

# THE SPIRIT

The Monthly Newsletter of Totowa United Methodist Church

## FROM PASTOR'S DESK



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I read it years ago. All I remember is the title and caterpillars. That, however; I have recalled often: Hope for the Flowers. The two main characters are caterpillars named Yellow and Stripe. They begin their search for meaning by attempting to climb to the top of a caterpillar pillar only to discover another destiny

That title came to mind winter days. We had a spate of unseasonably warm days. It even got up to 60 plus

degrees. Our neighborhood boys were out in shorts playing and riding their bicycles. That's not all that was out. Some crocus pushed up from the earth and started to open right in our neighborhood. Then the cruel, cutting winds from of the North rushed down the ground froze up again. The temperature had dropped more than 30 degrees over night. Gone were the boys in shorts and their game of street hockey. The tender little crocus were shriveled up. It seemed cruel and deadly.

In the neighborhood of our world and in the yards of our lives all kinds of good and wonderful things start to develop: peace, prosperity, cooperation, love, generosity, creativity. Then comes the rush of cruel, cutting winds to stunt and stymie their growth. Frigidity sets in and we all retreat inside and close up the doors. But this year it is not the temperature but COV-19 virus that force us to retreat in. Everywhere you

turn, schools, businesses and even churches are closing down.

“Follow governmental directives!” As you may have read, the president and governor have issued a directive that there are to be no gatherings of more than 10 people. This includes worship. All pastors and congregations are to follow the directives of federal, state and local municipalities.

Yet we all know that warm, sunny days are on the way and flowers are going to blossom. There is a hope. And there is Easter. This year more than ever people will be looking for answers and seeking hope in this time of uncertainty and chaos. Regardless of what the world will do on April 12th this year Easter will not be canceled! We may not be able to attend church physically at Totowa UMC, but we will be celebrating the hope we find in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Easter is the definitive act that means there really is Hope for the Flowers and for so much more. Cruel, cutting winds (Coronavirus Pandemic, if you will) rushed across Calvary. Jesus was stunted and stymied. All the goodness

he is seemed to be completely shriveled up in death. He was entombed in defeat. Within him, though, was the very vitality of God. It burst forth, broke the power of death and defeat. Jesus blossomed out in a resurrection of love and glorious life. There is Hope for the Flowers and for the future, and the neighborhoods of our world and the yards of our lives.

Easter gives us hope. The very vitality of God will triumph in our lives and in our world. Therefore, let's open ourselves in a conscious and grateful way to God just like the spring flowers that open toward the warm and bright sun. Our resurrection faith opens us to a God who grows us, nourishes us, draws us, changes us, surprises us and informs us.

May God bless you and your family with abundance! Alleluia. Amen!

God loves you and so do I,

Pastor Andrew

## CHURCH NEWS

### Letter from Bishop John Schol

Dear GNJ Clergy and Lay Leadership,

Grace and peace to you in very difficult and trying times in which all of us are learning to navigate. Thank you for your patience and flexibility. I am praying for you and your congregation daily and I have been overwhelmed by all of your prayers for me, the church and our world. Today, I want to update you about three important areas we are addressing during these early days of the coronavirus pandemic – financial concerns, protocols and new resources to support congregations.

#### Financial Concerns

**Shared ministry grace** - The leadership of GNJ is advising congregations to postpone paying their shared ministries for April and May in an effort to alleviate some of the challenges they are facing. To sustain the work of the conference during this time, we will borrow money from the Harvest Mission Fund, a fund that traditionally helps us make grants to congregations. We pledge to work with you during this challenging season and recognize that ministry and finances will vary from congregation to congregation. While we would have liked to have done the same for billables (pension and insurances), we do not have the resources to sustain these financial obligations, as these costs are directly paid to outside providers.

**Giving** – I am hearing reports of generosity across GNJ during this difficult time. One church member paid their entire pledge for the year. Others have increased their giving during this challenging season. These will be difficult times financially for the church. In addition to the tithe that Beverly and I give to GNJ and other ministries,

I will be giving one month of my salary to GNJ to help GNJ during this time. I invite everyone as you

are able to make additional sacrifices for your congregation's ministry.

#### Protocols

**Following governmental directives** - As you may have read, the president and governor have issued a directive that there are to be no gatherings of more than 10 people. This includes worship. All pastors and congregations are to follow the directives of federal, state and local municipalities. **Weekend worship** – Worship is a core practice within the church. It is the coming together of people to magnify and glorify God. It is a cornerstone of our community life together and builds up our faith.

•While the pastor by our polity has authority to hold or cancel worship, there are several reasons why congregations are not to be gathering people together for public worship and meetings.

