



Shared Hope, Shared Belonging

This Advent, we're exploring our shared sense of expectancy and attention. In doing so, we might understand who we are together as one body.

Attention and Advent: What we give our attention to actually changes how we experience reality. *See page 3.*

Anti-Racism and Hope: Read three unique perspectives on the future of anti-racism work in Catonsville. *See page 8.*

Plant-based Potluck: You're invited to a tasty night of plant-based foods. Explore the environmental impact of human diets. *See page 7.*

Dare to Dream: Laurie White retells the story of the Envision Board, and reminds us how hope in the future sustain us. *See page 12.*

Attention

Ken Kovacs | *Pastor*

For several years now, I've been interested in the phenomenon of *attention*. It was the French philosopher and Christian mystic Simone Weil (1909-1943) who struck me with this astonishing claim: "Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity." What we give our attention to is an expression of love and grace.

And what Weil did not know is that the object of our attention actually changes how we experience reality, and it changes the neural structure of the brain, which is plastic and constantly changing. Daniel J. Siegel, clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine, has written extensively on this process (see *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation*). "Where attention goes," he explains, "neural firing flows, and neural connection grows." Attention is essentially connecting, and where connections are made—in our brains or hearts, with people or

places or things, or in prayer—we are changed. This means that we ought to give special thought and care to what we attend.

Perhaps the writer who has done the most to help us understand how we experience reality is Iain McGilchrist. I have come to value his writings and insights. He's one of the great geniuses of our time whose thoughts will have an enormous impact for centuries.

Psychiatrist, neuroscience researcher, philosopher (with a deep appreciation for Christianity), and literary scholar Gilchrist wrote a groundbreaking book, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Modern World* (2009). This was followed by his magisterial two-volume work *The Matter with Things: Our Brains, Our Delusions and the Unmaking of the World* (2021), of which one Oxford

Adult Education

Advent: Facing the Darkness Together

Sunday, December 3 and 10 at 9:00 a.m. in the Library | Led by Ken Kovacs

"Advent," says Fleming Rutledge, "begins in the dark." And, therefore, it is not for the faint of heart. At the midnight of the Christian year, the season of advent is rife with dark, gritty realities, suffering, sin, alienation, oppression, and the apparent hiddenness and absence of God. Three articles will guide us through this season, we who might fear the dark.

Advent reminds us that God's light shines in the darkness (John 1:5), but we might first have to face the darkness to see it. Join us for a rich, unconventional take on the meaning of this season. Visit catonsvillepres.org/belonging to start reading articles.

professor says, “This is one of the most important books ever published. And yes, I do mean ever.” (For more about McGilchrist, see channelmcgilchrist.com; there are many video interviews with him on YouTube.)

McGilchrist defines attention as “the manner in which our consciousness is disposed toward whatever else exists.” He writes, “The choice we make of how we dispose our consciousness is the ultimate creative act: it renders the world what it is. It is, therefore, a moral act: it has consequences.” And this insight has substantial theological implications, I think, for how we walk in faith and face the world.

Yes, Advent is about expectancy and waiting, even active waiting. But this Advent, I want to be more conscious of what I’m *attending*, where I’m placing my attention, what, and who is receiving my attention. This is serious business. McGilchrist explains:

“Attention changes the world. How [we] attend to it changes what it is [we] find there. ... Attention is not just another ‘cognitive function’: it is... the disposition adopted by one’s consciousness towards the world. Absent, present, detached, engaged, alienated, empathic, broad or narrow, sustained or piecemeal, it

therefore has the power to alter whatever it meets. Since our consciousness plays some part in what comes into being, the play of attention can both create and destroy, but it never leaves its object unchanged. So how you attend to something — or don’t attend to it — matters a very great deal.”

“Seek,” Jesus said, “and you will find.” May we attend, find, and meet him anew this Advent, may he be born again in us this Christmas, and light our way into Epiphany and beyond.



A Communal Vocation and Invocation

Susan Jaeger | Session Member and participant in Contemplative Prayer and Meditation

Note to readers: as part of the Messenger's recent focus on personal experience, diverse perspectives, and theological reflection, you might see additional articles like this one. As part of the Messenger's shift in focus, Susan Jaeger was asked to share her thoughts on prayer and contemplation in this Advent season, where so much yearns for God's deliverance. A special thanks to Brenda Logue and Barbara Rice, who have reinvigorated Contemplative Prayer and Meditation. If you find this article interesting, consider trying out the weekly Monday night gatherings at 7:00 p.m.

