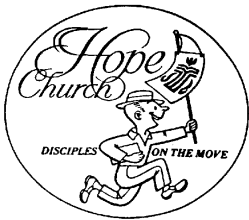


HOPE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
TINTON FALLS, NEW JERSEY



NOTES OF HOPE

A monthly publication to keep us informed.

November 2011

Edited by
Erica Andresen

Our Mission Statement

We believe that God has gathered this congregation and staff at this time and place in order to:

Introduce people to the enduring love of Jesus found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Invite them to become part of the family of God

Instruct them in the scriptures, God's word to us

Involve them in the ministry of the church, according to their gifts

Inspire them to go into the world, making disciples of others

Belonging, Then Believing.

The standard pattern of church membership has been that we expect people to believe *before* we accept them as belonging. We see this in the usual way Presbyterian churches receive members. Part of the process of becoming a member is making a reaffirmation of faith. We assume that the active members of a church are all people who have made this statement of what they believe. We are a gathering of people who believe in Jesus.

I wonder if this whole way of behaving isn't wrong, or at least very unhelpful. Isn't it kind of like expecting someone to know calculus before they take a calculus class? Or to play the trumpet, or speak Italian, or knit a sweater, before being allowed to participate in the group where those skills are learned?

Isn't it rather presumptuous of us to somehow expect people to be Christians before we welcome them into the church? Isn't the gathered community a place where we learn together how to follow Jesus? Is there anyone in our church (or any church) who is willing to say they have it all together and don't have anything left to learn about this? Doesn't requiring that people already believe/trust in Jesus before we will deign to make them a member exclude people from membership who may be on the way to becoming disciples?

I am coming more and more to the view that people need to belong first. We need to welcome and embrace people into our fellowship whether they are "Christians" right now or not. The church that allows itself to become a closed club of people who already believe is not going to grow very easily. First of all because even the people who have come to believe are not completed and finished as Christians. Secondly, a lot of people have learned that they have to *say* they believe in order to be included... but really don't trust in Jesus just yet. Thirdly, often it is the ones who have the most trouble believing who end up with the stronger faith when they do develop a relationship with Jesus.

When Jesus calls his disciples, he does not have them make complete statements of faith in him. Peter does not make his confession of who Jesus is until deep into his relationship as a disciple. Thomas doesn't make the kind of confession we require of new members until after Jesus' resurrection!

Jesus does not require anyone of his disciples or wider entourage to sign on to specific beliefs about him. Indeed, he welcomes sinners of all kinds, and people with all kinds of diseases, without regard for what they do or don't believe. It is their relationship with Jesus, and the community gathered around him, that brings people to faith in him.

Neither did Jesus bother with keeping detailed membership rolls, or deciding who was or wasn't welcome at his Table. Everybody was welcome: Pharisees, Roman soldiers, women, lepers, tax collectors, prostitutes, working people, children, and so on. He knew that faith in him was not based on what their opinion was about him, but on what kind of relationship he had with them.

Church, in other words, is not just for Christians. I hope no one avoids gathering for worship with us because they "don't believe all that stuff." I've got news: some of us who do gather also have serious questions about "all that stuff." And some of us who do accept it, do so in very different ways.

The church is not a gathering of people who already believe. It is a gathering of people who are open to a relationship with Jesus, through his followers. In our life together, we are developing this relationship with Jesus and his followers, and anyone interested enough in hearing what Jesus is about to get themselves to a church on Sunday morning. The people of the world are not divided into believers and non-believers. Rather, there are people who are in different places in their relationship with him. And those who say they "believe" are not necessarily "ahead" of those who are able to give the most orthodox opinions. I have known atheists who were better followers of Jesus than some Christians.

My point is that the church needs to be a place where people feel welcome and know they belong. Then we can show each other the love of Jesus, and grow in it together. We can build each other up, learn forgiveness, practice encouragement, pray with and heal each other. After all, every week we've been singing, "And they'll know we are Christians by our love." We don't sing that they will know we are Christians by the correctness of our theological opinions.

The "they" in the song are the people we meet in the world. Our little fellowship must be so welcoming, and our love for each other, and for the world, so apparent, that "they" will want to be a part of it. We have to be a part of that love first, before we can talk intelligibly about it. We have to be doing it before we can say we believe it.

