

The Messenger

A monthly publication from our Spirit filled church.

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Messiah Lutheran Church
2850 Guiderland Avenue
Schenectady, New York 12306
www.messiahschenectady.org

Email:
office@messiahschenectady.org

Phone:
518.355.2311

Facebook:
www.facebook.com/MessiahLC



We are a Spirit filled church following Jesus Christ.

Community Events

Pastor Dustin's Coffee Club Continuing Thursday, February 13th at 10:00am

At Messiah we generally offer two different weekly faith formation opportunities for adults. On Sunday mornings, Dr. Merle Longwood leads a wonderful in depth discussion group while on Thursdays at 10:00am, Pastor Dustin leads a more "entry-level" discussion about the Bible, core Lutheran teachings and other aspects of our faith. In fact, we use the same curriculum our confirmation students and their parents are experiencing every week, called [colaborate](#).

As our confirmation class is right smack in the middle of the Old Testament, we've started right there along with them and then will move into core Lutheran teachings as we journey into the spring. As there are study packets to be ordered, please let Pastor Dustin know if you're interested in attending! Coffee, as always, will be provided!

Community Meditation Hour Continuing Thursday, February 13th at 6:00pm

Over the past few months we've heard a lot of positive feedback about our twice a month community meditation sessions in the sanctuary, but

there has been indeed one criticism as well... scheduling has been difficult, and a couple times guests and members of our congregation have showed up for canceled sessions. Thus, this winter Pastor Dustin will begin "curating" a meditation hour each and every single week on Thursdays at 6:00pm. While some weeks we'll continue using the same wonderful meditation we have for a number of months under lay leadership, other times Pastor Dustin will lead and borrow from various traditions and practices he's studied over the years. Think of this as SORT OF a second weekly worship service at Messiah... just mostly

grounded in meditative prayer rather than a corporate spoken and sung liturgy. If you have any questions, suggestions or would like to lead a session, please speak with Pastor Dustin or our Worship & Music Ministry Team Chair Rianne Johnson.

**New Adult Education Course:
Reclaiming Jesus
Starting on Sunday, February
16th at 9:00am**

In a time of deep divisions in the American body politic, our Adult Education Sunday morning class will study the most recent book, *Christ in Crisis: Why We Need to Reclaim Jesus*, by Jim Wallis, globally respected writer, teacher, preacher, and justice advocate. In this book, Wallis writes: "Don't go right, don't go left, go deeper." Building on the "Reclaiming Jesus" Declaration that Wallis, the Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, Presiding Bishop and Primate of The Episcopal Church, and twenty-one other "church elders" from diverse backgrounds released to the public in May 2018—to which 5 million people responded—the author challenges us to explore how a crisis of moral conscience, perhaps compounded by a constitutional crisis, may require a fresh confession of faith. Copies of the book will be available to class participants. Everyone is welcome to join in these



Many thanks to all who came to Trinity for our shared Christian Unity Service!

discussions, which will be led by Merle Longwood, beginning on Sunday morning, February 16th, from 9:00 – 10:00am.

**WELCA Program Meeting: Joan
Nicole Prince Home
Tuesday, February 18th at
7:00pm**

Join the women of Messiah as they welcome representatives from the Joan Nicole Prince Home, a local nonprofit home that is dedicated to providing a safe, comfortable, caring residence for terminally ill patients in need of a home during their final days. From discussing how the home operates, to how individuals can help out, navigating loss, and how to support a terminally ill loved one, this night is an important aspect of Messiah's renewed focus on supporting the emotional and spiritual needs of Messiah's members and their families. Please join us – this event is open to all, not just women!

**The Poor People's Campaign:
Capital Region Organizing
Meeting**

**Wednesday, February 19th at
6:30pm**

**Albany Social Justice Center
33 Central Avenue in Albany,
New York**

Following the example of the ELCA Upstate New York Synod and national Christian bodies including The Presbyterian Church (USA), The Episcopal Church, United Methodist Women and the United Church of Christ, Messiah's Congregation Council voted in its February 2020 meeting to endorse The Poor People's Campaign, a movement that seeks to revive the work of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in connecting poor folks across racial, partisan and geographic divisions to transform America in a more moral society. If you're interested in learning more about the Poor People's Campaign, this is the gathering

for you! Simply speak with Pastor Dustin or [RSVP on Facebook](#).