How do we pray for a world in convulsions? When we feel overwhelmed, perplexed, and weak, where do we even begin in our praying? Are not the crises of the world—wars in Ukraine and Gaza, climate change, mass shootings, violent threats to democracy, immigrants massing at our borders, economic inequality—too huge for our little hearts and minds and prayers?



Romans 8 is considered by many Christians to be the greatest chapter in Paul's greatest letter. Within that chapter, there is a dark and strange passage that can show us the way to pray in our puzzlement and perplexity:

“We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the Creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

ROMANS 8:22-27

In this passage Paul describes a threefold “groaning.” First we are told that creation itself is “groaning” in the travail or “labor pains” of the new creation that has begun in Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection (Rom 8:22). Then, secondly, it is the groaning of the church, with which we ourselves

“groan inwardly” as we wait for our own final “adoption” when we will be fully drawn into Christ’s risen life (Rom 8:23). Thirdly, and most astonishingly, God’s own self—the “Spirit”—groans, pleading and interceding on our behalf with “sighs too deep for words” (Rom 8:26). (The Greek word translated as the “sighs” of the Spirit is the same word as the “groans” of creation and ourselves.) This image of a woman in labor pains, struggling to give birth, was a well known biblical and Jewish theme of the “messianic woes,” which held that God’s purposes of new creation would come about through a period of intense suffering.

N.T. Wright, widely regarded as one of our generation's most influential biblical scholars, has written a new book on Romans 8, *Into the Heart of Romans: A Deep Dive Into Paul's Greatest Letter*. Romans 8 figured prominently also in Wright's 2020 book, *God and the Pandemic*. In these books Wright explains that Romans 8 is full of faith, hope, and love, and that the chapter both begins and ends with celebration: "There is therefore no condemnation," the first verse announces; and nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord," the last verse concludes.

The "groaning" passage in the middle of Romans 8, Wright says, is frequently skipped over and viewed as an aside, as an odd and irrelevant add-on. Nevertheless, in an interpretation that is deeply encouraging for those of us who find ourselves at a loss as we try to pray, Wright argues that so far from being an aside, verses 22-27 are unique in scripture and are actually the climax, the very heart of the chapter. The suffering prayer described there – the deepest, most incomprehensible groanings that emerge from the innermost depths of our own being – forms our vocation: "This isn't just about 'going through a rough time.' Nor is it simply 'something we occasionally have to put up with.' Paul is talking about our vocation not just to get through difficult times but to stand in prayer where the world is in pain so that God's own spirit may be present, and intercede, right there."

Wright's understanding of Romans 8:22-27 can offer great comfort to us as we try to be faithful to our vocation of being people of suffering prayer and lament. In our weakest moments, when we try to pray but get lost in confusion and overwhelmed with sadness, that is not something to be ashamed of. We are not off-track at that point. Indeed, at such times, according to Paul, we could hardly be closer to God. As Wright affirms, "God himself comes into his world, into the hearts and lives of puzzled and frightened believers who don't know what to pray for as they ought, so that precisely in their prayer of unknowing, their prayer from within the darkness of their own lives and of the world around them, God himself will be at work, interceding from within his creation."

In my own seeking to be a person of prayer, I am very grateful that CPC's Contemplative Prayer Group has recently resumed in-person gatherings, after three years of meeting on Zoom during the pandemic. Weekly Zoom sessions do continue to be offered, but there is now also a monthly in-person meeting in the France Room. It is uplifting to gather with others and to have a communal experience of invoking the presence of God's Spirit. Contemplative prayer draws our awareness to the deep presence and movement of God in our hearts, minds, and bodies. The focus is on stillness and silence, spending the time on listening rather than speaking. At the first two in-person gatherings in October and

November, low lighting, candles, meditative music, comfortable chairs, and an opening and closing bell all helped to create a lovely atmosphere free from the distractions of phone and household. (Even so, there was plenty of honest acknowledgment in our group of our stubbornly wandering minds. We are all growing in our prayer habits.)