•We want to take every means possible to protect people's health and stop the spread of the coronavirus. The sooner we all work together to stamp out the virus, the sooner life gets back to normal.

•Governmental officials, including the president, have said there are not to be gatherings of 10 or more people.

•While your town may not be affected yet, we want to be in solidarity with our sister congregations that are in affected areas.

•We want to be a witness and example of what are appropriate behaviors and practices during a pandemic.

•For all of those who are sick or who have died, we want to honor them through our actions.

•The number of reported cases in the United States grew by over 25% overnight. This is a serious health pandemic, and the church should be part of the solution.

**Inappropriate faith teaching** - I have received reports that there are pastors and church leaders who are sharing that God is over the coronavirus and that God will protect us from the coronavirus. THIS IS NOT TRUE. While God is sovereign, throughout history, good Christians, faithful Christians have died through disease. Jesus was clear, "It will rain on the just and the unjust" (Matthew 5:45).

God does not protect us from foolishness and flaunting safety in the name of God. This is a serious virus that kills and is highly contagious. Such preaching and advice are not of God. We are called to be healers and protectors of God's people and not to suggest they should make unwise decisions about safety to demonstrate God "is on their side." God is for everyone and expects the church to model faith tempered with wisdom.

**Coronavirus reporting** - If any pastor has symptoms, contracted or associated with someone affected with the coronavirus, they are to contact their doctor or medical professional and their district superintendent immediately. Also, if any church member is affected, the pastor is to contact the district superintendent immediately. The district superintendent will share with the pastor the steps to be taken. All information will be kept confidential except to notify persons who may be vulnerable to the spread of the virus.

**Pastors affected by the coronavirus** - Presently we have no report of any pastor or church member who has the coronavirus, but we have two reports of pastors and family members who either have symptoms or were indirectly in contact with someone with the coronavirus. In both instances, the two pastors and family members are quarantined and as appropriate working with medical professionals.

**MRC (Mission Resource Center) hours of operation** – Monday through Friday during regular business hours, a few essential staff will be in the office. Most staff will be working remotely. We continue to receive mail, answer phone calls and respond to emails. There will be no onsite

conference meetings. All will be done electronically through video and phone until notified otherwise.

### Support Congregations

Our number one priority is to support our congregations so that we may serve our communities. During this season we have identified the following to guide our leadership and ministry.

### Our Values

**Faith** – During uncertain and fearful times, God is our creator and Jesus our healer who will lead us through this time.

**Compassion** – We care deeply about all people, those in our congregations and the people in the communities we serve.

**Health and Safety** – The health and safety of people is of primary importance.

**Mission** – The urgency of the virus calls us to serve the people in our communities and to witness the love of Jesus Christ within us in new and innovative ways.

### Our Outcome

Eliminate the spread of the coronavirus and increase faith and healing throughout GNJ

### Our Goals

While disease spreads, we will be the church of Jesus Christ, sharing and living the Good News so that we:

**Grow faith** in our people and extend the love of Jesus Christ to our communities.

**Practice safe and healthy ministry** engagement so that we stop the spread of the coronavirus.

**Embody the love of Jesus** and turn the church outward toward our communities to provide appropriate ministry and services with people living in the Greater New Jersey area.

### Our Resources

Staff, clergy and laity from across GNJ spent time on Monday reviewing what people are asking for during this season, and we are enhancing resources in the following areas:

**Worship** - robust materials for online worship and the ability for our smaller congregations to access worship online through GNJ.

**Technology** – step-by-step guides for using technology, interactive resources for asking questions and getting help and tools for innovating ministry online so that people can connect when they cannot meet at the church.

**Connecting people** - information for connecting small groups, youth groups, bible studies and other fellowship. As social distancing becomes the norm, people will need to find new ways to connect to each other.

**Mission** – New ways to serve communities during the coronavirus pandemic.

**Giving** – How to continue giving when people are not meeting regularly.

Some of these resources are already available. Others will be developed in the coming days and weeks. Look for announcements in the Digest and social media, and please continue to check back to see updated resources and information.

For this weekend, we will provide online worship for the people of GNJ whose congregation may not have online worship that will include music, liturgy, prayers and a message. This resource will only be for people whose congregation will not have online worship and will promote the worship later this week.

I am especially proud of you. You have been praying, keeping people safe and healthy and developing creative solutions. It is truly the work of

God among us. Thank you. God will see us through this time because of faithful people like you.

Keep the faith!

