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Sacred Storytelling

With the annual congregational meeting just a few weeks behind us—and the remarkable story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection ahead—it's time to practice the act of storytelling.

The New Geography of Worship: Nearly every Sunday, a friend of ours joins in worship. You've never seen her. *See page 4.*

Deacons' Report: It has been a full year of ministry. Read the stories and find concrete numbers about their impact. *See page 8.*

Creation Care News: Lent is a time for renewal and reflection. Consider picking up a new practice or exploring new resources. *See page 6.*

Finding Joy in Aging: Ralph Surette shares insight on how you can cultivate joy in aging and retirement. *See page 11.*



Some of our confirmands attended!



Closing Communion service



Dorothy and Michael at the camp font

About this edition

Michael Cuppett | *Communications and Operations Manager*

After a long day of traveling—for some, as long as 11 hours in the car—a gaggle of youth streamed into an auditorium with tired but excited eyes. Adults were peppered into this crowd of a few hundred, squeezed in between students and the corners of the room. Onstage, a woman with high hair and a beautiful, Southern accent began to speak while clip art danced onto a slightly-cheesy PowerPoint presentation.

“God is love,” she said. “The Bible is filled with the story of God’s love.” Though those statements aren’t especially profound, what she said next was unassuming, yet carried a world of blessing, promise, and sacred responsibility. “And you are all storytellers.”

Dorothy and I had the privilege of accompanying students for the 2024 Confirmation Retreat at the Massanetta Springs Camp and Conference Center, an enclave about two hours west of Washington D.C. Dorothy and Melissa Virago brought four confirmands from this congregation, and I brought four confirmands from Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church (a fifteen-syllable mouthful with the acronym “BMPA”), where I have been teaching since November.

The conference speaker is right, of course. God is love, and as Christians, we are commissioned to tell that story. But as Presbyterians, we sometimes focus on the content of stories—*what* is being said—rather than the art of storytelling itself—*how* a story is being told. We sometimes read sermons rather than experience preaching (there is a difference!), or fixate on beliefs rather than our walk in faith. That’s a valuable impulse, one that serves us well in many cases. And yet, we know that the art of storytelling matters, and it’s what we love about the Bible. The way we tell stories matters, just like it matters that the Bible is filled with poetry, prose, narratives, myth, epics, and apocalyptic letters. The Christian life requires storytelling and diversity in the way we do so.

With the annual congregational meeting just a few weeks behind us—and the remarkable storytelling of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection ahead—it’s time to practice the act of storytelling. What are the narratives we tell and retell? What are other ways to tell our



congregation's story? And why do we tell stories certain ways, and how might those ways of storytelling affect or change us?

This is a rather short edition of *The Messenger*. But I hope that this theme of storytelling will continue to resonate throughout the seasons of Lent and Eastertide. Consider the words of Ralph Surette and his invitation to reflect on the story of one's life. Explore how the Deacons are helping us write our congregation's story. And most of all, as you read this edition, listen for the story of God in your life, and never, ever stop being a storyteller.

▲
Main auditorium of the
Confirmation Retreat

The Old, Old Story

Ken Kovacs | Pastor

As a boy, I have fond memories of singing the old gospel hymn "I Love to Tell the Story." Perhaps you sang it too.

I love to tell the story
of unseen things above,
of Jesus and his glory,
of Jesus and his love.
I love to tell the story
because I know it's true;
it satisfies my longings
as nothing else can do.

And the refrain goes like this:

I love to tell the story;
'twill be my theme in glory
to tell the old, old story
of Jesus and his love."

Here's the second verse:

I love to tell the story,
for those who know it best
seem hungering and thirsting
to hear it like the rest.
And when in scenes of glory
I sing the new, new song,

'twill be the old, old story
that I have loved so long."

