

Crosscurrents

November 2011



Pebble Hill Presbyterian Church | 5299 Jamesville Road | DeWitt, NY | 13214 | 315.446.0960 | www.phpchurch.org

From Pastor Pete

I had the occasion recently to offer the “Charge to the Congregation” at the installation service for Shawn Reyburn as the new pastor at the Columbian Presbyterian Church in Lafayette. When looking for a text that I might use as a jumping-off point for my charge to them, I turned to Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians. Since Paul founded that church, he said, he didn’t need any letter of recommendation to be introduced to them, or them to him. Instead, this is what he wrote:



“You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”
(2 Corinthians 3:2-3)

What a wonderful image, I thought, each congregation of God’s people is a letter of Jesus Christ, written with the Spirit of the living God! I noted how people don’t write letters anymore, that it’s becoming a lost art. But many of us have letters we’ve received from family members or friends over time – and we’ve kept them because we know they were written from the heart and because they touched our hearts.

The first thing I charged them, then, was to open their hearts to God’s story being written upon them. Through worship and prayer, fellowship and study – to allow their new pastor to help prepare that word within and among them – and as their hearts are turned outward, their neighbors might read the Spirit of the living God in them.

The second charge flowed from the first. As they begin this new chapter in their life together, they can decide if they will write it, or if it will be written for them. If the Spirit of the living God is written on their hearts, then they are empowered to write a new and fresh story of faith with each new occasion, to build a ministry that touches people’s hearts so that the God to whom they witness will be a blessing to others, and that they’ll want to hold onto it – not as an artifact but as living, breathing documents that tell of the power and love of God.

Now, substitute “we” and “us” for “they” and “them” above, and this is our charge, too. The new thing God is doing isn’t limited to newly installed pastors and their congregations, but is there for all of us who seek it in faith. May our ministry together be a dedicated journey and a compelling witness to the God who has written himself into the very heart of life, through Jesus Christ, our living Lord.

Yours in that same love,

Peter

The Church at Worship November 2011

Worship begins Sunday mornings at 9:30 a.m. All who are interested are invited to gather in the Conference Room at 9:20 a.m. to pray for our church and pastor as we worship together.

November 6

21st Sunday after Pentecost
Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25
Matthew 25:1-13
“Unpredictable God”
Sacrament of Communion

November 13

22nd Sunday after Pentecost
Commitment Sunday
Matthew 25:14-30
“Kingdom Investments”
Celebration Luncheon follows

November 20

Christ the King
Matthew 25:31-46
“Why Wait?”
3:00 p.m. – Thanksgiving Celebration at Beth Sholom – Chevra Shas
“Hope and Thanksgiving”

November 27

1st Sunday of Advent
Rev. Earl Arnold preaching
Peter will be on study leave from November 21 through 28.

A Pledge to Growth

Financial stewardship is not about Christians giving money to their church so that the church can pay its bills. Rather, we see financial contributions as a way to help people grow spiritually in their relationship with God by supporting the church’s mission and ministry with a percentage of their incomes. It is based on the need of the giver to give for his or her own spiritual development, rather than on the need of the church to receive.

At Pebble Hill we treat people not like members of a social club who should pay their dues, but like followers of Jesus Christ who want to give unselfishly as an act of discipleship. We want to encourage people toward proportionate and systematic giving in response to the question, “What percentage of my income is God calling me to give?” During morning worship on November 13, Commitment Sunday, we are asking our members and friends to make their financial commitments to our church’s worship, educational ministries, outreach and mission in this community and around the world. As we make our “pledge to growth” we are committing to continued growth in our family and educational ministries, meaningful and inspired worship, effective outreach, and vital mission in the name of Jesus Christ.

No one will be solicited to complete their 2012 commitment cards. During worship on November 13, we will have a brief period of instruction and inspiration at the end of the service, climaxed by members making their commitments as a confidential act of worship. Our Commitment Sunday worship is

followed by our celebration luncheon in fellowship hall. Since we will make no follow-up visits to ask people to complete their cards, we will make every effort to inform, inspire, and commit everyone to attend Commitment Sunday worship.