Leader Brenda Logue calmly and graciously led us through practices of meditation, silence, and prayers of "loving-kindness." Both of these two sessions were wonderfully peaceful and restorative.

In John 15, Jesus asks us to dwell in his presence: "Abide in me as I abide in you," Jesus says. "Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." We are called to stand in prayer where the world is in pain. As we strive to be faithful to that calling, may the Spirit of Christ come alongside us and help us to abide.

For Further Reading

N.T. Wright, *Into the Heart of Romans: A Deep Dive Into Paul's Greatest Letter* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2023), especially pages 132-153.

N.T. Wright, *God and the Pandemic* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), especially pages 38-51.



Stephen Ministry is Here for You

Charre Symms | *Stephen Ministry Leader*

Our congregation joined the worldwide Stephen Ministry organization in 2021 to provide one-on-one, Christ-centered care to individuals in our church and broader community. Anyone who is going through a tough time and feels the need to confide in someone outside their close circle can request the services of a Stephen Minister caregiver. A Stephen Leader will meet with the potential care recipient to determine if Stephen Ministry is a good fit for their concerns. If so, and the individual agrees to receive care, they will be matched with a caregiver and meet about an hour each week as long as is needed. This service is highly confidential. Only the recipient, caregiver, and Stephen Leader know the identities of those providing and receiving care.

Stephen Ministry is available for those in our church and community. You don't have to be a member or attend our church. Providing care to those outside our church is a way we can share God's love with the world around us.

Words from a Care Receiver

After several months of meeting with her Stephen Minister, one of our care receivers shared how she received support through a variety of challenges.

“My life journey has included many joys and challenges. One of the hardest challenges was my youngest son's diagnosis with an emotional disability. I felt at times that I needed to be strong, keeping my troubles from impacting work and from being shared with others outside my family circle. It was often overwhelming, but I did not see any other way get through my challenges. I stopped going to church for awhile because I could not understand how a loving God could burden a child with so much emotional pain.

As hard as this was, the last few years brought on additional challenges when I had to be the caregiver for my aging parents. Although I had siblings who were going through this with me, they live on the West Coast. I had to navigate how to care for my parents, which is a completely different dynamic than parenting your

children. I shared my situation with a church member, who asked if I would be interested in being paired with a Stephen Minister. I took her up on the suggestion because I knew that I was trying to navigate a very challenging situation.

Stephen Ministry has been a blessing and provided me with the space to talk about my challenges and all these difficult circumstance without judgment, anyone trying to tell me what I should do, or having to navigate family dynamics. I am grateful to be able to talk with a fellow Christian, a person that I consider a friend, and someone who listens without judgment.”

How You Can Support Stephen Ministry

It’s often hard for the person who is struggling to recognize their own need for support. If you know someone in the congregation, your family, or community who could benefit from Stephen Ministry, suggest that they contact one of the Stephen Leaders for more information.

We plan to begin training a new class of Stephen Ministers in 2024. If you are interested in serving as a caregiver, talk with one of the Stephen Leaders.

Pray for this important ministry. As our Stephen Ministry moves ahead, may God’s love and abundant blessings be with all of those who receive and give care.

You can connect with Stephen Ministry and Stephen Ministry Leaders by emailing Dorothy Boulton at dboulton@catonsvillepres.org.

