



REV ERIN JAMES-BROWN

The Little Harbinger

Bethany Memorial Church

October 2022

The Pastor's Pen

by Rev. Erin James-Brown

I emailed and shook hands and smiled so hard my face hurt during my first week as pastor of Bethany Memorial Church. I delighted in the beauty of our church building and the rich history of the faith built here over generations. I felt and still feel so lucky to be called to serve alongside you all in this haven of West Virginia.

My family moved from Chicago to West Virginia, a big change of scenery and lifestyle. Life in the big city was lovely, but I find the slower rhythms of rest and enjoyment of nature so refreshing. I can feel my blood pressure calming and my muscles relaxing. This place, in all its natural grandeur, rings with peace.

My spouse, Joel, our toddler, Margot, and I lived in Chicago, Illinois for 8 years before moving here. I served new churches meeting in storefronts and theaters, mostly doing outreach to LGBTQ+ people

in the area. It was rewarding work, but hard. In my new calling to Bethany Memorial Church, I look forward to bringing my knowledge of innovative ministry to an established church where paths cross and new journeys begin. I am honored to serve with dedicated leaders who are committed to loving God and neighbor. And I wonder where God will lead us next.

To begin the conversation about God's leadership and how we will follow, I am introducing "Erin's Book Club." Every once in awhile, we will commit to read a book together as a church. Young and old and born in the church and those new to us, we need everyone's ears to hear the sound of God's call. Our first Book Club meeting will be Tuesday, November 1 at 7:30 PM on Zoom. Before then, get yourself a copy of one of my favorite books:

[*Real Good Church: How Our Church Came Back from the Dead and Yours Can, Too*](#) by Molly Phinney Baskette. Please do not be alarmed by the title! I do not believe Bethany Memorial Church to be on the brink of death. The author chose a provocative title to entice readers who are fearful for the Christian Church (universal) and its future. Written in 2014, the author presents data that is already a little out of date in a fast-paced society and a post-COVID world. However, Baskette offers practical advice that generates creative ideas for new ministries, evangelism, and joy in the church community. I love this book and hope you will, too. Baskette's story of her own church's growth will inspire us to engage our local community, use our resources well, and challenge our personal spiritual development.

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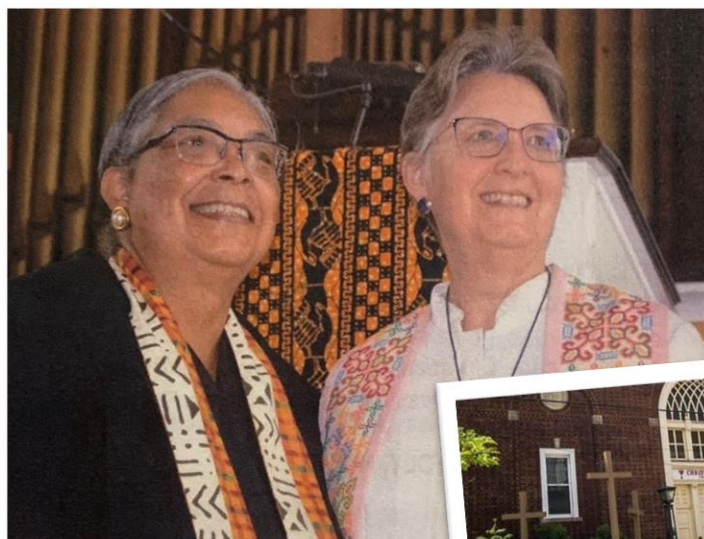
If you need help getting a copy of the book or cannot afford to buy one at this time, please reach out to Connie McVicar, our church administrator (cmcvicar@bethanywv.edu). There are copies in the church office for you. Looking forward to sharing in the conversation about the future of BMC with all of you. See you soon!

Our Sister Church

The Christian Church of Wilkinsburg

Submitted by Debra Hull, Outreach Ministries Chair

Interracial, intergenerational, into Jesus, in the heart of Wilkinsburg, within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), a movement for wholeness and healing in a broken and fragmented world.