Attention Congregation

It's been a few months since I wrote to the congregation and many things have changed in that time.

With the passing of our dear friend John Schwartz we lost a valued member of the finance ministry team. Currently the team consists of Nancy Oliviero and myself. Someone with a desire to help monitor the church's finances and help them grow is always welcome. We can also use help in counting the weekly offering. I try to work the schedule that each person helps just once a month and works with either Lynda Hicken or myself. We will train you how we perform this operation which is quite simple.

As we all know the McGuire's are moving and this leaves a large void in our property ministry. I am looking to create a list of people who would be willing to help out around the church with minor repairs and upkeep. As a team we would develop a list of the items needing attention and prioritize them. As we can all see the church and manse are in need of some care and as a group we can get this work done. Our sexton staff can always use help. Usually each person or group is scheduled once sometimes twice a quarter. Sexton duties are not difficult and amount to no more work than cleaning at home.

All of the opportunities I spoke about are very important to the operation of our congregation and facilities and offer the opportunity to grow in fellowship and the needs of our church. Some of these tasks take only a half a hour a month and others a little more. Giving back to our congregation is a responsibility for all members of Hope. God calls us to use our time and our talents and to give it generously. The Bible says, "This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God" (2 Corinthians 9:12 NIV). Anyone that would like to help with any of these or have ideas of where we can grow, please contact me.

Scott Van Bavel

November Stewards of the Month



Let's hear it for our November Stewards of the Month, our Sunday School Teachers! Our devoted and gifted teachers are Jean Buckley, Nancy Massa, Kathy Heller, Joyce Waldron and Erica Andresen. These ladies have a passion for teaching. They all are, or were (or are going to be!) teachers outside of Hope Church. It takes patience, creativity and a gentle spirit to groom our children in their relationship with Jesus. Each one of them carries this spirit and share their gift unselfishly each week while nurturing our youth to be the future of Hope. Let us be grateful and thank them next time we see them for leading our children into the future and for building them in spirit and in truth. Thank you for sharing your God-given gift of teaching and for the love and guidance you provide for the youth of Hope each week!

Proverbs 22:6 *Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.*

When You Give, You Are Performing a Service by Rick Warren

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion ... your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. 2 Corinthians 9:11 (NIV)

What an amazing verse! God makes you rich in every way so you can be generous on every occasion, which will result in thanksgiving to God.

God doesn't bless you to be greedy; he blesses you so you can be generous. God doesn't give you things so you can pile them up. When you let go of what's in your hand, it's now empty to receive greater blessings from God.

God's giving to you is based on your attitude. That's why it's so important to live with an attitude of gratitude and to be content with what you have. The Bible says, "This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God" (2 Corinthians 9:12 NIV).

When you give, you are performing a service. To serve and to give is the same thing. It's two actions of love. You can't love without serving and giving. Your service leads to expressions of thanksgiving to God and to contentment.

Take a moment to pray and express your gratitude to God. Ask him to show you the way to contentment.

Then, ask him to bless you so you can be a blessing to others.

It's Operation Christmas Child Time!

Once again we have the opportunity to share God's love and Good News with a child in need through the gift of a shoe box full of small items, selected with the child's age and sex in mind: girl 2-4, 5-9, 10-14...boy 2-4, 5-9, 10-14. On Oct. 30th and Nov. 6th, Sunday School will have available some plastic boxes for you to fill, or you can use a standard sized shoe box of your own. A brochure of packing suggestions and directions will be available. Please remember...no used items, fragile items, war toys, chocolate, aerosols, or liquids. Boxes should be returned filled on Sun., Nov. 13. A donation of \$7 would be appreciated to defray shipping and project costs.

During this time of year in the United States when we watch our families enjoy the treats of Halloween, the feasting and family gathering at Thanksgiving, and the anticipation of the joys of Christmas- both spiritual and commercial, taking a few hours to shop for items and pack them up is a way to express our gratitude for our blessings and to share the joy we find as followers of Jesus Christ.

