

November 2023



Sixth Sense

From the Pastor:

This month we enter a season of stewardship and also a season of gratitude. Daily, I am thankful that we can share with one another in a variety of ways what our joys and sorrows really are, and how we can care for each other.

Yet another aspect that I appreciate about this community is its desire to consider deeply complex issues of faith. Whether it be in Bible study, from the pulpit, special worship services, prayer vigils and the like-- part of our core identity is to not shy away from challenging conversations. Below you will read a variety of ways we will continue to live out these core identities together.

I look forward to seeing you in worship, on the livestream, on Zoom and out in the neighborhood!

Peace,

Sarah

Worship In November

November 5th – The Rev. Ralph Lowe, Associate Minister for Justice Ministries for Pittsburgh Presbytery, will preach. He and Pastor Sarah will lead communion together.

November 12th – Pastor Sarah will preach and lead worship with an emphasis on Dedication Sunday. Please bring your pledge cards so that we can celebrate all the ways we are committing to the mission and ministry of Sixth in 2024.

November 19th – Pastor Sarah will preach and lead worship with an emphasis on thanksgiving.

November 26th – Elder Kate Davoli will be preaching, and Pastor Sarah will be leading worship.

All Things Advent and Christmas – Mark Your Calendars!

The worship staff and committee are excited about the theme and plan for the Advent/Christmas Season!

This year, we will be using a new resource from [A Sanctified Art](#).

These talented folks have created a helpful focus for churches based on the lectionary texts and world events. This year's theme is, "How Does A Weary World Rejoice?"

continued on the next page...

Here's a bit about the theme:

"Christ was born into a weary world. King Herod ruled the land with a legacy of ruthlessness. The Romans treated the people of Israel with contempt, imposing harsh taxes and land seizures that forced many into subsistence farming. Poverty and destitution were pervasive. And yet, Christ was born, bringing good news of great joy for all people.

As Advent comes again to a weary world, we ask, "How does a weary world rejoice?" From the opening chapters of Luke's Gospel, we have found a few answers: we acknowledge our weariness, we find joy in connection, we allow ourselves to be amazed, we sing stories of hope, we make room, we root ourselves in ritual, and most importantly, we trust our belovedness. In the parallel birth stories of Jesus and John, joy arrives — despite trepidation, fear, or grief. In these stories, we find rhythms for rejoicing. As we move through our series, we hope to create space for acknowledging the weariness of our world while celebrating God's closeness with great joy.

And so, this Advent, we will hold space for our weariness and our joy. We will seek a "thrill of hope" in our hurting world. We will welcome joy — even if, like the prophet Isaiah, we cry out for comfort (Isaiah 40:1). In this weary world, may we find many ways to rejoice."

At the end of November we will share links and hard copies of the Advent devotionals, poems, artwork and prayers for the entire congregation.

Here are the dates you need to know:

December 17th — The Christmas Pageant will be enjoyed in worship, followed by the Christmas Meal in the Chapel.

December 24th — A more informal and cozy worship service celebrating the coming birth of Christ will begin at 10am. A traditional Christmas Eve candlelight and communion service will begin at 7 pm.

December 31st — A Lessons and Carols themed service will begin at 11 am.

2023 CROP Walk Wrap-Up

On October 8, the Sixth Church team successfully completed another CROP Walk, raising money for the hunger and development programs of Church World Service. It's our annual shoe leather demonstration that no one should go hungry.

If you did not yet donate to this wonderful organization, it's not too late! Donate to support our team and its efforts at <https://events.crophungerwalk.org/2023/team/sixth-presbyterian-church-3>. If you prefer to write a check, please make it out to CWS/CROP.

The Pittsburgh East CROP Walk was dedicated this year to Pastor Vincent. The CWS coordinator put together a video of thanks to Vincent for his support to the walk. Walkers Pam Twiss, Peter Kaplan, Cliff Johnson, Nora Johnson, Leila Richards, Peter Koehler, Sue Koehler, and Lauren Ward all sent greetings to Vincent via the video.

Adult Sunday School/Bible Class

Did you ever wonder what a poem that seems purely erotic is doing in the Bible, what such a poem says about the Bible's message? It is questions such as these that the adult Bible class is beginning to consider right now as we study Song of Songs, the sublime song of Solomon, in detail. Newcomers welcome. Contact Bill Guy or

Amy for the Zoom link.