Thank you in advance for your enthusiastic participation in our Commitment Sunday events.
Pastor Pete, for the Commitment Sunday Team: Deedee Elleman, John Fayos, co-chairs; Kristin Rubino, Commitment Sunday luncheon chair.

“Hope & Thanksgiving” Sunday, Nov. 20, 3 p.m.

Once again we join with our neighbors at Beth Sholom-Chevra Shas and their new rabbi, Andy Pepperstone, to celebrate Thanksgiving together. Hosted this year by Beth Sholom, our celebration will lift up hope in these difficult times when a lot of people are struggling to keep hope alive. How can Thanksgiving cultivate hope in us and how can thankfulness for what we do have help us to be bearers of hope for others? Through readings, prayers, reflection and music we will give thanks to God and be inspired to be people of hope.

A combined children’s choir will sing “Be a Candle of Hope,” and once again we will join in a service project during the reception following our time in the sanctuary, where the Klezmer Band will be playing.

Come join in this annual festive occasion, and help to welcome Rabbi Pepperstone and his family to our community.

Where Have All the Children Gone?

The September issue of *Presbyterians Today* featured an article by Jack Marcum with this title. The charts he uses illustrate the precipitous drop in Baptisms and Child Professions of Faith, as compared to the decline in church membership overall.

Here are the bullet points:

Child professions of faith have declined from 32,226 in 1992 (the first year they were tabulated separately) to 18,895 in 2010, a drop of 41 percent.

Over the same period, child baptisms fell from 45,017 to 22,460 (down 50 percent).

In contrast, membership dropped 27 percent from 1992 to 2010.

A comparison of child baptisms each year with child professions of faith a decade later—a rough indicator of how many baptized children continue to confirmation—stayed quite stable through 2006. In that year, child professions of faith (24,221) were 62 percent of child baptisms in 1996 (39,060).

By 2010, however, that comparison had dropped sharply, to 48 percent (18,895 child professions of faith, compared to 39,444 child baptisms in 2000).

If the pattern stabilizes at 48 percent, the church would have about 10,700 child professions of faith in 2020, or only about one per congregation per year, on average.

The article goes on to say that “U.S. birth rates have been fairly steady over this period” so “this faster drop owes to fewer young, childbearing families participating in church, compared with adults of other ages and life stages.”

As we look at our mission, how can we make sure that there will be young families here at Pebble Hill to continue the mission in years to come? What changes can we make to our programs, to our facilities, to our outreach in order to reach young families and make them welcome? Are we tailoring our program, services, and worship to satisfy the needs of those who are here, or are we molding them to meet the needs of young families who aren't yet here? Can we do more?