Revs. Cecilia Sims and Janet Hellner-Burris



“Working Together for the Common Good,” the theme of the installation service for co-pastors, the Revs. Janet Hellner-Burris and Cecilia Sims, on September 17, 2022, honored the legacy of the Christian Church of Wilkinsburg and provided a polar star for the future.

Formed in 1902, the church and surrounding community were made up of white, comfortably middle-class people. Once the steel industry collapsed and African Americans living in the Hill District of Pittsburgh were displaced by the construction of the interstate and the Civic Arena, middle-class African Americans moved into the community, some brave souls joining the church. During the white flight that followed, businesses closed, homes were abandoned, and most Protestant churches moved out of the community.

In the 1980s, denominational officials advised the Wilkinsburg Church also to move out of the community. Instead, in 1990, the church made the courageous decision to “stay in the city that we might be clothed with power from on high.” Shortly after, they called the Rev. Janet Hellner-Burris to be their pastor. She promised that they would do real

ministry until the day they closed the doors of the church—ministry in service of the guiding principles of racial justice, reconciliation, and inclusion.

Thirty-two years later, that ministry continues through: the New to You Shop; afterschool programs; preschool; weekend youth outreach programs; Santa’s Open House; mission camps; Wilkinsburg Sanctuary Project for Peace; a gun buy-back program; Art and Talent shows; interfaith prayer vigils; motorcades in response to Covid and the George Floyd murder; summer internships for youth; vaccine clinics; and so many more.

BMC is truly blessed to be in relationship with the people of Wilkinsburg Church. We pledge our continuing support and our resolve to learn better ways we can work together toward racial reconciliation through faithful conversations on race, always moving toward becoming an interracial family of faith.

[Excerpted from the program for the installation service]

Disciples Women's Retreat Resumes

by Connie McVicar

Disciples Women's Ministries is a general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of the United States and Canada that works to create avenues for clergy and lay women to seek renewal and ministry opportunities by and for women around the world. The WV annual retreat was cancelled during the Falls of 2020 and 2021. For more information about Disciples Women, go to <https://www.discipleshomemissions.org/congregations/disciples-women/>



After a 3-year delay due to Covid, it was great to meet up again with friends (old and new) from the WV Region. The retreat was held at Cedar Lakes Conference Center in Ripley, WV and there were 86 attendees from all over the state, including myself. Liz Short, Director of Philanthropic Gifts of Bethany College, also attended, providing information about Bethany College, as well as providing shuttle service for the women at the retreat.

The theme of the retreat was "Healing Love" based on the book, "Healing Love" by Becca Stevens. WV Disciple's Women were the Keynote speakers for the retreat, which included Jennifer Allen, Linda Cheverton, Rosetta Smith, Betty Beeson, Dorothy Brownlee, Carlotta Smith, Robin Norsworthy, and Sarah Webb. Each one gave us insight and perspective from different chapters in the book.

The Service Project for the WV Disciples Women was the WV Coalition Against Domestic Violence. This organization is based in Elkview, WV and services 14 domestic violence shelters throughout the state. This organization supplies the shelters with monies as well as items for women, children, and even pets that come into the shelter. BMC gave a monetary gift of \$200.00 and collected donations from the congregation for this service project. Thank you all for your donations! By the end of the retreat, the total amount collected for this service project was \$1,521.00. In addition, monies received at the Retreat included \$1998.86 in Blessing Boxes, \$418.00 for the Hunger Fund of Week of Compassion, \$725 during the Sunday Worship to be donated for the work in the WV region, and &1,715.60 from the Art and Basket Silent Auction which will be used to build the WV Disciples Women's fund.

Each year at the Women's retreat, participants honor and memorialize those West Virginian Disciples who have passed away. In the picture above, the Rev. Sarah Webb and Connie McVicar help prepare a cross that will include the names of those who have passed in the past three years.

Below, Disciples women participate in the "Kitchen Band," making music with items typically found in a kitchen.