**Schenectady Safe Space
Open Mic Night
Friday, February 21st from
7:00pm-9:00pm**

Ibrahim has begun working with Schenectady Safe Space after they approached Messiah about using the church space as a welcoming and inviting space for LGBTQIA+ folks in their first fundraiser - an Open Mic Night on February 21st from 7-9pm. Schenectady Safe Space is a burgeoning group for support and safety for LGBTQIA+ folx (like me, hence my direct involvement) in the Schenectady area. Proceeds and donations will go toward creating a more anchored (i.e. with a building) Space. Thanks for your donations, prayers, and loving support, and for showing up on the 21st!

**Sunday of the Transfiguration
Sunday, February 23rd at
10:15am**

As has become a tradition at Messiah, we spend Transfiguration Sunday, the last Sunday before Lent, celebrating and supporting our young people who are taking their First Communion. Following worship will be a very special reception and be sure pray for Jack, Atticus and Anthony as they prepare for

this important day in their life of faith!

**Shrove Tuesday Pancake
Supper
Tuesday, February 25th from
5:00 - 7:00pm**

Messiah will once again continue one of our most cherished traditions, the Shrove Tuesday Eve Pancake Supper. Join us for the traditional celebratory meal of pancakes and sausages cooked up by our awesome Kitchen Committee! Check out the bulletin board in the narthex to sign-up or sign up online on Realm and please bring pancake mix, syrup or pre-cooked sausage links if you're able. Whatever is leftover will be contributed to our Bread of Life Food Pantry. As part of our annual tradition, Pastor Dustin will burn last year's palms from Palm Sunday to prepare ashes for the following day at about 7:00pm outside by the fire pit, and he'd love for you to join him as we prepare for the Lenten fast.

**Ash Wednesday
Wednesday, February 26th
7:30am - 11:00am at the Jay
Street Pedestrian Mall
12:00pm at Good Shepherd
Lutheran Church
7:00pm at Messiah Lutheran
Church**

Pastor Dustin, Pastor Deron (and now Pastor Dan from Our Redeemer!) will once again be down at the Jay Street

Pedestrian Mall in Schenectady giving out ashes and a short blessing for folks on their way to work. We'll also hold our joint noontime service at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, 547 Saratoga Rd, Schenectady, NY 12302 with Pastor Dustin preaching and Pastor Deron presiding. A simple lunch of soup and bread hosted by the people of Good Shepherd will follow. Our primary Ash Wednesday Vespers service will take place at 7:00pm back at Messiah. Ash Wednesday is one of the best opportunities of the year to get out there and share the good news of Christ, so be sure to share our Ashes to Go and our Ash Wednesday Vespers events on Facebook with friends, neighbors and other loved ones!

**The Vagina Monologues at
Proctors
Friday, February 28th at
7:00pm
Proctors Theatre
432 State Street in
Schenectady, New York**

We know, we know... it's hard to get past the name! That said, since it debuted on Broadway over twenty-two years ago, the Vagina Monologues have been raising awareness about important topics that affect women everywhere, from body image issues, sexual harassment, reproductivity issues and more. Individual stories are told by a

cast that will include many well-known faces from across the Capital Region and all proceeds from the event will benefit the YWCA of Northeastern New York, an organization in Schenectady that serves nearly 4,000 women and families each year with comprehensive support services which include a domestic violence hotline, shelter, counseling, advocacy, and more! While this event is sponsored by Messiah's Young Adult Group, all are invited to attend. Tickets are \$35 each but the cost can be subsidized if needed. Tickets are general admission and can be purchased at www.proctors.org. Just let Pastor Dustin know to look for you there!