The hymn, based on a poem, was written by Arabella Katherine Hankey (1834-1911) in 1866 after recovering from a severe illness. Born in Clapham, near London, she and her family were part of the Clapham Sect, an evangelical movement within Anglicanism engaged in social reform. They supported the efforts of William Wilberforce (1759-1833) and worked for the abolition of slavery and an end to the slave trade. Hankey later moved to London to teach a Bible class for young women working in England's "dark Satanic mills," as William Blake (1757-1827) said, and continued that work for over a decade. Later, she became a mission worker in South Africa.

What I loved about this hymn and what I remember feeling as a child was how it not only told a story about Jesus and his love but told it in such a way that I found

myself included in the story. The "old, old story" Hankey was singing about was not only her story but also my story. My story, the story of my life, was and is included in a part of the "story of Jesus and his love." That truth made my heart sing. All those stories about Jesus that I learned in church school and heard about in worship, yes, they took place long ago, but they were also near and close to me. I loved and still love that story "because I know it's true"—more so now than ever. Today, I get to tell the story and preach about the story and share the story and continue to discover the meaning of "Jesus and his love."

One of the major issues facing us in the West today, particularly for those who never grew up within the Christian tradition (or any faith tradition), is that many are searching, "hungering and thirsting" for a story, a narrative, a myth larger than the narrowness of one's ego and

The Old, Old Story (continued)

personal agenda, a story one can give one's life to, a story that grants meaning and purpose to one's life. Perhaps the Church as a whole could better tell the "old, old story" and invite people to the myth that gives new life. C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) famously said, "Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us the same way as the others [pagan myths], but with this tremendous difference that it really happened." But we

can't tell the story with meaning and conviction unless we know it's true for ourselves, claimed as our own. Otherwise, it all rings hollow.

As we approach the season of Lent and tell the story again of Holy Week, the story of triumph and betrayal, the story of death and suffering and new life, I invite you to (re)consider the meaning of the story in your life. It's one thing to know about

what happened two millennia ago in Jerusalem, and it's quite another to know that the drama of Christ's passion continues to unfold around us and within us. It's one thing to recite the story and another to know and feel that one is participating in the ongoing drama of God's salvific work in Christ to heal, redeem, and make all things new. That's a story worth singing about and giving our lives to.

The New Geography of Worship

Nearly every Sunday, a friend of ours joins in worship. You've never seen her.

By Gabi Lazarro | *Online worship participant*

Hello to you, and thank you for taking the time to read this. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Gabi. I grew up in a modest, blue collar town in New Jersey, in an average home, and for the most part, was not really raised in any specific church as a small child. My family consisted of non-practicing Christians. My grandmother was Russian Orthodox. My grandfather was Roman Catholic. My mother was Lutheran and my father, Episcopalian.

By chance, directly behind our backyard was a very small Methodist church. On Sunday mornings, I would hear the congregation singing their hymns. One day in the mid 1970's, my next door neighbors asked my parents if they could bring my brother and me with them and their daughter to church, and that was all she wrote...

It started with an hour of Sunday school, followed by an hour of church services. We had VBS for a week in the summer. There were only a few families that attended services each week. We were lucky to have two dozen attendees at a regular service.

But, the sense of community was so incredibly welcoming. Eventually, as I grew older there was youth group and Confirmation as well. I found Jesus Christ and accepted him as my Lord when I was 9 years old. I'll never forget that moment. I literally cried with joy when I realized what I had found. It was an epiphany of sorts, and I thank God for that moment every day. I still recall the amazing feeling I would have when I would leave church on Sunday mornings. I think it was the benediction that started "it." Having that charge to start a new week, perhaps? I wish I could find the right word. Euphoria? Rejuvenation? Renewal? Perhaps, for me, I just felt like, "All was right with the world."

When I was 16, I got my first "real" job at the Lincoln Theatre. It was the local movie theater in town. My manager was the Rev. Dr. Ken Kovacs. (Well, he was just "Ken" at the time.) We formed a bond that has lasted to this day (coming up on forty years now - Wow, Ken, we're OLD.) I remember when he had office space in his local Presbyterian church in the next town over. On occasion, I'd join

him over a cup of tea and we'd have these deep, philosophical, religious, and somewhat existential conversations. Memories that I cherish to this day.