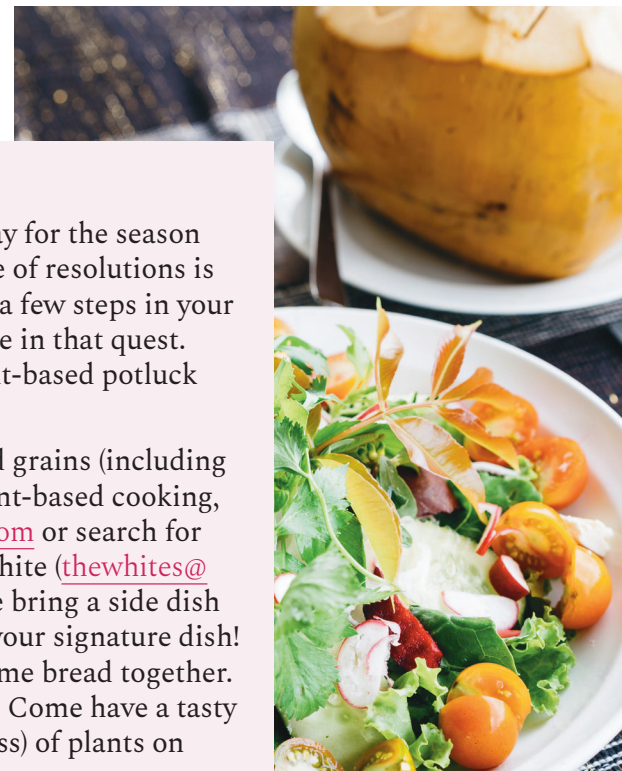


▲ After nearly thirty years at CPC, Ginger Daiger retired on October 20! We celebrated her in worship and wish her the very best.

You’re Invited: Plant-based Potluck

January is that time of year when the festive decorations are put away for the season and the sparkle seems to fade. A new year settles in and the pressure of resolutions is almost forgotten. Consider making 2024 the year you decide to take a few steps in your walk to live a little more gently on Earth. You might feel a little alone in that quest. Fortunately, the Creation Care Team has the perfect solution: a plant-based potluck dinner on Saturday, January 27, 2024 at 5:30 p.m.!

Plant-based meals are made solely of vegetables, beans/legumes, and grains (including pasta) and usually do not contain dairy. If you’re unfamiliar with plant-based cooking, you can try these resources to find some recipes: [ForksOverKnives.com](https://www.forksoverknives.com) or search for “plant-based recipes” on your favorite recipe site. Contact Laurie White (thewhites@brickhouse112.com) if you’re stuck for ideas or just perplexed. Please bring a side dish or main dish to share. Try a few recipes in the weeks before to find your signature dish! It will be a perfect time of year to focus on some green and break some bread together. Laurie is looking for people to help with set up and clean up as well. Come have a tasty meal that benefits the planet, and experience the power (and tastiness) of plants on January 27, 2024!



In the expectancy of Advent, we're engaging our neighbors, too.

Though started at Catonsville Presbyterian Church, the Dismantling Racism Committee (DRC) has expanded over the years to include representation from Grace AME, Christian Temple, and non-denominational members.

The impact and scope of racism can make any attempt to address it seem overwhelming. That is one reason why the work of this committee requires—more than perhaps anything else—a sense of hope. But hope can be a very personal thing, so we asked members from each of our committee churches to respond to a single question:

“What is your hope for anti-racist work in Catonsville?”

Tracy B. Jones, Grace AME: “Courageous, faith-filled people, who are seeking answers and methods toward its mission of dismantling racism.”

The existence and work of the DRC brings hope for influencing anti-racism. I define hope as a confident expectation and desire for something good in the future. Because of the sincere intentions and diligent efforts of the DRC, there will be an impact on Catonsville, the surrounding area, and beyond.

As educator Nannie Helen Burroughs stated, “Anything that is as old as racism is in the bloodline of the nation. It is not a superficial thing — that attitude is in the blood, and we have to educate about it.”

Since the origin of the DRC was based in and continues on a quest of education, there is reason for hope. There is little to no shifting in racism in Catonsville or anywhere if we continue blindly in the status quo and if everyone remains in their silos of perceived protection, safety, and isolation. Such a duck-and-cover approach to living is understandable because dismantling something that is institutionalized is a tall order! Akin to a fortified brick wall, tackling racism with our current tools is a formidable foe. My hope for the DRC is that education is occurring, tools are being examined and tried, and conversations are becoming more open and honest. With collaboration, determination, and a modicum of necessary grace around a topic so sensitive, the work is being fine tuned by courageous, faith-filled people who are seeking answers and methods towards its mission of dismantling racism.

Laurie Lane, Christian Temple: “May our committee continue to grow and be inspired to provide new opportunities for learning, facilitate experiences that will open minds, increase justice, and build relationships that bring positive change to Catonsville and beyond.”

I grew up in a rural area of Howard County where almost everyone I met looked like I did. My years in college and a career teaching elementary school did little to change that. But mission trips and volunteering at a nonprofit in Baltimore City finally gave me opportunities to build relationships with people who looked different from me and who lived in very different circumstances. As I heard their stories, my perspective began to change and I started recognizing the white privilege I was born into, yet could take no credit for.