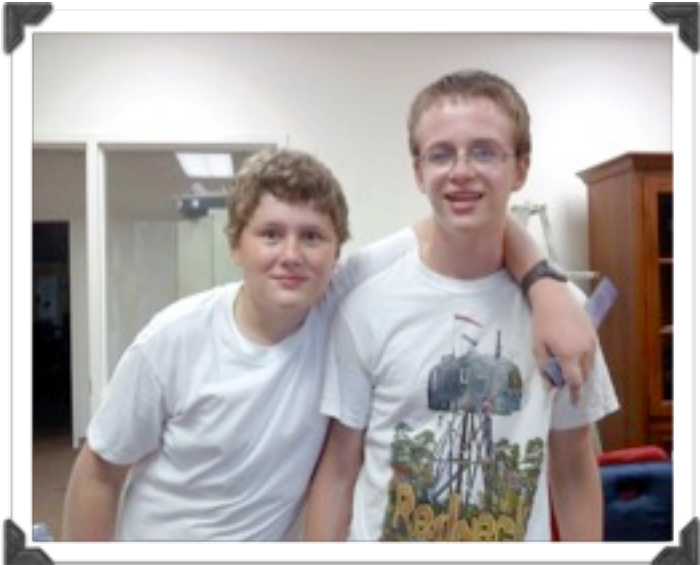
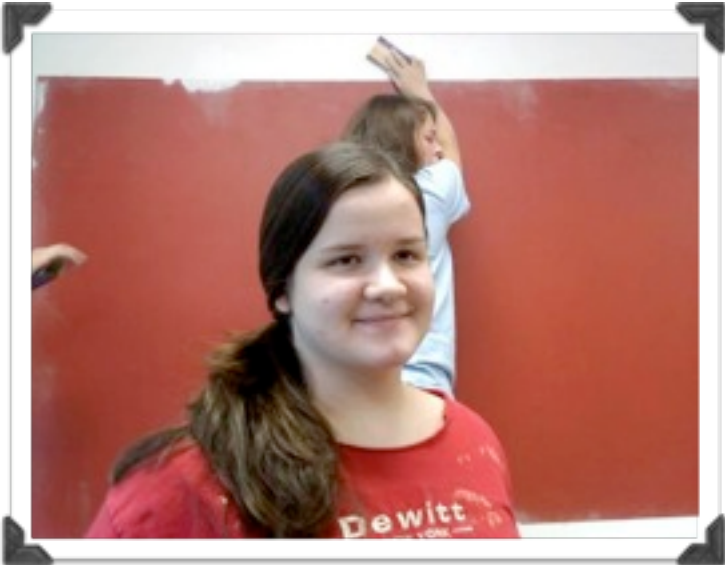
Pastor Pete and I are attending the NEXT Church Conference this month, where we'll meet with other church leaders and interested lay people to address questions like: What new forms of ministry is the Holy Spirit leading us to? And what do we keep and what do we throw away in congregational ministry? If you're interested in participating in the conversation, talk to one of us.

You can read the entire article at <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/presbyterians-today-go-figure-september-2011/>.

Intergenerational Communion Event



Youth Painting Party



Forum: The Advent Project Sunday, November 20, 11:00

Christianity long ago lost Advent to the Christmas culture of the societies in today's world. Many stores have been decked out in their Christmas finery since the day after Halloween, and in ways, it may feel like the first Sunday of Advent "interrupts" what has become one long holiday season lasting from November 1 until the New Year. Against all this the Church has little defense. For all intents and purposes, then, what has become the global culture of Christmas effectively eclipses the season of Advent, precluding any engagement of its primary focus, namely, the manifestation of God's reign. So, then, the Church needs to reclaim Advent, but "How?"

Many churches are complicit. By the time Advent begins, the pressure, even from practicing Christians, to sing Christmas hymns is overwhelming. Many congregations simply surrender to the Christmas culture and hold Christmas "Lessons and Carols" services and Christmas pageants on Sundays of Advent. Additionally, an ecumenical glance at publishers' catalogues will reveal that much of the popular religious literature about Advent heralds it solely as a season of preparation for the Nativity. Certainly, Advent calendars, replete with chocolate treats, are little more than a "count down" to Christmas. Advent spirituality is reduced to pleas to take time out for reflection on these things amidst the bustle of the season. Thus, by the beginning of December we are well on our way to Bethlehem.

The problem with this, of course, is that the primary focus of Advent is the full manifestation of the Reign of God. This is the exclusive focus of the lectionary (Scripture readings) from the Sunday after All Saints' Day (November 1) until the last week of Advent. Only in the last week do these readings which form the thematic emphasis of the Church's weekly worship begin to shift from a focus on eschatology to that of incarnation.

"The Advent Project," a seminar group of the North American Academy of Liturgy, proposes expanding Advent to seven weeks, in order to take full advantage of the richness of the season. Such a move would not only give us more time to live into "holy waiting" for our celebration of the birth of the Christ child; it would also remind us annually that we also await Christ's last coming, when the Reign of God will be fully realized.

Dr. Jill Comings of The Advent Project seminar will tell us more at the Adult Forum on Sunday, November 20. Find out more at www.theadventproject.org.

Updating Church Directory

The Membership Committee is planning to update the Church Directory soon and to get the updated copies out hopefully by January 2012. To ensure the accuracy of the updated Church Directory as far as possible, the Committee encourages the church members to review their names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses listed in the current Church Directory and to notify the church administrators, Pat Carroll or Carla Kinney for any errors or changes. Thanks for your cooperation.