Fast forward: Eventually, I got busy with life. I got married, had a child, and was self-employed for many years. My work schedule included Sundays, so, church fell by the wayside. My thought was that one day I'd attend again. My faith didn't lapse. My relationship with God was still there, but I did not worship in the traditional sense. Life went on, and God was still there, but perhaps not as regularly as I was accustomed to.

Then I began a new chapter of my life. I eventually moved on but several years ago, I knew something was missing in my life. I prayed every day. I had my regular conversations with God, and life was good. But I was looking for something else. I needed the "glue" to put some pieces back together again.

Ken and I had gotten to a point in our lives that our contact was sporadic. I was in New Jersey and he was in Maryland, after all. On a handful of occasions, I would be in the Baltimore area, and Catonsville Presbyterian was always on the agenda. I have attended a few services in person and always felt so welcomed. But one day a few years ago, I remembered that I can attend worship via Facebook.

I needed that feeling back. The one I'd get when church let out on Sunday mornings. And yet, call it a reason or an excuse, I could not get up the nerve to walk into some random church alone and hope to eventually fit in. The thought of "church hopping" until I found the right fit did not appeal to me. But I needed to worship with others.

So, Facebook it was. And it is one of the best decisions I've made to date. It's a larger version of the worship that I grew up with. However, it feels like home: the hymns, the organ and piano, the reading of scripture, the relatable sermons, and Communion (although I will admit that it took a bit getting used to "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" rather than "give us this day, our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses"). And then

there is the benediction. Oh, the benediction! It is by far my favorite part. For me, it's the best way to go out into the world and begin my week.

I appreciate the sense of acceptance and inclusion that Catonsville Presbyterian offers. God taught us to love without exception and accepts us as we are. The very least we can do is to reach out and extend the same to others.

I still wake up each and every morning, making my coffee and sitting by a window, enjoying what I like to call "Coffee with my Lord" (I guess I could have called it "Java with Jesus", but no, it's "Coffee with my Lord"). I have a little chat, thanking God for his blessings, asking for guidance and saying my prayers so that I start each day on the right foot. Even still, I look forward to my Sunday mornings

on Facebook with all of you, soaking in the joy of worship. I have attended online for years now, and have missed only a handful of services, mostly due to technical difficulties. But I've attended via cell phone while on vacation, and even a time or two from bed when I was under the weather. No matter what, I am there: if not in body, definitely in spirit.



I needed the "glue" to put some pieces back together again...

Then, one day a few years ago, I remembered that I can attend worship via Facebook.

Creation Care News

By Ron Gunderson and Laurie White | *Members of the Creation Care Team*

Spring is upon us! Time to shake off winter and get outside to enjoy the fresh air. Spring is the busiest gardening time of the year and we need your help. We will have both scheduled and pop-up work sessions as we dodge around the vagaries of spring weather. **Gather in the main parking lot for our first scheduled work session on Saturday, March 23, starting at 9 a.m.** Stay for as long or as little as you can. Come and enjoy fellowship in these beautiful, sacred spaces!

In the first several weeks of spring, our work sessions will focus on replenishing the wood chip pathways, clearing leftover stalks and seed heads, and removing invasive plants (particularly garlic mustard and wineberry vines). Later this year, we will be adding new plants in selected areas of the woodlands and some of our church gardens. If you would like to work with the creation care team, subscribe to updates at catonsvillepres.org/ministries/creation.

Beyond helping at church, you can give back to creation at home! First, live sustainably. Eat a more plant-based diet and be sure to reuse and recycle. Secondly, use native plants in your gardens. Native plants are easier to maintain, pollinator-friendly, and beautiful. Check with Ron to see if there are some transplants you can re-home from the church grounds.

As we enter Lent, a new focus and connection to creation might enliven the season for you. Below are three specific Lenten disciplines/studies to support your Lenten journey. Be sure to check out *Braiding Sweetgrass* for its beautiful storytelling.