The DRC has given Christian Temple and me opportunities to listen, read, go on trips, attend lectures, and continue to learn in so many ways. Meeting people in person or on Zoom, working on projects, or attending educational events continues to change me. I now believe relationships are the very best way to break down barriers of fear and distrust and build understanding and respect between people instead. Recent events around the world and in this country highlight the critical need for stronger respect and understanding between people with diverse backgrounds. The DRC gives me hope for our future, with the expectation that we *can* work together with God to create a better world for my young grandchildren and future generations. May our committee continue to grow and be inspired to provide new opportunities for learning, facilitate experiences that will open minds, increase justice, and build relationships that bring positive change to Catonsville and beyond. Our descendants are looking back at us, counting on us to grow and work together with a common goal: that someday there might truly be peace on Earth.

Jeff Bolognese, Catonsville Presbyterian: “[A] future voiced in the words *equity, respect, justice, and thriving.*”

A couple of years ago, as our committee continued to grow, we struggled to identify a shared vision of what we, as a group, wanted to accomplish. We knew we all wanted to “dismantle racism” but what exactly did that mean? We decided that one way to help us gain focus would be to create a mission statement for the committee. And so, like any good committee, we formed a sub-committee to start

You can make this future a reality

Peace & Justice and Dismantling Racism Committees are revitalizing and updating the Church and Society area of the Library. We are looking for books that make you THINK.

Church members are invited to help create this new resource library. Please donate books that fit the broad theme of education on diversity, dismantling racism, social and structural change, and community building and revitalization. We want books for all ages—young children, youth, and adults—that inspire, welcome, and challenge.

These thought-provoking books will be available without any need for a check out system (similar to a Little Free Library). If we end up with multiple copies of a title, they will be given to our Dismantling Racism partners: Grace AME Church and Christian Temple. We expect to receive books from them as well. Some books will be purchased but we will begin with donations.

To share your recommendations and make a difference in Catonsville, bring your donations to the Library on Sunday mornings or drop them off in the church office during the week!

Shared Hope, Shared Belonging

crafting one. In early February 2022, after several weeks of discussion, brainstorming, debate, editing, and re-editing, the DRC unanimously approved and officially published this Mission Statement:

As concerned people of faith centered in the Catonsville community, we see the impact racism has on societal systems and how it erects barriers that divide our communities and marginalize our neighbors. We listen to and accept the truth of racism's long-standing, systemic impact and boldly speak that truth to the world. We educate ourselves and others by highlighting the explicit and implicit biases that keep us from seeing and acting on the racism in ourselves and society. Therefore, we seek to promote equity, respect, and justice in our communities and respect everyone's basic right to exist and thrive.

There's a lot packed into those 99 words. First, there is recognition of the scope and challenge of racism in our communities. Next, there is an understanding that before we act we must see and listen to our neighbors. Then there is recognition that we need to educate ourselves before we seek to educate others. And lastly, there is hope for the future voiced in the words equity, respect, justice, and thriving.

My personal hope for this committee is that we continue to live into this mission statement. I would like it to be a lodestar that will lead us to a place where we collectively recognize that we need each other and that "what happens to you matters to me." I believe that these words can be a catalyst to help us demolish the artificial racial barriers that we erect and help us finally recognize that there is far more uniting us together than differences that divide us. My hope is that, emboldened by these words, we can empower people in the Catonsville community and beyond to see that we are all beloved children of God.



The Fill the Truck event on September 16 provided vital relief to the Catonsville Emergency Assistance and Grace AME food pantries. We're grateful for the Deacons and Mission Committee members who facilitated our involvement.

What Does Advent Have to Do With Deacons?

Tom Enokian | *Deacon Moderator*

As we live in a world of political, civil and religious unrest, I might argue that the world wasn't very different when Jesus was alive. As human beings, we seem to focus on what is wrong with everything. And yes, it is easy to lose hope. However, with Advent soon approaching and as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, we are reminded that hope is not lost.