Children and Youth Updates

Christmas Pageant

It's Christmas Pageant Time! Our date this year is **Sunday, December 17** where the children and youth will lead worship and share the Nativity story.

For our planning purposes, let us know how you or your young person would like to participate by using the link below.

Note*: There is space for multiple participants on this form so you only have to fill this out once :) Please respond by November 12.

Sign up here: <https://forms.gle/z7vHYgJP2WTE3zCt9>

We will rehearse from 6:30 to 7 pm on **Thursday, November 30, December 7 and 14**. We will also use some Sunday school and extended session time to prepare as we approach the date as well. We know this is a very busy time for families. Please attend as many of the rehearsal times as you are able.

NOVEMBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

Youth (6th – 12th)

Wednesdays 1,8,15,29 **Weekly Youth Group at ELPC**
4:30 to 7 p.m. Dinner is served at 5. East Liberty Pres. Church use the Highland Ave. entrance.

9 **Youth Service – Hot Metal Bridge/The Table**
5 to 6:30 at Hot Metal Bridge Church. Contact Jenny if you need transportation to and from 6th.

15 **Confirmation Meeting**
12:30 – 2:30 at the church. Lunch will be provided.

30 (Tuesday) **Christmas Pageant Rehearsal**
6:30—7:30 p.m. in the Sanctuary

Students attending youth group at ECLP and serving at Hot Metal must complete our Universal Permission Form found at <http://www.sixthchurch.org/christian-education/>

Contact: Jenny Newman
jennyrnew@gmail.com
412-720-6392

Sith Presbyterian Church

Notes from the October Session Meeting

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

CLERK'S REPORT:

- Worship attendance: 10/1, 90 (in-person), 53 (YouTube); 10/8, 65 (in-person), 64 (YouTube); 10/15, 72 (in-person), 58 (YouTube); 10/22, 84 (in-person), 46 (YouTube)
- The next Presbytery meeting is December 7, 1 p.m. at Union Presby in Robinson – no volunteers to act as commissioner(s).

OMNIBUS MOTION:

- Elder Tom Juring moved that the Omnibus Motion be approved as presented.
 - Motion to approve the Agenda as presented.
 - Motion to approve the minutes of the Session Stated Meeting, September 27, 2023

DEACONS' MEETING/CARE LIST:

- Deacon Linda Davoli joined the meeting to present rationale for the request made by the Deacons. She began by sharing the many ways the Deacons provide assistance to the members of the congregation. Most are in the form of physical and personal assistance, such as providing a meal in time of grieving or helping someone move a few items.
- There are two regular opportunities for outreach that do require monetary assistance. The loose plate offering on Communion Sundays is designated for the Deacons' Fund and can vary from month to month.
 - Homeless Packs are created four times a year and are financed through the Deacons and a subsidy from the Church and Community Committee. The packs are distributed through the Hot Metal Ministry.
 - Meals have been provided routinely to the Hot Metal Community by our members, including youth. The Deacons are making two requests on behalf of this very important mission:
 - The Deacons are requesting the amount of \$730 as compensation for the year 2023 for the Hot Metal Meal Ministry. The approximate amount spent was \$4500, most of which will be covered by the Deacons plus a designated amount from the C & C committee's Rainy-Day Fund.
 - Many thanks to Linda for sharing information about these ministries and other ways the Deacons minister to the community.
 - **Elder Scott Bell moved that the Session approve the \$730 from the special Session fund, to cover the request from the Deacons for Hot Metal Meals for 2023.** The motion passed unanimously.
 - The request for a line item in the upcoming budget was tabled for this meeting. Session agreed that more information should be shared with the congregation about the Deacons' mission(s), about overall homelessness/poverty, and Sixth' involvement with Hot Metal Ministry and their ministry.

PASTORAL REPORT:

- Rev. Robbins will send the notes taken at the Session Retreat shortly.
- The deadline for articles for the newsletter is Thursday night/early Friday morning.
- Kate Davoli would like to preach on November 26. Rev. Robbins will be leading the service. **Elder Joe Ashenden moved that Session approve the preaching of Kate Davoli on November 26, 2023.** The motion passed unanimously.

