



December 2020

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The Church Office will be closed on December 25th, 28th and January 1st.

Pastor Laura will be out of the office beginning December 28th through January 18th to continue studies for her Doctor of Ministries program.

Sunset Hills United Presbyterian Church

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A Message from Pastor Laura

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.
- Luke 2:11



The gift of Christmas is time. And, if you're anything like me, time is typically something Christmas has taken away. I found myself at Christmas parties with people I didn't know well, making small talk that left my spirit drained. I would spend eons in lines at Target when all I'd done was run in for some socks...and somehow walked out with a full buggy. I felt my time always being eaten in December until I woke up on January 2 wondering where the time with my loved ones had gone.

With most everything being cancelled or moved online this year, we get the time back in 2020. We can watch our favorite Christmas movies, bake our favorite Christmas cookies, and slip on our fuzzy slippers to linger over Facetime calls with our family - all without conjuring the courage to drive under nightfall. Additionally, we have the time to savor the Christmas story.

We are receiving two ways of savoring the Christmas story with our time this year. The first is in the form of a devotional written by my dad, the Rev. Dr. Clint Cottrell, and me. Our devotional is entitled *In the Bleak Midwinter*, based on the hymn of the same name. This devotional recognizes the grief that we have carried throughout this past year, and the darkness of our winter. But, it moves beyond the grief to the light that we find in Jesus Christ. We have aimed to create a devotional that is hopeful, spiritually fulfilling, and sometimes challenging as we seek to be faithful to our God in Christ this Christmas.

Second, we are savoring the Christmas story with the 8:00 a.m. adult Sunday School class entitled *Incarnation*. This study uses videos from Methodist pastor, Adam Hamilton, to reflect on the reality of God dwelling among us in the person of Jesus the Christ. We will reflect on the Bible together in this class, even as we reflect on what this story means for our lives.

I hope you will receive the gift of time this Christmas season. Let your fists loosen from their grip on all that needs to be done, that your hands may be opened to receive all God's gifts that are near.

In Christ's Service,
Pastor Laura

December Worship

Due to the recent spike in COVID cases in the Allegheny County area and following CDC guidelines, the Session of Sunset Hills has decided to suspend in person worship for at least the first Sunday in December.

They will meet again on December 9th and revisit this issue. If it is safe to do so, they will reopen the Sanctuary for the remainder of the Advent Season.

You can watch a video of our Sunday services by going to our YouTube channel:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeEpiQYSD_9My9tb5GEhVRA.

While we are closed, the video will be available on Sunday mornings by 10:15 am. Regular Sunday services will be available for viewing on the Monday after the service.

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service 5:00 pm & 7:00 pm

If the Sanctuary is reopened for services after December 6th, we are planning to hold two identical candlelight services for Christmas Eve this year. We are doing two services so that we can be sure to accommodate everyone in the Sanctuary safely.

Please be sure to make a reservation for you and your family for one of the services by December 18th.

You can make your reservation by calling the church office at (412)561-6261 or by email at: sunsethillschurch@gmail.com.

If you are not able to join us for one of our Christmas Eve services, a video of the service will be posted to our Youtube channel on Christmas morning.

Christmas Festival Sunday, Dec. 5th 5:00 pm



Join us for our Christmas Festival this year in the SHUP parking lot. The church has been decorated with hundreds of Christmas lights and we would like to gather under the glow of these lights for a Christmas celebration.

There will be a live nativity presented by the young adults and the youth of Sunset Hills Church. We will practice safe social distancing and remind everyone to wear their mask at all times.

(Due to the ever-changing situation of the pandemic, some aspects of the festival may have to be changed prior to Dec. 20th. Please remember to check our website for any updates).

We hope to see you there, but if you cannot make the festival, you can still see the lights by driving by any evening through Christmas.



Music Notes

By Shelby Gracey

Flexibility . . . my, how we've all had to learn that ability during this season of pandemic!

My article was all written and ready to go for the December Messenger . . . and then another "Stay At Home Advisory" was announced. Which means that our in-person worship plans have changed (and will continue to evolve over the course of the Advent Season).