How does this relate to the ministry of Deacons? As the Deacon Moderator, it is a humbling experience to listen to our Deacons discuss what more they can do for others. It is even more humbling to watch them put words into actions. As we get ready for Advent and prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, I want to take a moment to share some of the ways the Deacons are providing hope and touching the lives of others. Our Deacons continue to assist the Mission Committee with their food drives, collect and distribute warm clothing for the Westside Men's Emergency Shelter, send care cards to our college students, send Shepherd cards to hurting members of our congregation, and so much more. There is really too much to name.

And so, on behalf of our Deacons, I want to wish you all a very happy holiday season and close with a line from *Lord of the Rings* that's very apropos: "Even the smallest person can change the course of history."



What an Epiphany!

Laurie White | *Creation Care Team*

Did a light bulb just go off in your head? Was it an incandescent light bulb or a LED light bulb? Light bulbs are a very easy way for people to make a positive impact in mitigating climate change. An incandescent bulb (think your parent's generation light bulb) uses 60 watts of energy but emits only 5% of that energy as light, wasting 90% as heat. An LED light bulb takes only 10 watts to operate and creates 3 times as much light as an incandescent bulb (15% of its energy). If every American household replaced one incandescent light bulb with an LED, we would reduce greenhouse gas emissions equal to 800,000 cars. LED light bulbs last 3 times as long, leading to electric bill savings that offset the cost of an LED bulb. Simply turning off lights as you leave a room can do a world of good (and do **the** world a lot of good). We all care for creation — and we can care even more by incorporating a few adjustments to our environments!

Envisioning with Hope in the Heart

Laurie White | *Envision Board Chair*

We were given a gift ten years ago: the enormous gift of Bob Riley's bequest.

While that in and of itself was stunning, it was really cutting edge for the Session to establish the Envision Board. To me, this was the greatest gift of it all. It was safe to settle on financial security, but instead, our congregation decided to do something far more potent. We desired to create hope and joy in a world that needs nothing more than hope and joy.

It was a hot evening following the Freddie Gray riots when the board met for the first time. We felt a huge responsibility, knowing that the possibilities were endless should we establish a way to use this gift for change. All nine of us understood that it was time to walk a new path.

Sitting on the board in those early days was the most exciting and expansive work that I have ever performed. Our discussions were open and free flowing; we listened well to each other, argued until we built consensus, dreamed of what could be, and we laughed — a lot. The process was creative and enormous. We understood that those early days would set this church on a course that would amplify our mission and ministry. I felt like we were in the wild west, forging a new path and new way of “being” the Church. Would it work?

Every spring, we hear about the gifts granted to a variety of organizations, including those that stay within this congregation. We felt proud that we seeded new ministries and accomplished improvement projects. We enriched and transformed the lives of those who just needed a little bit of hope: mothers who needed a maternity ward in the Democratic Republic of Congo,

earthquake victims in Haiti, recovering addicts who required dental services, teachers in Nepal, clients of Catonsville Emergency Assistance, and so many others. But as we exit that season of excitement and hope, we naturally start to forget those stories. It is easy to forget that our community is making a difference beyond these walls through the Envision process.

Perhaps that process feels a bit hands off because the board reviews the requests. It might feel like a mysterious process and separate us from our day-to-day opportunities of mission and participation. Over the past ten years, the board became very good at the gift-giving process. But now, we are exploring how to be more expansive and widespread by bringing the envisioning process to you. It is time to focus on our hope as

a congregation — what do we want to change in our world? What do we dare to envision? What can we accomplish? And what is gnawing at our hearts to be changed, yearning to bring hope both big and small?

All of this is rather daunting: coming up with an idea, filling out an application, and getting information together. It's a lot for an individual to take on alone. But you're not alone.

You are part of a community, and this church is the perfect place to talk about these things. We are aware of the needs of the world; we are smart, creative, and helpful. Talk to friends or a board member about what you see, and ask for help so your dream can come alive. The Envision process allows you to take those thoughts and translate them into actual projects. It just takes the first step of listening to what you hope for the world.

Hope sustains us. What bitter people we would be without knowing there's a better way! In this church community, we can enact change individually or together. This Advent, focus on that hope candle and rely ask yourself, “What is it that I hope for the world? How can I make that happen?” And maybe, just maybe, the Envision process can be an answer to the dream you see. I really, truly hope so.