Rev. Robbins updated the Session on Rev. Kolb and Congregational Meeting plans

NOMINATING COMMITTEE:

- Elder Sara Berg reported that the slate for the PNC has been determined. There were 10 applicants for 7 positions (6 members, 1 alternate). The decision has been made and shared with the applicants. Elder Berg will notify the Session of the slate prior to the congregational meeting on Sunday, October 29, 2023..
- Copies of the PNC slate and the letter from Rev. Kolb will be shared at that meeting.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

- **FINANCE:**
 - Elder Peter Watt-Morse was not able to be at the meeting but sent his report which was referenced.
 - Pledged and non-pledged giving is falling somewhat and is below budget.
 - Worship spending is over budget for the year.
 - Elder Watt-Morse would like the proposed budget requests from committee chairs by Friday, November 17.
 - There may be difficult budget decisions, depending upon stewardship campaign.
- **PERSONNEL/SAFETY TASK FORCE:**
 - Elder Barbara Parees reported that she and Jenny Newman will be attending the Safety Seminar, sponsored by Pittsburgh Presbytery, on Saturday.
- **HOUSE:**
 - Thanks to Elder Juring for handling issues while Harry Kirk, Building Manager, was recovering from minor surgery. This included locating someone to repair the ceiling of the small kitchen within two days of request.
 - Elder Greg Winner reported that they will be looking at purchasing smoke detectors that will be following information from the Safety Task Force.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

The reports were referenced with some points highlighted.

- **Christian Education**
 - Potential formation of youth choir
 - Rev. Robbins will lead an adult Advent series from 10-10:30 a.m. on Sundays during Advent.
- **Church and Community**
 - Reiteration of distribution of Rainy-Day funds between Deacons' support of Hot Metal Meals Ministry and the United Nations Relief Fund and Works Agency for Palestinian Relief,
- **Fellowship**
 - Committee asked that Session make decision about Christmas Dinner-abbreviated meal with opportunity to move around, or be seated for a more formal, pot-luck meal.
 - Following discussion, members of Session agreed that the abbreviated, less crowded option would be wisest choice again this year, on December 17 at 12:15 pm.
- **Justice Team**
 - Peter Gilmore has been named to serve on Pittsburgh Presbytery's newly established Repair and Reconciliation Alliance
 - The "Team" will likely reorganize early in 2024 to become a committee of the congregation. Elders Tom Twiss and Peter Kaplan are already members.
 - The Overture that was to be presented will be tabled until another meeting as there is more information to add and some editing to finish.
- **Stewardship**
 - The names of those who need a reminder to pledge will be sent to members of Session before the next meeting.
 - Campaign is falling into place.
- **Worship**
 - There will be Advent updates via email.
 - Lessons and Carols will be December 31

- Communion servers volunteered for November 5.
- Rev. Robbins expressed appreciation for the staff and worship committee

OLD BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

None

COFFEE HOUR ASSIGNMENTS:

- November 5-Stewardship
- December 3-House and Finance

NEXT MEETING: November 15, 2023, 7 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kathi Robinson-Dassel
Clerk of Session

Notes from the October 29 Congregational Meeting

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

PURPOSE OF MEETING

- **To dissolve the Call of Rev. Dr. Vincent Kolb:**
 - A special meeting of the congregation of the Sixth Presbyterian Church has been duly called and announced by the session, to be held on Sunday October 29, 2023 for the purpose of hearing and acting upon the request of Rev. Dr. Vincent Kolb that Pittsburgh Presbytery dissolve the pastoral relationship between himself and this congregation.

READING OF THE LETTER FROM REV. KOLB TO THE CONGREGATION:

Rev. Brian Wallace of Pittsburgh Presbytery, read the letter, written by Rev. Kolb.

Rev. Wallace shared that this was an unusual situation, difficult for the congregation and for those who worked with Rev. Kolb, unable to have a proper farewell. He also shared that someone from the Pittsburgh Presbytery Committee on Ministry (COM) would be assigned to work through the next steps with Sixth.