My hope throughout this season is that the Campanile Bell Choir will be able to offer to the congregation the beautiful music that we've been working so hard on – whether it will be to share it in-person or to record it for our YouTube services. We'll also be presenting some Advent and Christmas anthems that were sung by our Chancel Choir and recorded from previous years. We ask your patience with us as we juggle our musical plans for the season!

One thing that's a definite is a new and exciting project that we'll be sharing with the congregation as Christmas approaches. It's a concert called "*The Virtual Singing Christmas Tree*." Many of you have heard me talk about the composer Joseph Martin as one of my favorite anthem composers. While he was "grounded" this year from his usually-busy travel schedule, he got an inspiration:

"We started The Virtual Singing Christmas Tree to be an encouragement to choir programs that have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many churches and community choirs are not able to meet in person and we wanted to provide creative options for singers everywhere. Soon, we began to dream beyond just doing a traditional virtual choir experience. We reached out to some of the nation's leading musicians to join our efforts and, before long, we had a

concert, 'The Virtual Singing Christmas Tree; a gathering of hope, a concert of joy.' This event was born of a desire to share the music of the season in a joyful new way. The Virtual Singing Christmas Tree will be the centerpiece of this amazing Christmas concert, while our guest Christmas magic to complete our evening of ministry, artistry, and community. This is an exciting new Christmas event that connects singers everywhere through the joy of music. Some of the nation's finest inspirational artists and ensembles are partnering to create a concert of hope and light." (Joseph Martin)

Singers from around the country (and the world!) have been invited to participate in the virtual singing Christmas tree anthems, and seven of our own SHUP Chancel Choir members will be part of the choir. The final musical selection of the concert will be Joseph Martin's original composition of "Let There Be Christmas." Be sure to watch for Ryan Gracey, Shelby Gracey, Dave Petty, Sarajane Obarsky, Tori Vernacchio, Keith Yanda, and Michelle Yanda (live from California!) to be part of that anthem. In addition to the virtual anthems and the guest artists, this hour-long concert will also include the Milwaukee Handbell Choir, and a virtual children's choir. Our participation in the event allows us to share the entire concert through our SHUP website, Facebook, and other social media platforms, so you'll all be able to watch the full concert in the comfort of your own homes. (You can also share it freely with your family, friends, and neighbors!) Our plans at this point are to share the final song of the concert in worship for our Christmas Eve service (either in-person or virtually).

The organization that is doing all the



technical work for the project is currently working on editing the videos and mixing every submission to combine it with the hundreds of participant submissions. Once the final product is completed, the anthem will be placed into the concert and surrounded by the music of some of the finest vocal artists and musicians from around the country.

This hour-long concert will be available for viewing about a week before Christmas. If you would like to watch this virtual event, you can visit their website at the link below. We will also post the link to the concert on our SHUP website, as well as our SHUP Facebook page.

<https://virtualsingingchristmastree.wpcomstaging.com/watch-the-event/>.

We know that it won't be the same as having all our wonderful SHUP choirs and musicians presenting live music during the Advent & Christmas season. However, we hope that everyone will enjoy the opportunity to watch this special Christmas concert, created in partnership and cooperation with musicians and singers from all around the country. We hope it will fill your heart with the warmth, love, and joy of the season – and that it will help to quiet your mind and give you peace, as we reflect on the birth of our Savior -- even amidst the ongoing pandemic!

Mission News



Your Mission Tithe and Dedicated Mission dollars have been at work during October and November. Your Mission Commission allocated an additional \$250 to SHIM because of increasing needs in our communities. The greater Presbyterian church received \$250 for GIVE828 which supports scholarships for seminary students of color. Pobatso, the young African whom we support through World Vision, received a 4th quarter installment to complete \$280 for 2020.

We participated in a series of 4 lectures through the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary on “Race and God’s Mission.” These lectures were viewed and discussed by a “watch group,” the Wednesday Night Bible Study. The focus of the lectures was recognizing systemic racism in our churches and personal lives, as well as missions we engage in. The Seminary is offering 6 workshops on racism for individual congregations.