Child of God: Advent Festival Play for Children and Teens

Rehearsals begin this month for the play our children and youth will present in worship on December 11. This year's title is "Child of God," and we have many speaking parts. We will also prepare some special music for this service. Please contact Rebecca Chaffee if you would like to help or if your child would like a part.

Advent Festival Rehearsal Schedule:

11/13	11:00-12:00	Parts assigned at end of classes, read through
11/18	6:00-9:00	Parents' Night Out—first practice, including music Advent wreath prep; Christmas gift project
11/20	11:00-11:30	Rehearsals in each classroom
	11:30-12:00	Combined music practice
11/27	No Practice	
12/3	1:00-3:00	Tree Trimming and practice
12/4	11:00-11:30	Rehearsals in each classroom
	11:30-12:00	Combined music practice
12/9	6:00-9:00	Final Run Through with all ages and music
12/11	9:30-12:30	Advent Festival in worship Crafting and Church Potluck Lunch

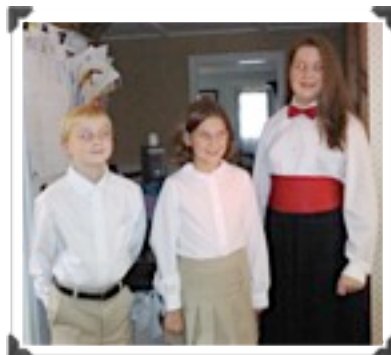
Christmas Eve Family Service Rehearsal Schedule

12/18	11:00-12:00	Christmas Eve service practice
12/21	6:00-7:30	Christmas Eve service Final Run through in costume Luminaria Preparation
12/24	5:30-6:30	Christmas Eve Family Service

Pebble Hill Youth In SCC

Many of Pebble Hill's children and teens have grown and improved their music skills through participating in Syracuse Children's Chorus. The tradition continues this year, with 3 of our young people in the chorus. Allison Tuxford is again in Chorale, and Lina Abu-Absi and Conrad Chaffee are in Preludio. We're so proud of them, and we're thrilled to have them improve the gifts they so often share with us in worship.

For concert information, visit www.syracusechildrenschorus.org. To support the chorus and these kids, contact Rebecca Chaffee. Allison is raising funds for a Chorale tour to Chicago next summer, and all three are selling poinsettias and wreaths in their holiday fund raiser.



ACTS Begins Addressing New Issues

On October 23, the Alliance of Communities Transforming Syracuse (ACTS) Issues Convention identified a new set of issues as the focus for research and action by its member congregations and groups. Representatives of the 44 member congregations voted to choose issues for the coming several years from the following list:

PUBLIC EDUCATION covering funding inequalities and performance outcomes

FOOD ACCESS exploring options to overcome the "food desert" in the city

CRIMINAL JUSTICE dealing with reintegration of former prisoners and performance of police and jail facility

IMMIGRANTS/REFUGEES looking at the difficulties faced by new Americans and harassment by authorities

VOICE OF 99% focusing on state & national economic policies depriving communities of necessary resources

ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES seeking to expand rather than restrict needed care

YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES advocating for options on recreation, jobs and "growth" of young people

PRESERVATION OF NEIGHBORHOODS promoting affordable housing while maintaining vibrant neighborhoods

New task forces are being formed, drawn from ACTS member groups, to research each of the chosen areas and formulate a program of action to address it. The first meeting of all the new task forces will be on Thursday, November 10, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., probably at University United Methodist Church on East Genesee Street. Members and friends of Pebble Hill church are encouraged to attend and join one of the task forces, as together we work to address issues facing our community. *–Submitted by Earl Arnold*

Environmental Film Showing November 18

“Go Green for God”, a Mission and Ministry team involving several Presbyterian churches in central New York, is presenting the documentary "Gasland" on Thursday evening, November 18, at 7:00 p.m. at the Liverpool Presbyterian Church. This film discusses the controversy surrounding hydrofracking, the process for extracting natural gas by injecting a solution of chemicals under high pressure into rock formations deep beneath farmlands and aquifers in southern New York and nearby states to release this clean-burning fuel.