John

John Schol, Bishop

United Methodists of Greater New Jersey



### **April Birthdays**

**April 6 – Jim Gibbons**

**April 15 - Mark Sciacca**

### **NOTE:**

**The following events will be updated by Pastor Andrew as we get closer to the dates**

### **Maundy Thursday**



### **Good Friday**

**Seven Words from The Cross**

**Apr. 10<sup>th</sup>, 6 PM**



## “VANTAGE POINT” APRIL 2020

### “THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT”

BY DOUG DUNLOP



“It is eternity now. I am in the midst of it.  
It is about me in the sunshine;

I am in it, as the butterfly in the light-  
laden air. Nothing has to come; it is now.  
Now is eternity; now is the immortal life”.  
Richard Jefferies.

April is the month for celebrating Easter,  
or “Resurrection Sunday” the arrival of  
spring, and new life.

I did have a different topic in mind that’s  
been stuck in my head for a while, but  
after reading an article posted by Pam,  
and talking to Renee about the symbols  
early Christians used to identify  
themselves, I decided to put the other  
topic on hold for now, and write about the  
symbolism of the butterfly.

The scientific name for butterflies is  
Lepidoptera, meaning “Scaly Wings” the  
Greeks from the time of Socrates believed

in the butterfly as a symbol of the  
resurrection of the soul.

As we all know, the early Christians had  
secret symbols to let others know who  
they were without the Romans knowing.

Later the Christian church adopted and  
“Transmogrified” symbols and customs  
of “Pagan” religions to get them to join  
the church. “Easter” was named for  
“Estrus” the goddess of fertility, and the  
“Easter Bunny” became symbolic of new  
life.

Symbols like the Easter Bunny are fine for  
children to help them understand the  
meaning of the resurrection, but as Jesus  
said, now we are grown and it’s time to  
put away childish things.

One other point to consider is that to  
adopt all the pagan symbolism dilutes the  
truth of our own faith. But as Shakespeare  
said “The truth is the truth” and if there is  
truth in the symbolism of nature, we  
should embrace it.

I have always loved butterflies, I think  
they had a symbolism for the ancient  
peoples as well. As Christians we are not  
so different, we are still connected to  
nature. We can see the life cycle of  
butterflies as a metaphor for human life.

The butterfly starts as an egg, develops  
into a caterpillar, then disappears into a  
cocoon, appearing to die, only to re-  
emerge as a butterfly, leaving the shroud  
of the cocoon behind and spreading it’s  
wings to fly.

What happened to the caterpillar? It is not dead but transformed, given a new body.

As Job said “Though worms destroy this

body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” Jesus I believe hinted at this at the Transfiguration, showing that he had the ability to transform himself.

I believe Jesus also said “I will give up this body” and referred to himself as a seed that must die and be placed in the ground.

As I have said before, I believe the church misinterpreted the resurrection by emphasizing the resurrection of the body rather than of the spirit.

In my medical career, I have seen a lot of death, seeing the lifeless body of someone you knew or loved is not easy.

No words can make it any easier, especially if it is a young person gone tragically before their time. Death is a natural progression of life in God’s plan. Though the body may be still and lifeless, the butterfly of the spirit lives on.

We may not understand all of God’s ways but to paraphrase what God said to Job, “You don’t understand my plan for the world, have faith and deal with it”!

## “BUTTERFLY KISSES”

The small white cabbage butterflies flutter gently onto the humble dandelion.

The smallest of butterflies, and the humblest of flowers.

To us they are weeds, in our pride and arrogance we can’t see their beauty.

But the butterflies do.

## BUTTERFLY DANCE

Two pretty butterflies, dancing in the sun.

Little yellow butterflies, having lots of fun.

Swooping up and down and fluttering all around.

God must love to see them play,

that’s why He made them just that way.



ANCIENT CHRISTIAN SYMBOLS AND THEIR MEANING

## 1) Staurogram / Tau-Rho



The Staurogram, or Tau-Rho, is a Greek *tau* (T) combined with a Greek *rho* (P) and was used in the early church as an abbreviation for the Greek word for cross. The letters also sometimes had a deeper meaning. The *tau* could symbolize the cross on its own. The *rho* had the numerical value of 100, which itself could either be a reference to the Greek word for help (which also had the numerical value of 100), or as a reference to Abraham (himself taken as a symbol of the Messiah) because Abraham procreated Isaac when he was 100 years old.

## 2) Peacock



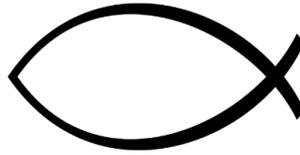
The Ancient Greeks believed that the flesh of peacocks didn't decompose after death, and so peacocks became a symbol of immortality. Early Christians adopted the symbol to represent their belief in eternal life in heaven with God and was often depicted with the Tree of Life.