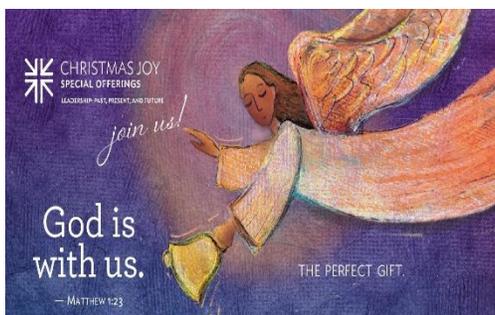
On November 6, your giving designated for Meals for Meds sponsored a pizza meal for the 90 member staff at Paramount Senior Living Center as a thank you for their steadfast care of our seniors during this time of pandemic. Bob and Ileana Wyerman and Dick and Phyllis Moore were residents there during this difficult time.

Christmas Joy

During the Season of Advent, the Presbyterian Church (USA) is asking for donations to its Christmas Joy Special Offering.

The Christmas Joy offering reflects that God is with us, through the generous gifts that support church leaders among us, retired, present and future. Fifty percent of your Christmas Joy Offering is used to provide assistance to current and retired church workers and their families with critical financial needs. The other fifty percent is used to make it possible for students to learn and grow in faith at Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color.

If you would like to make a donation to this special offering, please mail a check to the church or you can use the tithe.ly app on your phone or other smart device. Just remember to write “Christmas Joy” on the memo line.



Angel Tree

This year, SHUP partnered with The Baptist Homes for an Angel Tree project. We received information and requests from 15 residents.

Please consider taking a tag from our tree in Findley Hall to be an Angel to someone this Christmas holiday.

Please return the wrapped gift with the original tag attached to the church by Sunday, December 6th. One of our Deacon volunteers will deliver the presents to the Baptist Homes.

SHIM

SHUP has been collecting food donations through the pandemic to deliver to the food pantry at SHIM. Last month the Deacons delivered over 41 pounds of food. We also made a special delivery right before Thanksgiving.

For the month of December, we would like to be able to help SHIM provide holiday meals to families in need in addition to our regular monthly delivery and **we need your help!**

If you are able to help, you can bring your donations to the church at any time. There is a bin outside the Findley Hall door for collections.

December Activities

Adult Sunday School

8:15 am

This class will continue via Zoom. Pastor Laura will finish the study of *Incarnation: Rediscovering the Significance of Christmas* by Adam Hamilton on Dec. 27th.

The class will take a winter break from January 3rd - 17th.

Class will resume on Sunday, January 24th with the study of "The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church's Complicity in Racism" based on the book by Jemar Tisby. This study will run through April 18th.

Findley Hall Bible Study

Monday's - 1:00 pm

This class will continue meeting using Zoom. They will finish the study *Your Move* by Andy Stanley on Dec 14th.

Please watch the videos before class at:

<https://subsplash.com/northpointministries/media/mi/+mq2253n>

Please contact Evelyn Lape at (412)531-9856 if you would like to join this class and/or to have the Zoom link sent to you.

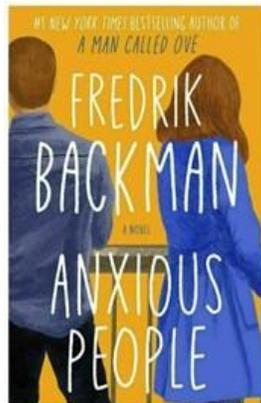
Kid's Club

Wednesday's - 4:30 pm - Findley Hall

All children PreK-5th grade are invited to join us for this Zoom to learn about the love of Jesus.

No meeting on the 30th this month!