This is the first of several programs on environmental issues affecting our region, to help us become more faithful stewards of the earth God has created, preserving its resources for future generations.

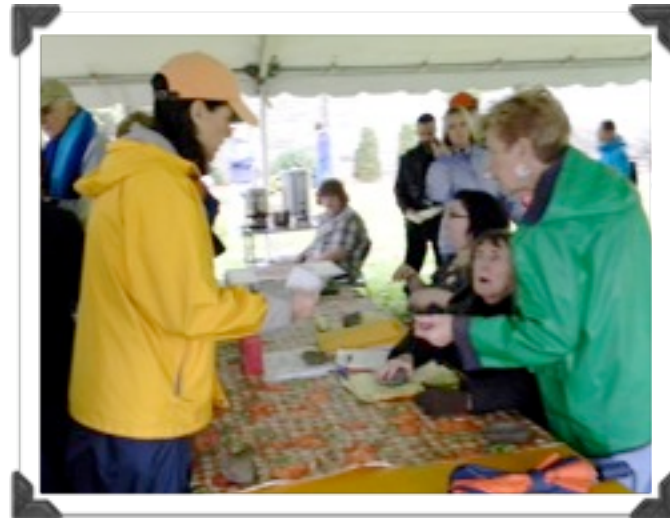
–Submitted by Earl Arnold

Thank You PHPC Women!

I would like to send a huge THANK YOU to all the women of PHPC for making the Tea in September a success. It was wonderful to see all of you there, including the friends you invited. Sandy gave her usual fine presentation of the new study guide. And a special thank you goes to all who helped with set-up and cleanup!

–Doris Gorman

CropWalk 2011!



Advent Reflections

The worship committee will be collecting stories and happenings that you have experienced in your life relating to the Advent season. They can be humorous or serious – old or new, not necessarily church related. We will be grateful for your submissions from now until mid-November. If you could send them to the church office in an electronic form, that would be helpful, but a story typed or hand written and given to a worship committee person will be acceptable. They can be anonymous if you prefer.

The stories will be gathered together and printed in a booklet of *Advent Reflections* so all our church community can share and enjoy them during the Advent season.

For questions, contact a member of the worship committee: *Carolyn Layburn, (Ch), Robin Batley, Carol Ganotis, Linda Kaiser, or Nancy Stewart.*

Communion Ministry

Since 2003, a dedicated group of members of Pebble Hill have been taking Communion to our shut-ins and those not able to attend the public worship service. This is an important ministry as it is a means of extending the church's ministry to them. Even though such a celebration may involve only a few members of the congregation, it is not a private ceremony or a devotional exercise, but an act of the whole church.

To insure that those of our members who need to receive communion even once every three months, we would like to have more of you join in this ministry. Peter will meet with those interested and "train" them. The new book of order states that "such an act of the whole church shall be represented not only by the teaching elder . . . but by any member of the congregation authorized by the session to represent the church"..

Next Communion Sunday when you see the Communion Ministers coming to the front of the church to receive the Communion Kits from Pastor Pete, remember these folks are representing you to our shut-ins.

For questions contact Jean Wolff at 446-1689 or jbwolff_3@msn.com.

Do You Know Your Elders and Deacons?

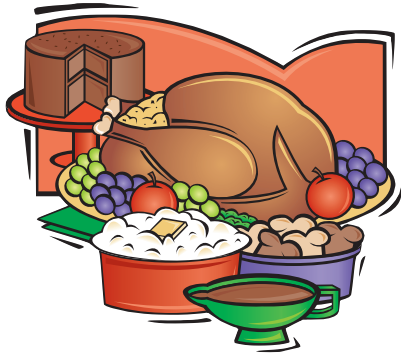
To facilitate church members and frequent visitors to know our Elders and Deacons better, the Membership Committee has recently attached small designation labels to the name tags of those officers. Please feel free to talk to them regarding their joy and responsibilities of serving the congregation and your concerns about the church.