- **Motion made from Session that the congregation join with the Rev. Vincent Kolb, requesting that Pittsburgh Presbytery dissolve the pastoral relationship now existing between them, effective on January 31, 2024. The motion passed unanimously and reluctantly.**
- **To hear the report of the Nominating Committee**

Elder Sara Berg, chair of the Nominating Committee, thanked the members of that committee, Peter Gilmore, Patty Halverson, April Clisura, and Mary Crossley, for their work in choosing a representational slate to be part of the Pastoral Nominating Committee (PNC).

- **Motion made from Nominating Committee to approve the following slate for the Pastor Nominating Committee (6+1 alternate); Joseph Ashenden, Kit Ayars, Pamela Bower,**

Erik Fog, Andrew Swensen, Peg Watt-Morse, and Mary Radcliffe as an **Alternate**. Rev. Robbins asked if there were nominations from the floor. Hearing none, a motion was made to close nominations and vote on the slate as presented. **Motions passed unanimously with thanks.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Kathi Robinson-Dassel
Clerk of Session

November Birthdays

November 3	Andrew DeJong	November 21.....	Bob Robinson-Dassel
	Alice Scales	November 22.....	Cosy Cornelius-Bates
November 5	Mary Crossley	November 23.....	Lucy Brennan
	Zylphia Ford	November 25.....	Laura Sindhi
November 6	Megan Fogt	November 27.....	Elena Berg
November 16.....	Gray Brennan		Robin Holtje
	Brian Lazarus	November 29.....	Dan Brennan
November 17.....	Peter Gilmore		

Hey!!

Yes, you! When you turn the page, you’re going to see a whole special Stewardship section. You should definitely read all of it. And definitely also give the Stewardship Committee a hand for all the work they do to make the annual campaign a success. Yaaaay, Stewardship Committee!!



Special Stewardship Section

Welcome to the Special Stewardship Section of the November Sixth Sense! As you have likely read in this year's Stewardship brochure, the theme of this year's campaign is "The Good That Is Ours To Do". In this Special Section, we share Pastor Vincent's original explanation of the theme, and the stories of several church members who brighten their corners of the world.

We have so many stories to share because as Patty Halverson has observed, our theme "fits Sixth Church like a glove". Whether helping the needy or working for change, many members of Sixth have chosen to answer Jesus' call to be Christ-like in the world. You'll hear more stories as the Stewardship Campaign continues.

Your financial support of Sixth Church is essential to sustain and grow our culture of doing good, as well as the other cherished aspects of our church life. Pledging your financial support to Sixth is an important part of the good that is yours to do!

The Stewardship Committee – Patty Halverson, Beth Hazlett, Peter Kaplan, and Barb Parees

Pastor Vincent – Planting the Seed



Photo by Kat Procyk/PublicSource

I was walking in Schenley Park with Peg Watt-Morse, a couple of weeks after Anna, their daughter, had passed away. Peg mentioned that she would go back to work eventually, so that she could "continue to do good in her little part of the world."

That immediately got me thinking about a possible stewardship theme, "**The Good That Is Ours to Do.**"

When we are young, we harbor great dreams for ourselves. We imagine that we will grow up to become the President of the United States, fly to the moon, play professional sports, run a marathon, or circle the globe. Some of those dreams come true, many times they do not. But

what we always are given is an opportunity to make a difference in our small corner of the world, with the gifts we have been given, the talents we have honed, the skills we have mastered, and the faith that compels us to a life of service.

There was also a time when the church was convinced that we would conquer the world, that every knee would bow and every tongue would confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. But now it is evident in the early 21st century that God prefers that a diversity of religious faiths always exist. Our task as followers of Jesus is not to convert the whole world; our task is to be Christ-like in the world. Nobody else can be that for us.

We know that, in our time, there are more conversations about the church's irrelevance. While we at Sixth are blessed with remarkable strengths, we know that we often feel that our strength can seldom match the demands and needs of the world in which we live. The gift of such a position is that it reminds us of our dependence on God. We choose to do the good that is ours to do and see what God will do with that.