Resources for Reconnection and Refocusing on Creation

PC(USA) Lenten Calendar: tinyurl.com/tread-light

Lenten Creation Challenge: tinyurl.com/crc-lent-challenge

A Ground Faith: Reconnection with Creator and Creation in the Season of Lent by Janet Parker and Solveig Nilsen-Goodin.

Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants by Robin Wall Kimmerer.

A huge assortment of dishes were shared at January's plant-based potluck



Tread Lightly for Lent, a calendar with daily sustainable practices from the Presbyterian Hunger Program, is available for download. Physical copies are in the front and rear of the sanctuary beginning Sunday, February 11.

tinyurl.com/tread-light





Envision Your Own Story

By Laurie White | *Chair of the Envision Board*

Studies have found people who read fiction develop more empathy than non-fiction readers. Stories evoke emotion within us. We try on someone else's life. But what if you don't have a story to read? How does a child immerse themselves into a world beyond their own? The Santi School in Nepal noticed there was a severe lack of children's books, especially books culturally relevant to the children the program serves.

Fortunately, Chris Heun, founder of the Santi School Project and a child of Catonsville Presbyterian Church, applied for an Envision Grant in 2020. Santi School wanted to publish their own books to complement their teacher training programs. The \$10,000 grant was used for writers' workshops, illustrator fees and editing and publishing 3 different titles, totaling 1,250 books. Catonsville Presbyterian became a part of these children's story in a small way. To have a colorful, beautiful book bringing context to a forgotten population in Nepal was revolutionary for this area. We helped bring them their own stories – to be enjoyed over and over.

Small Moments of the Everyday

Reviewing the Deacons' ministry in 2023

By Tom Enokian, Ami Guchhait | *Deacons*

The work of the deacons—from coordinating events with other local organizations to setting up tables and chairs—stands as a quiet testament to the idea that God's story and power are best illustrated not through grand gestures or awesome miracles, but rather through the small moments of the everyday. In 2023, we are thankful to have been able to continue long-standing ministries serving our CPC congregation, including writing cards and assisting with memorial service receptions, as well as ministries serving our larger community, including our food and clothing drives. We began offering Stephen Ministry Care, which provides one-on-one care for members of our congregation who are experiencing a difficult time in life. We as deacons endeavor to “be the community” we would like to see, whether by offering a friendly ear, a helping hand, or a shoulder to lean on. Please reach out to Tom (taenokian@gmail.com) with any thoughts for how we can continue to serve CPC in 2024!

“...If our summons as followers of Jesus is not only to go to church but to be the church, then it follows that the ministry of the deacon—‘compassion, witness, and service, sharing in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ’ (*Book of Order, 2009–2011, G-10.0102g*)—is the leading edge of our common life in and for the world.”

RALPH W. HAWKINS

*Executive presbyter and stated clerk of the Presbytery of Shenango
From Regarding ruling elders: ruling elders and deacons (2016)*

A Westside Story

By Jen Lockard | *Deacon*

Except when COVID made the party impossible, the Deacons always invite the congregation to a party for clients of Westside Men's Shelter who have December birthdays. This past year was no exception, with church members distributing birthday cards and gifts as well as sharing cupcakes, ice cream (nutty buddies are the hands down favorite), and camaraderie with approximately sixty attendees the evening of December 5.

The highlight of the evening—and the place where most connection happened—was the bingo session. The competition was hot for prizes such as a heavy winter coat, Ravens beanies, several pairs of wool socks, and multiple McDonalds gift cards.



All in good fun, the men gently cajoled the bingo caller, swapped light smack talk, and razzed the two comrades who won twice and walked away with choice spoils. We met their energy with pleasant ribbing, encouragement, and laughter. It felt good to be with one another, sharing the gift of fellowship.

When bingo sadly came to an end, we closed out the evening with *Silent Night* and a promise to host the party again next year. This is your advance invitation—all are welcome!

From November through January, the Deacons collected winter clothing for the shelter. Thanks to everyone who made this year's collection a huge success, including our Scout troop. We delivered approximately ninety individual items (coats, sweaters, socks, pants, gloves) as well as six large bags of coats and blankets.