Addicted: A Lenten Sermon Series on the Twelve Steps Sundays, March 1st - March 29th at 10:15am

While we might not always talk about it publicly, a significant portion of folks at Messiah have either family members who have faced alcohol or drug addiction or are working at recovery themselves. And from Martin Luther's perspective, even the heart of sin is addiction to our own egos and hangups, something he called being "curved in on our ourselves." With these facts in mind, Pastor Dustin has spent some time this winter studying the spirituality of twelve step programs, namely through the fantastic work *Breathing Under*

Finding the Divine Through Music: A Lenten Journey with Douglas J. Chilton

Wednesdays, March 5th - April 1st from 6:30 - 7:30pm

Oftentimes through learning about the faiths of others, we can learn even more about our own. In this spirit our one and only Minister of Music will lead us through a magnum opus of a Lenten journey entitled *Finding the Divine through Music*. After a brief opening centering Mr. Doug will play music and lead us through conversation based on the faiths and composers outlined below. Local clergy from the faiths being discussed may be joining us as well.

- **March 4th | Qawwali Music:** Devotional music featuring the great Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. Originally performed at Sufi shrines or dargahs throughout South Asia, Qawwali music gained mainstream popularity and an international audience in late 20th century. Sufism is the mystical, inward dimension of Islam.
- **March 11th | Music from the Top of the World:** The Gyuto monks are known for their tradition of overtone singing, also described as "chordal chanting". The monks are part of an order known as The Gelug, which is the newest of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism.
- **March 18th | Ravi Shankar:** Ravi Shankar is the Master of Indian Classical Music, which is a part of the Hindu tradition. Hindustani classical music is the art music of northern regions of the Indian subcontinent. Its origins date from the 12th century CE.
- **March 25th | Chichester Psalms:** Composer, conductor and performer Leonard Bernstein, the son of Ukrainian Jewish parents, explores the book of Psalms in his Chichester Psalms. The text was arranged by the composer from the original Hebrew. The piece uses Psalms 100, 108, 2, 23, 131, and 133.
- **March 11th | Johann Sebastian Bach:** J.S. Bach was the primary developer of Western music as we know it. Bach devoted nearly his entire professional musical life to service in the Lutheran Church.

Water by Richard Rohr, and he'll be leading a sermon series throughout the Lenten season based on the twelve steps. Grounded in the four Lenten practices of self-examination and repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving and works of love, the beautiful music of Marty Haugen's *Unfailing Light* liturgy and the practice of our Lenten prayer tree, we'll be taking some time collectively this Lent to stand together as we turn way from our addiction to ourselves towards Christ reflected in the face of our neighbors.

Historic SiCM Assembly Hosted at Messiah!!!

Tuesday, March 3rd at 7:00pm

This past Easter Sunday the people of Messiah Lutheran Church signed a letter urging Schenectady Community Ministries to become an interfaith organization so it's fitting that a massive celebration of that historic change will take place right in our own Fellowship Hall! Join us as we welcome delegates from SiCM's current member faith communities and new delegates from at least two new member faith communities, Congregation Gates of Heaven and Nemeton of the Ways. Press and other local leaders will likely be on hand to bear witness to the fact in Schenectady County, folks of

We welcomed our newest baptized member, Nathaniel on February 9th!



"Who Is My Neighbor?" Conference Tuesday, March 17th from 9:00am - 4:00pm Presbyterian New England Congregational Church 24 Circular Street in Saratoga Springs, New York

Join the New York State Council of Churches, Goldstein Hall Attorneys at Law, Pace University Land Use Law Center, American Institute of Architects Westchester Hudson Valley, New York State Association for Affordable Housing, Upper New York Conference United Methodist Church, Community Preservation Corporation and other partners for a day of conversation with colleagues and experts that will inspire you to: Think in new ways about how congregations can reach out to their communities and to revitalize.

Draw on the theological riches of your tradition to address attitudinal and legal barriers which prevent your neighborhood and region from welcoming people of all incomes and races and helping them to live, work and participate in your local economy.

Renovate and improve your property to further your mission.

Show a variety of real-life examples of congregations who have found creative ways to extend their mission and redevelop their property for the benefit of the community while improving space for fellowship and worship. Many have also built affordable housing, created arts and community spaces, planted community gardens and developed schools and educational programs.

Equip you with practical tools that will enable your congregation to take important new steps in following the biblical command to love our neighbors—and our neighborhood.