So, in the fall of 2023, our stewardship campaign theme could be, "**The Good That Is Ours to Do.**"

Amy Whipple – View from the Church Office

Insert So, I occupy an interesting place in the life of our church. On Sunday mornings, I'm the person who has sat in the back pew for the past 15 years, looking at some truly great heads of hair. During the week, I am your friendly neighborhood church secretary and, for the better part of this article, that's the role from which I'll be writing. As a visual reminder of which version of me is writing, I am changing the color of the font. Purple is a good color for a church secretary, right?

When someone asks me about my job, I always say how much I love the people.

For the past eight years behind the desk in that office over there, I've gotten to see and hear the remarkable members of Sixth as they navigate their lives and the world, the things they know and the things they want to.

My job has meant spending a lot of time on the phone: talking to congregants who want to make sure they understand the difference between gender and sexuality or who want to check in on the life of the church when they've been away or who are grieving one of the seemingly endless number of people we've lost in the past two years.

It has meant witnessing how all of you have insisted on making good on the promise you continually make to love one another: whether finding ways to stay connected when you had to be apart or opening the doors to the community in the face of local and national tragedies or praying with your feet in the name of righting systemic injustices.

It has meant knowing that there are so many little things you all do that add up to become the big things that make Sixth a beloved home. I don't know that I could ever name them all, so here are just a few:

It's Tom finding someone to fix the cracked ceiling in the kitchen and Greg making sure the furnace gets repaired. Barb tending to the staff and Erik paying the bills and Kirk setting up for the livestream. Kate refilling the pews with yellow envelopes and working pens and Myra making the coffee for after worship. Leslie ordering flowers to decorate the sanctuary for Christmas and Easter and Pam keeping tabs on the candle supply. One Linda teaching Sunday school and another Linda emailing the choir with recordings of their upcoming music. Patty scheduling the ushers and another Pam readying the acolyte and water pourer to walk down the aisle. A second Tom sorting the offering and Jan and Sharon making sure you're fed after every funeral and, one wonderful afternoon, a wedding, too.

It's Sue and Pamela organizing our church's participation in the CROP Walk and Mary delivering a collection of single use plastic to be recycled. Gwen filling out Lazarus Fund paperwork and Lori photocopying letters demanding that our elected officials pass sensible gun legislation. Lynn and Eliot leading the Deacons in making bags for unhoused people and the youth group serving dinner at Hot Metal. Nora marching for clean water and a second Kate taking Flat Jesus to Pride and a third Tom arranging speakers for panels about racial equity.

It's Peter signing up to be liturgist and another Peter maintaining our finances and yet another Peter running wires through the ceiling and somehow one other Peter collecting testimonials for the Stewardship brochure.

Which is also how/why you've been reading this article. Thanks for doing that!

I'm going to switch back to the regular black font before I conclude.



Whew! It's nice to be the congregant who sits in the back pew. And it's pretty great to be here at Sixth, isn't it? I think so, too. I look forward to another year of being part of the little things that make up the big things that make up our beloved church home.

April Clisura - Caring for the Earth



Wow, I have been a member of Sixth for over 5 years now! Having come from a church where I did a lot of work, I told myself I would join just ONE committee at a time. However, after a couple of years, I found myself drawn into the work of the Fellowship Committee and the Earth Care Committee.

Taking care of the environment is important to me for both spiritual and practical reasons. Around the time I had become drawn to Earth Care, I had become aware of that committee's efforts to provide hard-to-recycle item collections right here at the church. Efforts at "zero waste" and recycling more effectively had already been an important project for me outside of church with the folks at Pittsburghers Against Single-Use Plastic (PASUP) and Clean Air Council. Earth Care committee members were also engaged in policy discussions around waste, pollution, and environmental justice. I was impressed that the committee was engaged in a process of inquiry, delving into the messy issues, and listening to many voices.

All this reminds me of how I see Sixth taking seriously to "do the good that is ours to do." The active work of various committees at Sixth is an expression of God's love for the world, God's care for each and every person through Christ, and the

Holy Spirit, when we work together as a team to do good, stop harm, and pray about our discernment of the issues. This makes me want to contribute my time and also support Sixth financially.