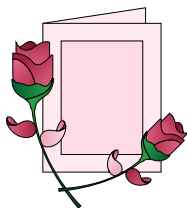
Our ministry this past year

Leadership transitions

Donna McAdoo-Bucher, Kevin Flis, Cindy Gunderson, and Dave Stubbs all concluded their installed service this past year. As they rolled off, we welcomed Charre Symms (who was re-elected for an additional 3 years), Chuck Fields, Jane Kennedy, Sue Schultise, and Rick Santos.

Cards and flowers

- We sent more than 100 cards during the course of the year. Sixty were sent throughout the year, with the rest mailed immediately prior to the Advent and Christmas season.
- College students also received cards in January and in the final weeks of the semester.
- Flowers were sent after services to those who are homebound, in need, or who provided special services for the church.



Care for our congregation

- Deacons provided meals for the Martinez family after the birth of Carolina Paola Chame Maxwell.
- After a year without use, the Deacon prayer line was discontinued.

Care for our neighbors

- Bears were contributed to the McKim Center gifts.
- Clothing was collected for the Westside Men's Shelter from November through January.

Food insecurity

- Deacons played a key role in delivering collections from the Friday food collections and the "Adopt a Turkey" drive to Catonsville Emergency Assistance, Grace AME, and Westowne Elementary.
- Over 280 meals were distributed by Grace AME through the "Adopt a Turkey" drive.



Care during grief

- Sharon Pound kept the care note display updated with the latest pamphlets.
- Deacons read and discussed the first Stephen Ministry grief book.
- Additional grief books were distributed to members of the congregation and were met with positive response.
- Deacons assisted with the memorial services for Peggy Carr, Rachel Schultise, Lee Van Koten, and Hanju Lee.

Other activities

- The "Backpacks For Success" collection was held.
- Deacons participated in discussion and education on prayer.

CPC Doubles Its Gift to Seafarers

By Glenda Johnson and Brenda Logue | *Members of the Mission Committee*

Wow! The congregation was “all in” in preparing 135 Christmas at Sea bags for international seafarers who visit the Port of Baltimore during this time of the year. Sixty-six bags were delivered last year.

The Mission Committee thanks all those who contributed to Christmas at Sea. During the Advent Gathering many members of the CPC community took part in assembling the bags with a warm hat, scarf, handwarmers, and a Baltimore souvenir. And eight families shopped for and completed their own bags beforehand. Finally, Christmas cards were added to each gift, having been signed by members of the congregation throughout November.

Most of the gifts were sponsored with donations from members and friends of CPC. In total, the Mission Committee raised \$1,904 for this project. Bills for the purchases of the gift items are now being processed.



Supplies were delivered to the Baltimore International Seafarer’s Center.

Mission members Linda Meyer and Brenda Logue made the delivery to the Baltimore International Seafarers Center on December 5. The Rev. Joshua Messick, Director, and John Thompson, Treasurer, welcomed the gifts with open arms – indicating they were just what they wanted and needed!

The Mission Committee is most grateful for all the participation

in this year’s event – from generously donating, signing cards, assembling bags, and building your own. This annual project is a special one during the holiday season as we remember Lee Van Koten’s extensive work and dedication to the Seafarers Center. Contact John Dittman (jndittman3@gmail.com) to get involved with the Mission Committee!



Finding Joy in Aging and Retirement

By Ralph Surette | [Comments welcome at ralphsur@gmail.com](mailto:ralphsur@gmail.com)

There is an old saying: “Squeeze the juice of life before life squeezes the juice out of you.”

Wise advice alright but what about the difficulty in coping with the inevitable losses and increasing imperfect control of life and limb? Teeth falling out, trouble with balance and the loss of hearing and memory. Isn't growing old fun! But wait! You still have the wisdom and power to do what you wish with the precious time still allotted to you.