Messiah and Trinity Reformed's properties will be included in a case study presented at this conference, so it's important a number of our folks attend! Messiah's leadership training budget line will cover attendance costs for our team, so please simply contact Pastor Dustin to sign up [or click here for more information](#).

ALL faiths are working together to build a better community! If you'd like to help provide refreshments, please speak with SICM Delegates Nancy Stellrecht and Betsy Ryan.

March Newsletter Articles Due Tuesday, March 3rd

Yes, we are starting to get much better at collecting articles! Many many thanks to our congregational council members for being liaisons and reaching out to their assigned committees for to get our newsletter out on time! Please get your articles in to Rianne by Tuesday, March 3rd at the latest. A reminder will be emailed out on Tuesday, February 25th.

March Newsletter Released Thursday, March 5th

As long as nobody in the office is sick (like this release, whoops) the newsletter shall be released on Thursday, March 5th! Keep an eye out on your inboxes and be sure to pick up your newsletter on Sunday, March 8th.

SICM Empty Bowl Fundraiser Sunday, March 29th from 2:00 - 4:00pm

Double Tree Hotel by Hilton 100 Nott Street in Schenectady, New York

Join Pastor Dustin, fantastic chiefs and local leaders from across Schenectady County for an afternoon of delicious soups, voting for your favorite chef, pick a prize raffle, fellowship and most importantly, supporting our collective efforts with folks of all



Adult Ed is excited to begin Jim Wallis's book *Christ in Crisis!*

faiths to feed the hungry! Tickets are \$35, and you can either buy a ticket online [here](#) or speak with Nancy Stellrecht or Betsy Ryan. You'll even get to take home an awesome homemade bowl!

Earth Honoring Faiths: Working for Climate Justice in Our Time Tuesday, April 21st at 7:00pm

For Messiah's third annual Earth Day lecture we'll welcome nationally known scholar, speaker and theologian Dr. Melanie L. Harris, Founding Director of African American and Africana Studies and Full Professor of Religion and Ethics at Texas Christian University. Dr. Harris is a former broadcast journalist who worked as a news producer for ABC, CBS, and NBC affiliates. A community leader whose passion for education is linked to a commitment to social justice, she has also served as an educational consultant with the Ford Foundation, the Forum for Theological Exploration, and the Wabash Center for Teaching and

Learning in Theology and Religion, Lilly Endowment Inc. Her talk will focus on the intersection of race, religion, gender and environmental ethics. Please join us friends for what's become a powerful and well attended annual tradition for many throughout the Greater Capital Region!

The Poor People's Campaign: Moral March on Washington Saturday, June 20th, 2020 United States Capitol Building US Capitol Grounds in Washington, DC

Messiah's headed to Washington this summer for the Poor People's Campaign Mass Assembly and Moral March on Washington! The gathering will be a generationally transformative event in front of the US Capitol in Washington DC. People of faith from across the country will be gathering to stand with the poor as they raise up the collective voice of poor and low-income people. The Poor People's Campaign demands that both our major political parties address the interlocking injustices of

systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, militarism and the distorted moral narrative of religious nationalism in America by implementing a truly [Moral Agenda](#). If the rejected millions—the poor without health insurance, without living wages, without clean water, without voting protections—unite, especially alongside people of faith, we can move the moral and civic imagination of our country across party lines and revive the heart of the nation! Forty-three percent of our fellow citizens, including members of Messiah, are now struggling to get by, and building on the work of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. before he was assassinated, raising up the voices of those directly affected by poverty will be the best way to bring lasting change. If you have any questions or are interested in attending, Pastor Dustin is currently serving as our main connection point and will be organizing rides to Washington alongside other local religious leaders.

News You Can Use!

Reminder: Lock Up!

As a reminder, please make sure that if you're the last person to leave and lock the church up, please pull the door shut to make sure the lock has properly latched. Many thanks for keeping our church safe!

Pastor Dustin, Ibrahim, and Merle at a Poor People's Campaign Event



Volunteers Needed!!

Golly, in our rapidly growing congregation, we're always in need of all sorts of help to support our many new and existing ministries. If you'd like to volunteer, please speak with Pastor Dustin! Here's just a few keys areas where assistance is needed.