A Nepali children's book created through an Envision gift

Start Brainstorming with the Envision Board

One of the hardest parts of the Envision process is getting started! We want you to take a first step: reflecting on hope. To make it as easy as possible, we've written a few prompts to help get you started. All you have to do is fill in the blanks! Once you've filled in a few blanks, consider sharing your answers with the Board.

I see a need at CPC to do this...

I care deeply about...

An organization or cause I deeply care about...

--

I'm already serving with the following organization...

--

I would love it if CPC worked with...

--

I am energized when I see possibility for change with...

A problem I've always wanted to solve is...

Sometimes I'm frustrated because there's a better way to do this...



▲ The middle and senior high youth group enjoyed live-action CLUE! Adults like Colonel Mustard and Farmer White lent a hand with the mystery.

Adult Education this January

Perils and Promise of the Pulpit

Sunday, January 21 at 9:00 a.m. in the Library | Led by Ken Kovacs

Thomas Long, the “dean” of American Protestant preachers, former professor of preaching at Princeton Seminary and Candler Divinity School at Emory, wrote an essay in *The Presbyterian Outlook*, which has received a lot of attention: *The Perilous and Promising Pulpit*. Long recounts: Russell Moore, the editor-in-chief of *Christianity Today* recently told a chilling story about preaching. A number of pastors, he said, had reported to him essentially the same experience. They would be preaching on a passage like the Sermon on the Mount, including sayings such as “turn the other cheek,” “blessed are the merciful” or “love your enemies,” only to find themselves sharply attacked at the church door. “Where’d you get that nonsense?” some aggrieved parishioner inevitably would ask. “From Jesus Christ,” the startled pastor would respond. “I was literally quoting Jesus Christ.” Far from mumbling out an embarrassed apology, the critic would instead walk away, scoffing, “Yeah, but that doesn’t work anymore. That’s weak.” Long believes, “In a new and disturbing way, preaching has become perilous.” But there’s room for promise when we remember what is really going on when a congregation faithfully and courageously listens for the Word of God.

How to Know a Person

Sunday, January 7 at 9:00 a.m. in the Library | Led by Ken Kovacs

How to Know a Person (January 7) David Brooks’ *How to Know a Person* is a book for our times. With the increasing divisiveness of American society and growing isolation many are experiencing these days, people are searching for communion and community, yet don’t know how to connect. “People want to connect,” Brooks writes, “Above almost any other need, human beings long to have another person look into their faces with love and acceptance. The issue is that we lack practical knowledge about how to give one another the attention we crave. Some days it seems like we have intentionally built a society that gives people little guidance on how to perform the most important activities of life.”

Book Review: *The Hidden Roots of White Supremacy* shines the light of hope on a dark history

Jeff Bolognese | *Dismantling Racism Committee Chair*

Robert P. Jones opens his newest book, *The Hidden Roots of White Supremacy*, with a story that illustrates the complexity of our nation's relationship with White Supremacy. In May 1863, a steamboat on the Mississippi River encounters a raft of African Americans who are fleeing enslavement in Missouri for the newly emancipated north. The captain of the steamboat offers to tow the raft north to Minnesota. The passengers safely disembark at the steamboat's destination of Fort Snelling, a Union outpost north of St. Paul. After unloading his cargo, the steamboat's captain begins loading his new "cargo:" 547 Dakota people bound for their new "home" on a reservation in the Nebraska territory.

That story about the intersection of the early stages of "Emancipation" with the final stages of "Indian Removal" in Minnesota highlights the premise that drives Robert Jones' argument. While we may see chattel slavery in the nascent United States as the focal point of our long battle with White Supremacy, its roots go much deeper. Jones argues that to find the origin story of White Supremacy in North America, you need to go back to 1493 and the Doctrine of Discovery.

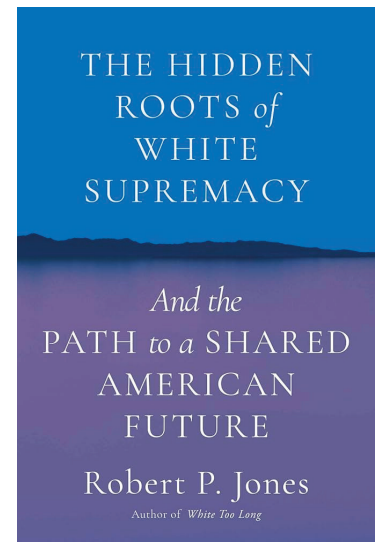
There is a transformative power generated when we collectively tell the full, uncomfortable truth of a shared past and take responsibility for how we move forward together.