Helping Hands

Annual Thanksgiving Food Pantry Collection

Throughout the year, our congregation, led by the Board of Deacons, supports the food pantry at New Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church. During November, we make an extra effort to provide special Thanksgiving food items along with regular staples for those in need.



To help with this outreach, brown paper bags will be distributed on Sundays, November 5th and 12th. Please take one (or more if you wish), fill it with groceries, and return it to church **no later than Monday, November 14th**.

In addition, the deacons would like to collect at least 25 turkeys. Donations of frozen turkeys or financial contributions for their purchase will be most appreciated. Frozen turkeys can be placed in one of the freezers in the church kitchen. Please notify a member of the Deacons' Food Pantry Team if you have done so. Financial contributions may be placed in the offering plate or directed to Bill Byrne, Treasurer of the Board of Deacons (checks

payable to "Pebble Hill Presbyterian Church" with "turkeys" noted on the memo line).

The food will be delivered on **Tuesday morning, November 15th**. This mission is very important as the need continues to grow. We are deeply grateful for your generous support.

Deacons' Food Pantry Team:
Nick Abu-Absi (682-9975)
Paul Falgares (682-3548)
Dan Dingle (682-8963)

Deacons Christmas Stocking Project



The annual Deacon Christmas Stocking Project is underway. This year the Deacons are providing stockings filled with necessities and toys for children in the pre-K program at Dr. Weeks School. Our need this year is for 36 stockings. Stockings can be sewn or purchased. There will be stocking patterns and a list of gift suggestions near the display board in the atrium.

Items needed include hats, mittens, socks, underpants/panties (to fit 3, 4, or 5-year-olds); small stuffed animals (beanie-baby size); small toys; stickers (non seasonal); hair accessories; pencils, crayons, markers; little pads of paper; toothbrushes and toothpaste; small, easy-to-read books; wrapped candy. Please remember that it's important for all items to be sized to fit into a stocking. *Items may be left in the bin by the display board. The deacons will fill the stockings.*

Stockings and unwrapped fillers will be picked up on December 13, by the pre-K teacher.

Thank you all for supporting this worthwhile project, and have a wonderful holiday season! **Questions?** Contact Deacon Jinny Caswell at 637-3967. *Thank you*



Laughing Matters

Kids and Church

Three boys are in the school yard bragging about their fathers. The first boy says, "My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it a poem, they give him \$50." The second boy says, "That's nothing. My Dad scribbles a few words on piece of paper, he calls it a song, they give him \$100." The third boy says, "I got you both beat. My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it a sermon, and it takes eight people to collect all the money!"

.....

Two boys were walking home from Sunday school after hearing a strong preaching on the devil. One said to the other, "What do you think about all this Satan stuff?" The other boy replied, "Well, you know how Santa Claus turned out. It's probably just your Dad."

.....

Attending a wedding for the first time, a little girl whispered to her mother, "Why is the bride dressed in white?" The mother replied, "Because white is the color of happiness, and today is the happiest day of her life." The child thought about this for a moment then said, "So why is the groom wearing black?"

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Pebble Hill Presbyterian Church Staff

Pastor: Rev. Dr. Peter Shidemantle ~ *E-mail:* petephpc@twcny.rr.com

Music Director/Choirmaster: Bette Kahler ~ *E-mail:* bkahler@twcny.rr.com

Director of Family & Educational Ministries: Rebecca Chaffee ~ *E-mail:* kidsphpc@twcny.rr.com

Office Administrators: Patricia Carroll, Carla Kinney ~ *E-mail:* patphpc@twcny.rr.com

Bookkeeper: Cindy Wakeman ~ *E-mail:* cindyphp@twcny.rr.com

Sexton: Bob Wolff ~ *E-mail:* bewolff@msn.com

Coordinator, New Member Ministries: Nancy Byrne ~ *E-mail:* nancyhippsbyrne@gmail.com

Clerk of Session: Doris Gorman ~ *E-mail:* dorisgorman@verizon.net

Moderator of Deacons: Janet Rider ~ *E-mail:* laughonu2@aol.com

Crosscurrents Editor & Webmaster: Kathy Monaco ~ *E-mail:* kcmcreative@aol.com