Green Chalice Recognition Given to BMC

The letter from Rev. Carol Devine, Minister of Green Chalice, a partnership of Disciples Home Missions, reads in part:

“On behalf of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), I extend congratulations to Bethany Christian Church for becoming a Green Chalice Ministry. Green Chalice celebrates the fact that you are living out your faith by caring for God’s creation and leading the denomination and your community in authentic ways. Green Chalice applauds the fact that you have a green team, have affirmed and signed the Alverna Covenant, and have made changes that help your ministry walk more gently on the earth. Take time to celebrate this accomplishment. Please add this recognition to your newsletter and website.”

I look forward to hearing about the new things that Bethany Christian Church is doing to save our sacred planet. May your journey be blessed by God.”

Thanks to the committed work of Chair Gerard NeCastro and the Green Team, BMC was recognized as a “Green Chalice Ministry” earlier this year. Now the goal is to become a CERTIFIED Green Chalice Congregation. To achieve this recognition, a Creation Care Team must be created, the Green Chalice Covenant adopted, and three additional actions undertaken to demonstrate the church’s commitment turned to action.



The Alverna Covenant

Whereas:

God has created the world with finite resources;
God has given to us the stewardship of the earth;
God has established order through many natural cycles;

And it is evident that:

We are consuming resources at a rate that cannot be maintained;
We are interrupting many natural cycles;
We are irresponsibly modifying the environment through consumption and pollution;
We are populating the earth at a rate that cannot be maintained;

As a member of the human family and a follower of Jesus Christ, I hereby covenant that:

I will change my lifestyle to reduce my contribution to pollution;
I will support recycling efforts;
I will search for sustainable lifestyles;
I will work for public policies which lead to a just and sustainable society;
I will share these concerns with others and urge them to make this covenant.



Excerpts from Pastor Erin's Report to the Board

Presented at the BMC Board Meeting on
October 10, 2022

Worship

Advent Planning. I plan to schedule a meeting with the Worship Leadership Team to plan the advent season. This year's lectionary passages tell the birth narrative of Jesus through the gospel of Matthew.

Evangelism

Outreach to the community. I reached out to the pastor at Christian Church of Wilkinsburg (DOC) to discuss further partnerships and continued reconciliation and anti-racism efforts. I am passionate about anti-racism work and would like to learn more about what ways we can work to support our siblings in Wilkinsburg and grow as a congregation to be increasingly anti-racist. I volunteered to serve with the Reconciliation Ministry of the Christian Church (DOC) for the larger denomination.

Vaccination Clinic. I am excited about the vaccination clinic and believe it could be a great invitation to Bethany community.

Outreach at Bethany College. As I meet folks at Bethany College, my mission is twofold: meet with faculty and staff to learn about the institution and meet college students where they already gather. My goal is to reach out to Deans to schedule meetings and learn

about their needs at the college. I plan to be present and available where students hang out, while I gain trust with the institution and its leaders, by regularly eating lunch in the cafeteria on Mondays and Thursdays. The Gay/Straight Alliance on campus hosts a Bethany Pride event on Tuesday, October 11 from 5-7 PM, which I plan to attend. (See photo above)

BMC Spotlight. Once a month, or maybe once a week, we will host a BMC member Spotlight. Members answer several questions about their favorite movie, book, or podcast. They recommend their favorite local eateries and disclose what they wanted to be when they were a child. All spotlights will include a photo of the individual and their answers to be shared in the monthly newsletter and on Facebook. Up first, we will feature Bill Kiefer, Noah Gill, and Brenda Hart.

Pastoral Care

I value pastoral care for the sick in body and the healthy in spirit. Regarding the latter, I am contacting regular attendees of worship to learn more about the people who consider themselves a part of the BMC community.

Spiritual Formation

Weekly Bible study and mid-week prayer. I have not attended any of these meetings, however I hope to begin doing so in the near future.

Erin's Book Club. See information in front page article.