The Doctrine of Discovery was a series of papal edicts that declared the superiority of European civilization and Western Christianity. It gave European countries what they saw as theological and moral justification to claim newly "discovered" territories and to subjugate or eliminate the native inhabitants.

Jones illuminates the consequences of the so-called doctrine by telling the stories of events in three different regions of North America. Those stories intertwine histories of the decimation of Native Americans with the enslavement of African Americans and the racism that still plagues us today. Some of the stories may be familiar to us: the Trail of Tears, the murder of Emmett Till, and the bombing of "Black Wall Street" in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Many other stories are less familiar. All of them illustrate the interconnected nature and deep origin of the challenges with White Supremacy we still face today.

While the histories Jones highlights are disturbing, he ends each of his three regional narratives on hopeful notes. Each regional story ends by showing how the current residents have worked—and continue to work—to recognize and reconcile their past. Instead of erasing or ignoring the legacy of White Supremacy and racism, these communities chose the uncomfortable path of facing it and, in doing so, creating opportunities for healing and growth.

The full title of Jones' book is *The Hidden Roots of White Supremacy and The Path to a Shared American Future*. The "path" Jones points to is the powerful healing that can occur when we come together and tell the truth of the totality of our shared history. The communities that Jones highlights are signposts along that path and models for us to follow as a larger society. There is a transformative power generated when we collectively tell the full, uncomfortable truth of a shared past and take responsibility for how we move forward together. The path isn't easy, but it's illuminated by hope.



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Financial Update

Actual Income..... \$ 710,447

Actual Expense..... \$ -747,120

Total..... \$ -36,673

Updated 11/30/2023

Per Capita Update

CPC per capita total \$ -16,280

Contributions received.. \$ 2,210

Per capita balance \$ -14,070

Updated 11/30/2023

Gifts for the McKim Center

All are invited to contribute gifts for the McKim Community Center Christmas party! Please place new, unwrapped gifts under the tree in the sanctuary from November 26 to December 10 or drop them by the church office. Craft kits, sports equipment, and board games are some suggested items. Thank you for helping make a child's holiday bright.

Trees and Baked Goods Now On Sale

Scout Troop 306 is selling Christmas trees on the front lot facing Frederick Road. This project is the Troop's major fundraiser for the year and supports the entire operating and program budget. As an added bonus, Scout Pack 306 is excited to announce their "Trees & Treats" fundraiser during the weekend hours of the Troop Tree Sale. There will be many types of homemade holiday baked goods and hot chocolate for sale.

The sale will be held from November 26 to December 23 (or sooner if all trees have been sold) during the following hours:

- Mondays through Thursdays, 6-8 p.m.
- Fridays, 6-9 p.m.
- Saturdays, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. (including Trees and Treats)
- Sundays, noon to 8 p.m. (including Trees and Treats)

Calling all bakers and candy makers!

Join in the fun as we bring back the Cookie Walk on December 17, 2023 after worship in the Fellowship Hall. This is one of the CPC highlights of the holiday season and we need you to help us make the return of this event special!

If you'd like to participate, you will need to bake 6 to 7 dozen fancy cookies or candy. You should be careful to label any allergens. We need bakers to drop off their yummy items on Saturday, December 16, between 10 a.m. and noon or on Sunday, December 17 before 9 a.m. You can sign up at tinyurl.com/cpc-cookies.

Proceeds will go to the Santi School in Nepal. Questions? Contact Alison Enokian (aenokian@gmail.com) or Megan Peercy (mpeercy@umd.edu). Thank you for helping us bring back this wonderful tradition!

Pledge Update

Pledges received.....38 *41% of the total pledges in 2023*
Total amount pledged.. \$232,078 *62% of the amount pledged in 2023*

Updated 11/30/2023



COVENANT NETWORK
OF PRESBYTERIANS

Catonsville Presbyterian Church

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