- Cradle Roll/ Nursery Committee Chair
- Social Justice Committee Chair
- Arts & Culture Committee Chair
- Nursery Leaders
- Fellowship Ministry Team Coordinator
- Tech Czar Worship Leaders
- Snow Shovelers
- Personnel Committee Members
- Communications Committee Members
- Mighty Men of Messiah Chair
- Welcome Committee Chair

Reverse Lenten Project

Our Reverse Advent project was such a success that we thought we would do something similar for Lent. We are suggesting for this time, to add as many items to the bag as you wish. The bags will be available on Sunday, Feb 23rd, at the Pancake Supper, Tues Feb 25th and Ash Wednesday, Feb 26th. They will, again, have lists of the products we use in the pantry. If possible, please stick to that list. We are asking that you bring them back on Palm Sunday, April 5th and place them on the altar. We appreciate all the donations and help this congregation gives to the Food Pantry and our community.

Join Messiah in Going Solar with Common Energy!

Announcing an exciting new partnership with our friends at [Common Energy!!!](#) Messiah recently signed up to both save money and receive 100% renewable solar energy from local community solar provider Common Energy and you can

too! Common provides folks in our area with a guaranteed lower energy bill, a lower carbon footprint and for every household that signs up using this

link: <https://www.commonenergy.us/partners/messiah-lutheran>, \$50 is reinvested

back in additional energy saving efforts at Messiah Lutheran Church! So far we have two households signed up and we're hoping to get to twenty! Signing up is a breeze! If you have any questions, please speak with Creation Care Chair Karen Enke Telfeyan!!!

We're Funding the Furnace!!!

Especially given that a major capital appeal campaign is no longer happening immediately, it's important we replenish our Dr. Robert Doremus Emergency Fund used to purchase our new sanctuary HVAC system quickly! Many thanks to our many members and our friends from Christ Lutheran Church who've contributed so generously to the campaign so far! We've currently collected \$6,850 of the \$10,000 needed so we're almost three quarters of the way to our goal! Let's wrap this up by Easter Sunday!

Camp Calumet News!

We currently have somewhere between ten and fourteen of our youth attending Camp Calumet this summer and Kristen and all the Calumet kids' and their parents have been hard at work preparing for fundraising season to start this

March to reach our goal of paying half the cost for a week of camp of each youth! Ongoing fundraisers will include a bottle collection, a t-shirt sale, a change collection and something called "March Mug Madness" where our kids will lead a decorate your own mug project for \$5 each to help green our congregation and cut down on kitchen costs. Here's a preview of specific upcoming events:

- Friday, March 13th at 6:30pm: Bingo Night with Sister Robert Ann
- Sunday, March 22nd after worship: Crepes for Calumet Luncheon
- Friday, May 8th at 6:30pm: Paint & Snack Night at the Olochnowicz Garage Mahal
- TBA, June: Second Annual Calumet Carwash
- Sunday, June 28th at 7:00pm: Second Annual Campership Fund Benefit Night featuring the Messiah Lutheran Choir

Faith Formation Ministry Team Update

Feels like a whirlwind, doesn't it? Winter, the quiet months for trees, for animals, for "living things", seems to be a-bustle with vivacity for Messiah. Talk of buildings, of mergers, of moving, of maybe and maybe not - all of these can feel invigorating or destabilizing. I would like to think that as the Faith Formation Ministry Team (FFMT), our goal is to help us not

with what we believe, but HOW we believe. Faith formation doesn't offer answers, but offers a path or multiple paths to discerning answers to life's many many many questions.

In our Strategic Plan, we said Faith Formation's goal is "to listen, share, be heard, and experience the Way of Christ." The journey is not always clear. The way is not always obvious. But we are stronger when we listen to God and each other. We are stronger when we are honest about where we are at. We are stronger when we are together, hand-in-hand, shoulder-to-shoulder, sharing the journey, fiercely committed to being together even if and especially when the road gets rough.