## 3) Pelican



Medieval Europeans believed that pelicans were particularly attentive to their young, even to the point of wounding itself and letting its young drink its blood when no food was available. As a result, the pelican became a symbol of Christ's passion, pouring out his blood for the forgiveness of sins, as well as the Eucharist.

#### 4) Ichthys



Ichthys is the Greek word for fish, and it was one of the most important early Christian symbols. Not only did fish feature in several miracles of Jesus in the Gospels, but the ichthys was taken as an acrostic for the Greek phrase “Iēsous Christos Theou Hyios Sōtēr,” which means “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.”

#### 5) Alpha and Omega



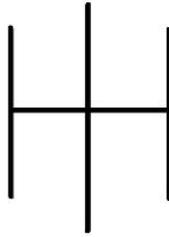
In the book of Revelation, Jesus says of himself, “I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” (Rev 22.13) Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and Omega is the last one. Putting the two together, they represent the eternity of Christ as the Son of God.

#### 6) Chi-Rho



The Chi-Rho is a combination of the Greek letter *chi* (Χ) and *rho* (Ρ), which are the first two letters of the Greek word for “Christ,” and so when put together represent “Jesus.”

## 7) IH Monogram



The IH Monogram consists of the Greek letters *iota* (I) and *eta* (H), which are the first two letters of the word “Jesus” in Greek, and as such was a common shorthand for “Jesus.”

## 8) IX Monogram



The IX Monogram consists of the Greek letters *iota* (I) and *chi* (X). *Iota* is the first letter of the Greek word for “Jesus,” and *chi* is the first letter of the Greek word for “Christ.” Put together, they function as a shorthand for “Jesus Christ.”

## 9) Anchor



In the ancient world, anchors symbolized safety. The author of the Hebrews adapted this symbol for the hope Christians have in Christ: “We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

## A MATTER OF HOPE *Written by BJ Foster*

My workday ended at the United States Senate at the normal time that Friday evening. Normally, I would walk slowly to the train, taking in all the beauty of Washington, D.C. in early spring but not on this evening. I needed to travel to my hometown of Philadelphia for my grandmother's funeral. My father and I had spoken briefly by phone the Sunday before about his mom's passing and I anticipated being able to comfort him in person.

*"When circumstances get dark or difficult sometimes the only thing to keep you going is hope."*

The three-hour drive was filled with heavy rain making the night feel darker. When I finally arrived, I noticed that my parent's driveway was filled with the cars of family members. I was tired but eager to join everyone. As I walked through the door, there was a noticeable silence. My mom who had clearly been crying approached me and told me that my father had died several hours before I arrived. At that moment, a great pain in me was born. It's the type of pain that never disappears, causes time to stop, and makes all of the concerns from the day before seem insignificant. When circumstances get dark or difficult sometimes the only thing to keep you going is hope. However, finding hope can be hard because deep pain is so disorienting. It's tough to see anything but the darkness. The following is what has given me hope in the midst of my deepest pain.

### The Sun Will Rise

Within a couple of years after my dad's death, the movie *Cast Away* came out.

That movie more than any other identified how I felt: lost and isolated, hopelessly separated from a loved one. At the climax of the movie, Tom Hanks' character, Chuck, describes to a friend the hopelessness of being stuck on a desert island. While all logic told him that he would never get off the island, he realized that he needed to stay alive and keep breathing. Then his lack of hope was proven wrong when the tide came in and brought him the material he was able to use as a sail to get home. When he returns home, he finds out that the woman he loves is now married and he has lost her again. In the midst of his terrible sadness, he realizes quickly what he needs to do. "I have to keep breathing because tomorrow the sun will rise and who knows what the tide will bring."

### The Tide

Sometimes it is difficult to understand pain and suffering. Much of it seems senseless causing us to look for someone to blame. When we can't find a person, we turn our prosecution on God. I did that for a while until I realized that all it gave life was a bitter taste. There are many that disagree with my personal beliefs and I say the following with respect for all opposing views. I believe in God and that He is good. When I came to that conclusion, hope was born and healing began. It opened my eyes to how I viewed pain and loss. In my observation and experience, I have found God to be a creative restorer of life, building empathy out of pain and connection out of isolation. He is my rising sun and hopeful tide. What's yours?



**THE SPIRIT**

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Please send your contributions for the MAY issue of The Spirit by April 20, 2020 to the editor at [reneevl@verizon.net](mailto:reneevl@verizon.net). Consider events, news, stories, poems, recipes, or photos. Thank you.

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