It also reminds me of how Earth Care approaches its area of stewardship. As Rev. Kolb stated, "...we know that we often feel that our strength can seldom match the demands and needs of the world in which we live" and "we choose to do the good that is ours to do and see what God will do with that." The challenges to our environment right now can seem more daunting than ever, especially with Global Warming and the relentless tendency of powerful interests to somehow get the best of the situation. We see giant corporations making money off of vast solar farms that threaten the ecology of the Southwestern deserts while modest-income homeowners and renters still don't have solar panels to lower their energy bills, and we see electric car companies taking off while we still lack adequate public transportation. This tells us that we must keep advocating for good works and doing the things we can "at home," as so many members of the church did with our recent Plastic Reduction Challenge and as the Committee does by donating to some really impactful local organizations.

Last but not least, the call to "do the good that is ours to do" should remind us to be mindful of our limitations and partner or support others to get the needed expertise or resources for our work. We should also remind ourselves to rest when needed so we don't stumble in other areas of our lives that need attention. After all, not all the good is ours to do all of the time!

Chuck Herrold and Jan Myers-Newbury - Loaves and Fishes

"Taking the five loaves and the two fish, Jesus ... blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled ..." —Matthew 14:19-20. In the words of one Presbyterian pastor: What if the message here is that as Jesus cares for us, and we, his disciples, are to care for others, and that by so doing, there is enough caring to go around, to meet the needs of everyone; a spirit of generosity, the sharing of who we are, and what we have.

We have for the past few years volunteered for the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank variously delivering food, packing boxes at the warehouse, and participating in drive-up or walk-in distributions of food in various communities in the Pittsburgh area. In our wealthy country, where such large amounts of food are wasted, there are nonetheless many who are food insecure. The GPCFB addresses this issue directly, and we feel that our participation is an act of Christian caring and generosity. This is "The Good That is Ours to Do."

Thanks - Chuck and Jan



Left to right: Lori King, Martha Funderburgh, Lori Swensson, Judy Schryer, Diane Scanlan, and Marianne Novy (Church of the Redeemer)

The Gun Safety Committee - Standing Against Gun Violence

Members of the Gun Safety Committee believe we are called by our faith to stand up to gun violence and injustice in our communities. Gun violence affects everyone, but the burden falls most heavily on communities of color. We joined this committee because it provides a way to reach beyond our walls to the wider community and show those suffering because of gun violence that someone cares, and that we will work with them to build a caring community.

The committee's goals are: 1) to invite others to join our work so that MANY more voices will be heard by our legislators; and 2) we ask for sensible gun safety laws to be enacted. To borrow from Pastor Sarah's August 20th sermon, we are "turning our concerns to action."

As one member says, "I love being part of a faith community that is not limited to Sunday mornings but believes all parts of our shared lives are holy." That is why we give our time, energy, and financial support to our church home, Sixth Presbyterian.

We welcome others to join our committee and help us get sensible gun safety legislation enacted.

Jason Shifflet – “Raising Holy Sparks”

Living as a Christian and attending worship in Squirrel Hill lends itself to being open to other faiths and diverse concepts of the Holy. One concept I have tried to adopt over the years is the Jewish idea of “raising holy sparks”. I initially thought of this as doing something grand, such as ending homelessness, fixing hunger, or alleviating housing injustice. Being introduced to the Lazarus fund by Sixth has shown me another way, the God of the small.

Giving out micro-grants of \$400 for housing and utilities help will not solve all the world’s problems. However, it is not in vain either. Each grant creates a human-holy connection between the interviewer and the applicant. “Someone cares,” I was told during one interview. The applicant expected me to be condescending, like others had been to them. That is not Sixth’s way. Being open, affirming, choosing the preferential Christ-like option for the poor is the Sixth way.

I have always felt supported at Sixth in this ministry, not for the grand, but with one spark at a time, for the God of the small things. Thank you Sixth for showing me the small way. Although I am not in a position to make a grand impact on Sixth’s funds, I know I can raise sparks through giving in any small way. Let’s raise holy sparks together!

In Christ,

Jason Shifflet, Co-chair Lazarus Fund, Pittsburgh Presbytery



Leila Richards – Visiting the Prisoners



After hearing Pastor Vincent speak several years ago at a Metro Urban Ministry program at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, I thought, "I'm heading to whatever church he's from." At Sixth, I've encountered a haven where I've found kind, generous friends and committed activists. Having lived and worked for three years under Israeli military occupation in Lebanon, Gaza, and the West Bank, I'm particularly impressed that Sixth, through the Church & Community Committee, donates to Sabeel, an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, to promote unity among them, and lead them to act for justice and peace.