This will be a year of lots of transition - lots of formation, deformation (hopefully not the bad kind), re-formation. Faith Formation will not be one thing, one way, monolithic. I once heard that truth is not a brick wall to defend but a trampoline to which we invite others to share and play. I am guessing Faith Formation might feel like that trampoline over the next year - I hope it's fun!

Social Action Ministry Team Update

On January 14th, the Social Action Ministry Team had it's first meeting. As per the new Strategic Plan, what we formerly call the Social Action Committee is now the Social Action Ministry Team. The "in the works" Social Action



Our second annual Candlemas was interesting, to say the least! Many thanks to Rachel DeTeso-Mathis, Jill Becker, Rianne Johnson, and all who helped in SO many various ways that Sunday!

Committees will now be called the Social Justice Committee and the Community Service Committee. We are looking for persons to chair each of those committees. The other two committees making up the Social Action Ministry Team are the Creation Care Committee and the Bread of Life Community Center.

The Social Justice Committee has yet to be defined but will be the "advocacy" committee. Look for further information in the future.

The purpose of the Community Service Committee will be to support the work of our congregation members in living out God's call to serve their neighbors, generally in partnership with local and global organizations. This would include our God's Work, Our Hands Projects as well as volunteering for Concerned For the Hungry, The Regional Food Bank, SICM's Summer Lunch program and various other programs. The first hour was spent mostly on Social Action items like sorting food at the Regional Food Bank on two

upcoming dates, April 18th and June 20th. We also discussed how we would run the meeting and the two new committees. The second hour, the two existing sub-committees met and discussed information related to their individual sections. Pastor and I rotated between each of the meetings.

Worship & Music Update

On February 3rd the Worship & Music met for their monthly meeting. Topics discussed were: Mr. Doug's upcoming retirement and the beginning stages of developing a new job description with the Personnel Committee; worship assistants and areas where we may need to implement more training; the need for more individuals in Altar Guild; evaluations of services over the past month; the upcoming dedication of our new hymnals; and meditation! Meditation has been very well attended – we have had up to nine people show up to one session which is absolutely amazing. We now have a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board

if you would like to lead a session – it is open for all to lead with no experience required. We invite all to try out an evening to unwind, connect with our bodies and spirituality better, and be kinder to ourselves.

Fellowship Update

In the coming months our Care and Concern Committee's work will be expanding! We will be extending visitation to not just members, but the family of members that may be in nursing homes. We hope to send care packages to college students and other young adults that are away from the congregation for one reason or another, and trying to reconnect with inactive members. Our currently-forming Welcome Committee will hold a Spring New Member Class on June 7th, 2020. A new goal is to make sure we are following up with new members over the first six months to make sure they are getting connected with at least one group or committee at Messiah. We also plan on bringing in new folks to better coordinate our Men's Group, Young Adult group, and our Over 55 Gang. We will also be welcoming Gloria Maki as one of our new Visitation Ministers soon!

Stewardship Update

We currently have 49% of our confirmed members actively involved in committee and our goal is to get up to 80% by the end of 2020... so we definitely need folks to prayerfully

consider how all of our members can take more ownership over the many ministries at Messiah. We are also working on finishing the campaign for the furnace – we are currently at \$6,850 out of \$10,000 which is almost there! It's so important that we replenish our Dr. Robert Doremus Emergency Fund quickly. Many thanks to our many members and friends from Christ Lutheran who've contributed to generously to this, as well. The Property & Grounds Committee is working on implementing the "low-hanging fruit" from our recent energy audit, addressing ongoing maintenance concerns, and will begin evaluating our friends at Trinity Reformed's building soon. The Budget and Finance Committee is continuing to strengthen the work of our Treasurer in line with Generally Accepted Accounting Practice. The Personnel Committee is taking the lead on finding a new Minister of Music and wrapping up the development of a Staff Handbook.

Card Ministry

Betsy continues to send out cards as a part of our card ministry and has sent out five of them with lots of love and care during the month of January.

