still had PVA in it. When I contacted the company, they said that their PVA was made from coconut oil which is better than the synthetic kind. The company was very responsive to my inquires, which I liked.

Kitchen:

Dishwasher Detergent Pods (info@dropps.com) They worked fine but the same problem with the PVA. Blueland has tablets that come in a metal box that I just ordered to try.

Liquid Dish Soap (info@shopetee.com) We both liked the dish soap. It comes in a beeswax container that you open and put in your own container with 12 oz of water. Works well. It also came with a Loofah sponge which I absolutely loved. It does NOT get smelly. Also they have cellulose cleaning cloths that do not smell either.

Etee makes everything they sell so they can oversee the entire supply chain. It is all plastic free. Their factories are powered by renewable energy.

Hopefully this will give you some ideas on how to reduce your use of plastic in your household.

–Pam Howe

Notes from the November Session Meeting

(NB: notes from Session are pulled from yet-approved minutes)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- Minutes from the October 18th Session meeting were presented to the Session for approval
 - **Motion to approve** minutes as read
 - **Motion passed** unanimously

- Worship (YouTube views): November 1, 63; November 8, 57; November 15, 43

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- **FINANCE:** The October financial report and a draft of Sixth Presbyterian Church's 2021 budget were presented for discussion by Finance Chair Mary Radcliffe..
- **STEWARDSHIP:** Beth Hazlett presented a stewardship campaign update detailing the following:
 - At the time of the November 2020 Session meeting, the 2020 stewardship campaign had raised \$254,590.12 of its approximately \$340,000.00 goal.
 - The stewardship campaign will continue to reach out to congregation members to encourage pledge card return and completion of 2020 financial commitments.
- **HOUSE:** House Chair Greg Winner will be communicating with Julie Mole regarding the request to use the building for a boy scout troop.
- **PERSONNEL:** A personnel report was provided to Session by Personnel Chair Phyllis Rupert regarding employee benefits selection and the status of building manager Harry Kirk following a medical leave.
- **TOWER UPDATE:** At the time of the Session meeting, there are no updates from Verizon or Unison regarding the tower usage. The church is waiting for approval from the Presbytery regarding the tower lease agreement.

PASTOR'S REPORT AND DEACONS' REPORT

- A brief update was provided to Session regarding members of the congregation who require care and assistance.

REOPENING TASK FORCE

- Kirk Howe provided a detailed report explaining COVID-19 spread in indoor spaces such as the church sanctuary. The report also included data gained from a model that clarified the effectiveness of various safety measures that can mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The session discussed the report as it related to in-person activities in the church building.
 - **Motion to approve** the closing of the church building for all in-person activities including the December 6th outdoor Advent event but to forgo the vote on the December 16th Advent event until the next Session meeting.
 - **Motion passed** unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

- Revision of the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws
- Session reviewed the revised bylaws drafted by Elder Bill Moore and Peter Watt Morse.
 - **Motion to approve** the amended bylaws and articles of incorporation
 - **Motion passed** unanimously
- Statement Against White Supremacy
 - **Motion to approve** the appointment of Kit Ayars and Carol Emerson to work with the Justice Team on a revision to the statement against white supremacy.
 - **Motion passed** unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS AND COMMITTEE INFORMATION

- More Light Committee
 - Elder Kit Ayars presented to the session a letter of endorsement from the that would provide support for a project by Pitt faculty member Erik Schuckers. The letter was written to the University of Pittsburgh Year of Engagement Funding Committee and would support a pilot writing program for LGBTQ elders in the Pittsburgh Community.

- **Motion to approve** the sending of a letter of endorsement for the pilot writing project proposed by Erik Schuckers.
- **Motion passed** unanimously.
- Congregational Engagement Effort
 - Peter Kaplan submitted a request for approval to continue conversations with church members. The conversations are used to discern what issues are of the most importance to Sixth congregation members
 - **Motion to approve** a request to continue conversations with church members
 - **Motion passed** unanimously
- Pulpit Supply
 - **Motion to approve** Elder Kate Davoli and Pastor Myra Kazanjian provide pulpit supply services as needed.
 - **Motion passed** unanimously

NEXT MEETING: December 16, 2020

Notes from the November Congregational / Corporation Meeting

(NB: notes pulled from yet-approved minutes)

Ruling Elder Bill Moore presented the Amended Articles of Incorporation, which were mailed to the members in keeping with laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.

- **Motion to approve** amended Articles of Incorporation
- **The motion passed** unanimously.

Ruling Elder Bill Moore presented the proposed new By-Laws of the Corporation, and he accepted an amendment from Peter Watt-Morse that permits the annual election meeting of the congregation to be held on a Sunday to be determined by the Session.

- **Motion to approve** amended By-Laws by approved
- **The motion passed** unanimously.

Ruling Elder Jan Myers-Newbury presented the report of the Congregational Nominating Committee.

- **Motion to approve** the following slate of officers for the Session:
 - Class of 2023: Gregory Winner, Lori King, Joe Ashenden, to be installed. Keith Gillogly, to be ordained and installed.
 - There were no nominations from the floor. **The motion passed** unanimously.
- **Motion to approve** the following slate of officers for the Deacons:
 - Class of 2023: Patty Halverson, to be installed. Martha Funderburgh and Gwen Harcar, to be ordained and installed.
 - There were no nominations from the floor. **The motion passed** unanimously.
- **Motion to approve** the following at-large church members serve on the congregational nominating committee for 2021: Chuck Herrold, Tom Twiss, and Leslie Kaplan.
 - There were no nominations from the floor. **The motion passed** unanimously.
- **Motion to dissolve** the 2020 Congregational Nominating committee (Jan Myers-Newbury, Frank Davoli, Keith Gillogly, Kurt Thompson, April Clisura) effective December 31, 2020.
 - **The motion passed** unanimously.

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We are an open and affirming community of faith in Jesus Christ. At home in an urban neighborhood of many faiths, we acknowledge that we are not alone on the path to understanding God. In worship, study, and fellowship, we celebrate our Presbyterian roots and find joy in our diversity. We strive for the grace to love one another as we seek a deeper understanding of life in the Spirit, working for justice and serving as stewards of God's wondrous creation.



The deadline for the January newsletter is Dec. 15th. Please email articles and announcements to Amy in the church office (office@sixthchurch.org).

You can also put printed copies on her desk.

Thank you!

Food for Thought...

“There are a thousand reasons to live this life, every one of them sufficient.” – Marilynne Robinson

“For outlandish creatures like us, on our way to a heart, a brain, and courage, Bethlehem is not the end of our journey but only the beginning - not home but the place through which we must pass if ever we are to reach home at last.” – Frederick Buechner

“Love is what carries you, for it is always there, even in the dark, or most in the dark, but shining out at times like gold stitches in a piece of embroidery” – Wendell Berry

“My wish for you is that you continue. Continue to be who and how you are, to astonish a mean world with your acts of kindness. Continue to allow humor to lighten the burden of your tender heart.” – Maya Angelou