REMEMBRANCE SERVICE

Again this year, Hope Church will gather to remember our family members and friends who have gone before us to be with the Lord. This year, our service will take place on Tuesday evening, November 1st, at 7PM in the Sanctuary. In the past, this service has been a special one. During the service, each person who wishes may bring forward a candle for each of the people they wish to remember, light the candles from the Christ candle, and return to their seat in the pew. In this way, we remember the "saints" who have gone before us. We urge you to invite any friends or neighbors who may wish to participate...this event is open to all!

HOPE CHURCH GEARS UP FOR THE ADVENT SEASON

The first Sunday in Advent is coming upon us very fast! Some events you will recognize from past years; some events are all new this year!

"The Hanging of the Greens"--

When: Saturday, November 26th, 2PM

Where: Sanctuary, and later downstairs in the John Calvin Room

As in past years, we will decorate the sanctuary for the coming of our Lord Jesus. (The tree will already be up; we will not need to do that during this time.) After decorating, we will gather downstairs to share a meal of soup, bread, hot mulled cider, hot chocolate, and desserts. Plan to spend a couple of hours with us as we begin to welcome the King of Kings into our midst!

Advent Worship --

During our Sunday morning worship, we will again this year include the liturgy of the Advent Wreath, with special readings and the lighting of a candle each week. But in addition to the wreath, we will be beginning a new "tradition" called "Cloth for the Cradle". You will have to attend worship to learn more about this exciting new addition!

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Worship --

Christmas is on a Sunday this year! Our Christmas Eve service will be at 7PM (no 11PM service this year), a family-oriented service with candlelight. Pastor Paul has a special teaching planned for children of all ages, called "Mary's Treasure Box." On Christmas Day, our worship will be at the normal time, 9:30AM, a low-key service, but with Communion. Pastor Paul has a surprise planned for the children on Christmas morning!

It is so very easy for the Advent Season to become harried and rushed and crammed full of extra things on our to-do lists. Come celebrate with us as we endeavor to put Jesus at the center of our preparations. After all, it is HIS advent we are celebrating: the birth of the Baby who would be King.

PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY REACHES DOWN SOUTH!

This summer Steven and I attended Ben Speer's Stamps-Baxter School for Southern Gospel Music. We met some of the greatest people from all over the world! We remain friends through Facebook. One sweet lady was in my Music Theory Class and was not feeling well during the school. I kept in touch and found out she was soon was to be diagnosed with some form of cancer and was under treatment. Prayer was one thing I could do, but then I thought I will send Carolyn a Prayer Shawl! My knitting time is limited, so I asked the Prayer Shawl commander-in-chief- Nancy Massa for one of her shawls in waiting- hot off the needles and I mailed it direct to Marietta, GA. I have spoken to Carolyn on the phone and I know her treatments are going well. But I had not heard if she had received the shawl sent in August. I was about to e-mail her this week. Well a large envelope arrived this week to my delight.

The note read:

Dear Jean, Nancy, and all ladies of your Prayer Shawl Ministry,

Thank you so much for sending me the beautiful red prayer shawl I know each stitch was knitted with much love and anticipation of God's healing power in my current health challenge. I am responding very well to my treatments, without any significant side effects. I know God is in control and guiding the hands of those who minister to me. Although I don't know any of you except Jean, you are my sweet sisters in Christ. You are a blessing and encouragement to me!

Love, Carolyn Brand

God bless Nancy for the time that she puts into the Prayer Shawl Ministry and other ministries that she is involved in at Hope Church and in the community! If you are interested in knitting or crocheting prayer shawls I have a supply of wool that I will be happy to share with you.

Jean Buckley

November Birthdays

2	<i>Charles & Nancy Massa's wedding anniversary</i>
8	Steven Buckley
8	Arlene DePolo
12	Jennifer Van Bavel
13	Ricky Crutchley
15	Paul Baker
15	Max Schmardel
16	Jessica Cotton
18	Daniel Buckley
18	Rose Leadbeater
20	Ginny Catenaro
21	Ernest Watts
21	Micah Patrick Cotton
24	<i>Steven & Jean's wedding anniv. ('06 30 years)</i>
27	Tammy Weiss
27	Charlie Carson
29	Nancy Oliviero