Ministry Team Meetings

Fellowship Ministry Team Meeting

Tuesday, February 11th at 1:00pm

Out of our four new program ministry teams, gosh, it's clear that Fellowship needs the most work. At the same time, as we work to knit our church family closer during a time of immense change for our congregation, simple opportunities to be together are more important than ever! Pastor Dustin is currently coordinating this ministry team as it's just so gosh darn important, but would love to find a replacement! Topics for discussion include evaluating the role our Kitchen Committee should or shouldn't have in all the various meals we have together, our upcoming Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper and Easter Breakfast, how to develop a strong Welcome Committee for our new members and potential members and strengthening the work of our Care & Concern Committee. If you have any questions please speak with Pastor Dustin.

Faith Formation Ministry Team Meeting

Tuesday, February 11th at 7:00pm

Come discuss the year ahead and continue to try to unfurl some little leaves in the dead of winter. We are ever thankful for your support, your prayers, and your insights. Feel free to e-mail Ibrahim before Tuesday night if there are particulars you want us to discuss (ijp@ibrahimpedrinan.com),

and feel free to shoot a prayer their way at 7pm or so! Much will be discussed, from our efforts to support our high school youth to our first ever confirmation winter retreat weekend to our adult education opportunities and more!

Over 55 Gang Planning Meeting

Thursday, March 12th at 1:00pm

Please join our Over 55 Gang meeting on Thursday, March 12th at 1pm – lunch will be provided as we plan future outings and events. For more information, please contact Barb Hallett.

Stewardship Ministry Team Meeting

Tuesday, March 17th at 7:00pm

The Stewardship Ministry Team comprises all our committees that steward all of the tools we have as a congregation to support the work of everything God calls us to do as a congregation. Members of the Communications Committee, the Property & Grounds Committee, the Budget & Finance Committee, Personnel Committee, Mission Support and Budget & Finance Committee will BRIEFLY meet together to hear common updates and then break out into small groups to discuss their regular business. If you have any questions, please speak with Pastor Dustin.

Minister of the Month: René Dunda-Martin



Congratulations to René Dunda-Martin on being our Minister of the Month! Rene and Randi met in the Navy 29 years ago and have been married for 1 ½ years. René works as a school bus and medical driver in Albany. She has graduated chiropractic school and is currently working hard on passing her boards to get licensed. René is very creative (which is evident in her delicious cooking,) and loves grape juice! She loves living in New York and absolutely loves spending time outside with her fur babies, Paco and Baxter, the best non-service service dogs around. René is a natural teacher and speaker (although she will say she is not,) and is looking forward to being able to present her "Rene 2.0" at a

WELCA meeting later this year.

René does a ton at Messiah – she serves on the Altar Guild and is an usher alongside Randi, is our treasurer (and has done a LOT of tedious work on vacation/days off), and has done so, so much behind-the-scenes work that deserves a huge THANK YOU!



Congratulations to Messiah's very own John Crowther who was recognized as Firefighter of the Year in our local fire district!! Thank you John for your service to our community!!!

*Another picture from Candlemas – we **really** like to use candles at Messiah!*



PASTOR'S LETTER: REV. DUSTIN G. WRIGHT



Dear siblings in Christ,

I keep on saying this as of late, but keeps being true... I could not be prouder of this Spirit filled congregation of folks grounded in Jesus Christ.

Only two and a half years after our historic Reconciling in Christ vote to become a fully open, welcoming and affirming congregation to everyone, in particular the LGBTQIA community, it was Messiah who was asked to later this month host the kickoff event for a drive to build a Schenectady Pride Center. Less than a year after we all signed a letter on Easter Sunday urging Schenectady Community Ministries to become an interfaith organization, on March 3rd right

in our very own Fellowship Hall, SiCM will welcome a Jewish community, Congregation Gates of Heaven and a Druid community, Nemeton of the Ways, into its membership (and likely another synagogue, a mosque and a Sikh temple will be joining as well).

After years of horrible territorialism between food pantries in the Schenectady area, Messiah's Bread of Life Food Pantry will soon be one of the first pantries in our county to join the Food Pantries of the Capital District and it is my hope that our example will be able to once again move SiCM to similarly partner with The Food Pantries... we all need to work together to feed a hungry community, and Messiah is leading the way on that!