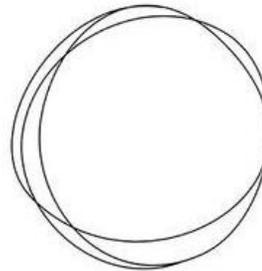
Sunset Hills Book Club
December Book of the Month
December 17th - 7:00 pm
Anxious People by **Fredrik Backman**



An everyday apartment open house becomes the stage for Backman's latest novel, when a bank robber bursts in and takes a group of strangers hostage. As the title hints, each member of the group bares his or her own anxieties, not just about the hostage situation, but about their individual lives. Backman is a funny, charming story teller, and "Anxious People" is a fine showcase for his talents as a writer. There are twists and surprises. There are editorial asides. Beneath it all, there is a deep sense of warmth and empathy. Backman is particularly gifted at creating a community of memorable characters and opening up their mental states to readers. And many readers of Anxious People will in turn reflect on their own anxieties. Ultimately, Backman seems to be telling us that—though it be a messy, ambiguous world we inhabit—we can turn toward one another to find calm and assurance. This is a novel that can, and should, be embraced by anxious people everywhere. —Chris Schlupe, Amazon Book Review

The Book Club will meet using Zoom. If you would like to join the discussion, contact Pastor Laura to have the link sent to you: revlaurastrauss@gmail.com

Prayer Circle



We will be continuing our prayer circle in December. Every week we will pray for 2 members (be it family or individuals). We started at

the beginning of the directory in September and will continue until we reach the end and then repeat. Someone from the church will call you and see if you have any specific prayer requests. This is a time of prayer for our friends and families. We ask that every week you take a moment and add these people to your daily prayers.

Week of:	Praying for:
Dec. 6 th	John & Pat Ellis The Enterline Family; Eric, Carol & Nathan
Dec. 13 th	Joanne Enterline Pamela Enterline & Anthony Martin
Nov. 20 th	The Ernst Family; Kevin, Sarah, Charles, Sara & Lorryn Karen Evans
Dec. 27 th	Tim & Jill Fako The Farabaugh Family; Randy, Darlene, Parker, Bailey & Riley



New Door & Security for SHUP

If you have been to the church building recently, you may have noticed that we had a new door installed by Findley Hall. This is a security door.

Along with the door, ADT is installing a security system. Once the system is fully installed, the security door will remain locked so that a code will be required to enter the building.

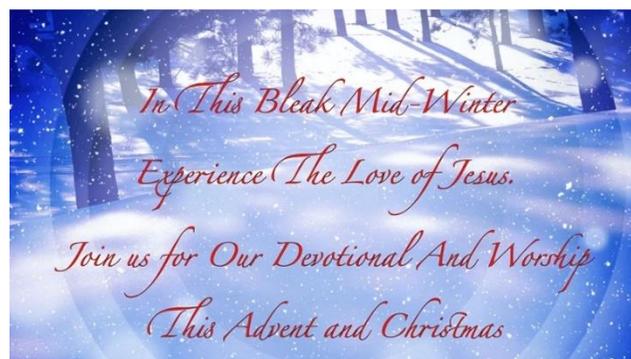
The door will be unlocked for Sunday services and other SHUP activities to allow members access to the building.

You will be able to buzz in during regular business hours.



Prayer List

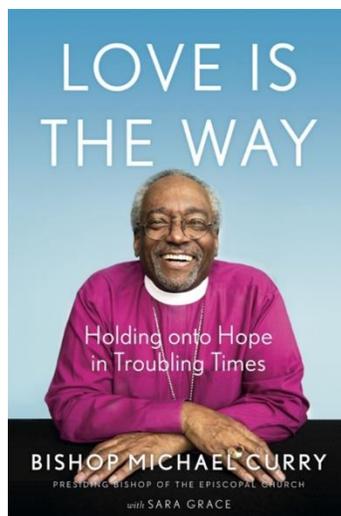
Carolyn Caldwell
JoAnne Enterline
Walter Jackson



Save the Date
Jan. 28th
7:00 pm - via Zoom

Join Pastor Laura for the January 2021 book of the month:

Love is the Way
By
Bishop Michael Curry



Advent Devotional

Pastor Laura and her father, Rev. Dr. Clinton Cottrell have written an Advent Devotional entitled *In the Bleak Midwinter*. The devotional is to guide you on your journey to the manger, leaving the bleak midwinter behind.

A copy of the devotional is available for download on our website:

www.shupchurch.org.