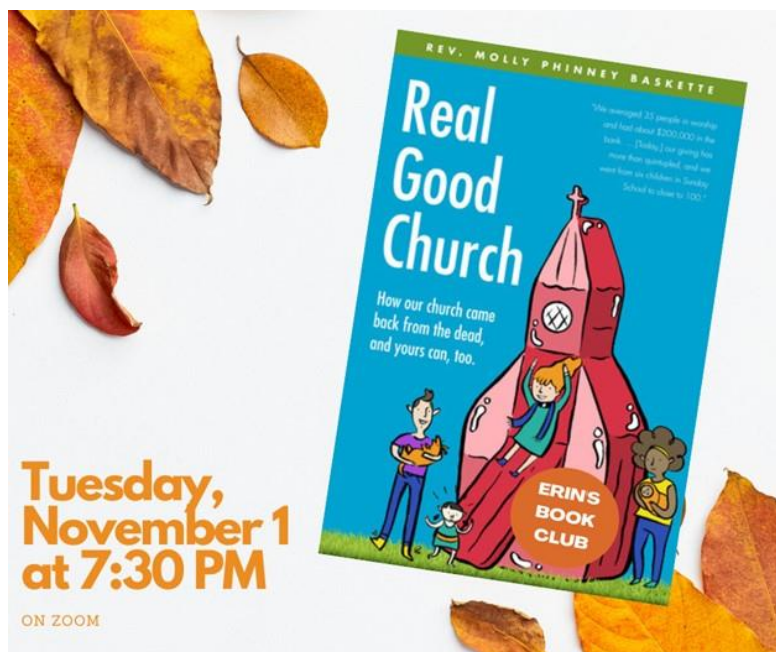
Prayer List

*Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may
be in good health, just as it is well with your soul.*

3 John 2:1

- The men, women, and children of Ukraine.
- John Cole
- Tamara Pettit (Bill Kiefer's wife)
- Rick Ehrhart & Sharon Zacherl (cousins of Vicki NeCastro)
- Mike (Brenda Hart's cousin)
- MaryAnn Eisenhauer
- Bill Kiefer
- Becky Ayers and Family
- Roma (Brenda Hart's mother)
- Kerry Shaulis
- Helen Moren
- The Tennant Family (friends of MaryAnn Eisenhauer)
- Cathy Chambers
- Cheri Schwertfeger Koscevic
- Natalie (friend of Brenda Hart)
- Butch Brown
- Vonnie Larson
- Kelly (friend of Brenda Hart)
- Lynn, brother of Shirley Kemp
- Tom and Karen (friends of David George)
- Tommy VanMeter and the VanMeter Family
- Eldon Beery (Deb Hull's father)
- Jim McMillan
- Bird Taylor Guio
- Mary Wilson (former mother-in-law Holly)
- Perry "Jeff" Jones, Jr.
- Sandy Stevenson (sister of Kim Stevenson)
- Sharley Hillgardner
- Larissa and Hannah Holland (friends of Vicki NeCastro)
- Debbie Guillony Geisler (sister-in-law of Jim McMillan)
- Madeline Wilson
- Nancy Pietrangelo (sister of Penny Tittle)
- David Gnatek (brother-in-law of Holly Hillgardner)





**Tuesday,
November 1
at 7:30 PM**

ON ZOOM

Contact Connie in the church office (304-829-7138) if you are interested in participating in “Erin’s Book Club” to begin on Tuesday, November 1 at 7:30 pm.

Call for Congregational Work Party

The restoration of the interior of the Old Meeting House is nearly complete. What remains is fastening down of the pews and vacuuming up of any dust. Of course, after such major restoration all the pews and the floor must be washed down.

If you participate, we ask that you bring a bucket of warm water and cloths for cleaning and drying. This is necessary as we have no access to water at the OMH.

We will have bottled water and snacks.

Look for the rescheduled date on the BMC Facebook Page.

<https://www.facebook.com/bmcwv>





“We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ we welcome all to the Lord’s Table as God has welcomed us.”

The
Little
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Memorial
Church

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