Despite a heartbreaking setback when our long awaited final draft of a Master Plan to make our building fully accessible came in at over double what we could afford, over \$500,000, folks showed up, week after week to discuss a wide range of possibilities. After those three conversations, and a historic worship service at Trinity Reformed, two Sundays back at our Annual Meeting we decided to take some common steps together:

- Delegated all building, financial some mission questions related to our capital campaign and possible consolidation with Trinity Reformed away from my pastoral portfolio of work to an appointed team of Neal Fisher, Charlie Zitzmann and Joyce Gresham.
- Affirmed our 2020 – 2025 Strategic Plan as a guiding document for making future decision.
- Entered into a renewed sense of prayer and fellowship around the possibility of consolidation with our friends at Trinity Reformed.

And gosh, I'm happy to say that the Spirit is already moving quickly and rapidly in this area as well! Trinity Reformed's version of our synod, a classis, was so excited about the possibility of them consolidating with us that they recommended we begin permanently worshipping together as early as Pentecost Sunday, May 31st!

While property, legal, financial and other matters won't yet be worked out by that time, it is my firm belief that those hard decisions will become much easier as soon as we start gathering together as one community. There's a lot ahead of us, dear friends, but gosh is the Spirit moving in an exciting way! Let's ground ourselves in prayer and get to work!

May you know the peace of Christ as we prepare for our Lenten journey and for all that is ahead,

Pastor Dustin



PRESIDING BISHOP'S LETTER: BISHOP ELIZABETH EATON

In 1526 the reformers embarked on a program of visiting the parishes in Electoral Saxony. It's known as the Saxon Visitation. As would later be stated in the Augsburg Confession, its objective was to determine if "the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly." Martin Luther himself visited the parishes in and around Wittenberg. He wasn't pleased. He found that many clergy didn't receive adequate compensation, and that the gospel was not clearly taught or understood.

Luther, in his inimitable subtle style, wrote: "Dear God, what misery I beheld! The ordinary person, especially in the villages, knows absolutely nothing about the Christian faith, and unfortunately many pastors are completely unskilled and incompetent teachers. Yet supposedly they all bear the name Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, even though they do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments! As a result, they live like simple cattle or irrational pigs and, despite the fact that the gospel has returned, have mastered the fine art of misusing all their freedom." Yikes!

Luther's experience led to the publication of his Small Catechism, a "Handbook for Ordinary Pastors and Preachers." In clear and concise language, he explained the basics of the Christian faith so that all people, not just educated professionals, could understand the great gift of the gospel and live it in daily life. Theologian Timothy Wengert points out that Luther rearranged the typical order of medieval catechisms to make clear the evangelical understanding that the good news means law and gospel, judgment and promise. Luther "insisted on moving from law (Ten Commandments) to gospel (Creed and Lord's Prayer)."

This uniquely Lutheran understanding of the gospel is an important contribution to the Christian movement. It calls out the reality of the human condition, that we are broken and have broken creation, that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves, that we need a just and loving God who has no illusions about human nature and, at the same time, has infinite love that claims us and sets us free. This is true evangelicalism that rejects what I call the "Billy Joel gospel" that declares: "I like you just the way you are." God's love is unconditional, but God does not like us just the way we are—that's why we have Jesus. I am concerned that our branch of the Lutheran movement can become watered down to the point of Christian Moralistic Therapeutic Deism—a concept developed by Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton in their 2005 study of common beliefs of American youth. To paraphrase very roughly the results of their study: God exists, God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, the central goal in life is to be happy and feel good about oneself, God does not need to be particularly in one's life except when God is needed to solve a problem, and good people go to heaven when they die. In this philosophy, there is no awe in the presence of the Transcendent, no turning outward from self, no horror of the reality and the effects of sin—and not in the narrow sense of individual moral failings—no wonder at the intimate love of God shown in the incarnation and the crucifixion, no deep gratitude for the liberation of the resurrection.

In 2017, I called this church to study Luther's Small Catechism. I think we did for a while. I ask that we all study it again, use it in Bible study and preaching, refer to it when navigating the demands of daily life, incorporate it in our work of justice and advocacy, use it in honest self-examination, and trust its witness to the gospel when we receive the Lord's consolation. Luther said he needed to study it every day—and he wrote it! Let's us do the same.