I worked in a prison clinic in New York City as a medical student because I wanted to practice my new medical skills, and because I was drawn to any opportunity to see what our society looked like to those who were, in a manner of speaking, on the outside looking in. A few years later I heard many stories about prison life when I worked as a doctor in a refugee camp in Lebanon. Both of my young Palestinian translators, like most of our male medical staff, had been imprisoned by Israel for over a year after its invasion of the country.

Prisoner Visitation and Support (PVS) is a nationwide organization of volunteers who visit federal and military prisoners. Founded in 1968 to support imprisoned conscientious objectors, the Federal Bureau of Prisons granted PVS access to all Federal prisons, and in 1975 the Department

of Defense granted PVS access to military prisons. PVS has received endorsements from the NAACP and the agencies of several Christian and Jewish religious denominations, including the PC(USA).

After hearing about the work of PVS I contributed to it for several years before finally deciding to become a volunteer myself. I'd just finished my orientation to the program when the Covid epidemic began, so for the next two years the prison was in lockdown, and I corresponded instead with the two or three prisoners I'd been assigned to. Since then, in-person visits have resumed, and I meet face to face with three inmates every month or so.

As I was trying to recall a Bible verse I'd heard about prisoners, an inmate I was visiting at the Federal Correctional Institution in Elkton, Ohio quoted those words to me from the Letter to the Hebrews, 13:3: "Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them."

The prison I go to in Elkton is a minimum-security prison. Some of the inmates I visit are facing long sentences and have never had a visitor, either because their families live far away or because they were estranged from them. When we meet, they do most of the talking! In a letter to PVS one inmate wrote, "I have no one on the outside; I get no visits. I have no one to talk to. I'm in solitary confinement. I just want to talk to someone."

As he looked at me, wearing a bright blue shirt in a room full of inmates in khaki-clad jumpsuits, an inmate I visited last month, who'd been on the PVS waiting list for three years, said "Now I can see colors!" I had literally brightened his day.

"I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me. (Matthew 25:36)"

Sara Berg – Putting Faith In Action

Adversity, such as poverty, often leads us to question the meaning of our faith, and in our family, we have found meaning through the service of others. After all, what is faith without action? Over the years, our family's commitment to serve has propelled us to invite others to join us in different volunteer opportunities.

In 2008, our church family started what is now a 15-year-old relationship with the community of El Porvenir in León, Nicaragua. Groups of youth and adults traveled with us to this very remote community for mutual exchanges. We got to experience first-hand the effects of living in abject poverty, lacking running water and electricity, having limited educational opportunities and medical care and being fully dependent on farming. As the political climate in Nicaragua becomes increasingly complex, and the realities of global warming affect the livelihood of this coffee farming community, Sixth continues to support them through our Church and Community funds.

Giving to Sixth is not just about contributing to the sustenance and life of our church, but it is also about our relationships with others. When our family pledges to the stewardship campaign, we know that we are also contributing to the service of others.

Even if we don't have the capacity to volunteer with these organizations, we know that we are contributing to their mission through our church's benevolence. That is living our faith in action!



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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 December newsletter is November 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...

"Any Common Desolation," Ellen Bass

can be enough to make you look up
at the yellowed leaves of the apple tree, the few
that survived the rains and frost, shot
with late afternoon sun. They glow a deep
orange-gold against a blue so sheer, a single bird
would rip it like silk. You may have to break
your heart, but it isn't nothing
to know even one moment alive. The sound
of an oar in an oarlock or a ruminant
animal tearing grass. The smell of grated ginger.
The ruby neon of the liquor store sign.
Warm socks. You remember your mother,
her precision a ceremony, as she gathered
the white cotton, slipped it over your toes,
drew up the heel, turned the cuff. A breath
can uncoil as you walk across your own muddy yard,
the big dipper pouring night down over you, and everything
you dread, all you can't bear, dissolves
and, like a needle slipped into your vein –
that sudden rush of the world.