I propose the following suggestions that you just might find helpful in your quest to find some joy in aging and retirement: Today write your own obituary. This can help you review your life and provide the motivation to add anything that you might still do and that loved ones will remember you by. Secondly, recall a time in your life when you were the happiest. Compare then with now. What can be replicated what cannot? I once taught a woman who admitted in class that when she was a

young woman she would sit on her porch and men would walk by and ask her out for a date. All she had to worry about was which one to select. What bliss! Alas, she then announced that at 85 she could not remember the last time anyone asked her out. I offered to take her to lunch as did several of her classmates. She was a changed woman, and could have been earlier if only she had known. Thirdly, work on resolving anger and hurt. Nothing will ruin your retirement years more than chronic resentment and disappointment. Stay away from those who elicit this in you, even if they are family. Remember, a relationship is not an entitlement to change someone. Lastly, live congruently with your values and beliefs. This will help you in accepting illness, infirmity and mortality as part of the human life cycle not as a punishment or cruel act of fate. I conclude with this quote from the film *The Shawshank Redemption*: “You can get on with dying or you can get on with living.”

Where's the calendar?

By Michael Cuppett | [Communications and Operations Manager](#)

The elephant in the room is that the church's calendar isn't printed anywhere, except for the bulletin, where we only publish the upcoming week.

Why? Great question. Our facilities, committees, staff, and ministries are so active that the church's operations calendar is constantly changing. People's behaviors have changed, too. Fifteen years ago, iPhones didn't exist. The reality is that most of us have hectic schedules, unpredictable weeks, and increasingly ephemeral commitments. Seismic changes have occurred in society, and online calendars are only the very tip of the iceberg. It's why we decided to build tools like

calendars and announcements into our website half a decade ago.

Though we certainly long for the days where a full calendar was printed in the monthly *Messenger*, the obstacle isn't our will to do so. It's the changes to human behavior and the world we live in, behaviors and ways of living that no longer fit into the models of ministry and communication to which we clutch.

Fortunately, the calendar is still in one place: the church website. At catonsvillepres.org/events, you can see what's coming down the pipeline in our congregational life. You can look backward, too,

and find bulletins and services from the past year. By clicking on each event, you can find additional details like maps, links, and files to download. For a variety of reasons, you won't be able to view the entire facilities schedule (like FCCC building use, outside renters, and room availability), but fortunately, there's plenty to view. Consider sharing events with those you know by copying the link in your web browser and pasting it in Facebook, an email message, or text message.

As always, you're welcome to send me a message (office@catonsvillepres.org) with any questions or corrections that come up.

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Financial Update

Actual Income \$ 84,367

Actual Expense \$ -67,019

Total \$ 17,348

Updated 01/31/2024

Per Capita Update

CPC per capita total \$ -16,400

Contributions received . . \$ 180

Updated 01/31/2024

Lent and Easter at Catonsville Presbyterian Church

Ash Wednesday

February 14, 2024 | 7 p.m. | Hunting Ridge Presbyterian Church

This joint service includes contributions from Dickey Memorial, Hope, Hunting Ridge, and Catonsville Presbyterian churches. There will be imposition of ashes.

Palm Sunday

March 24, 2024 | 10:30 a.m.

On Palm Sunday, when we mark Christ's entrance into Jerusalem for Passover, we will lift up festive praise in worship. The children and youth choir will sing.

Maundy Thursday

March 28, 2024 | 7 p.m. | Sanctuary

As we mark Jesus' last supper with his disciples, we will gather for a Communion service in the sanctuary.

Prayer Vigil

March 29, 2024 | Noon to 3 p.m. | Sanctuary

The sanctuary will be open from noon to 3 on Good Friday for those who would like to privately pray, meditate, or engage in contemplation.

Good Friday

March 29, 2024 | 7 p.m. | Labyrinth

A simple contemplative service will be held at the labyrinth. In the event of rain, we will gather in the main church building.

Resurrection of the Lord (Easter Sunday)

March 31, 2024 | 10:30 a.m.

We will celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord with choral anthems, special music, and a joyous service of worship.



COVENANT NETWORK
OF PRESBYTERIANS

Catonsville Presbyterian Church

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