

**December 2024**



**First Presbyterian Church of Verona**

***Come and Worship With Us  
All Are Welcome***

**10:15 am**

**10 Fairview Ave, Verona, NJ 07044**

**973-239-3561**

**Interim Pastor: The Rev. Dr. Rhonda Myers**

**Interim Music Director: Kyle Blackburn**

**Christian Education Chair: Cathy Franco**

**Sexton: Open Position**

**Admin. Assistant: Patti Beirne**

**E-Mail: [veronapreschurch@gmail.com](mailto:veronapreschurch@gmail.com)**

**Website: [www.veronapreschurch.org](http://www.veronapreschurch.org)**

**OUR MISSION STATEMENT**

***“WELCOMING HEARTS, NURTURING SPIRITS,  
UNITED IN FELLOWSHIP AND FAITH***

**ONLINE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUPPORT AND WORSHIP**

**For those who are unable to attend, services will be streamed through this you tube site:**

**<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0czo7NSkhf56Ffx50pA03Q>**

**Online giving is now available on our website: [veronapreschurch.org](http://veronapreschurch.org)**

## FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK



“The angel said to (the shepherds), “Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” (*Luke 2:10-11*)

My Dear Friends in Christ,

I’ve never seen an angel. But, if I did, I suspect my reaction would be much like that of the shepherds: cowering at the fearsome sight. And I would likely ask: Why should the angel come to one such as me to offer a message from God?

Me, a mere mortal? I pray my response might be similar to that of Mary, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.” (*Luke 1:46-48*)

But I have my doubts!

The thing is, though, we all *do* receive messages from God. They may not come to us through the spectacle of an angel visitant, but that doesn’t make them any less real. My call to ordained ministry came years ago amidst a Presbyterian Women’s retreat at Stony Point Conference Center, where the voice of God was heard only by me and the embrace of the Holy Spirit was unmistakable—yet, again, known only to me. While unapparent to others, it was a moment which arose out of prayer, a moment of utter conviction which changed my life, and a memory which will stay with me forever.

The angel’s approach to Mary and to the shepherds might not have been broadly experienced by the larger world, but it didn’t make the experience any less a summons to respond to God’s grace with love and conviction. They knew from that moment forward that they could no other than serve the Lord with gladness and share the good news of the incarnate Son.

As Christians, we share a common calling to be servants of the Lord, giving freely of ourselves with joyful and generous hearts. Now, our rational brain may reject the idea of our seeing angels, but that doesn’t mean that God won’t send messengers our way, perhaps even messengers who will encourage us to act as the author of *Hebrews 13:1-2* instructs, “Let mutual affection continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

Angels come in many forms, often hidden by a cloak of invisibility. But they come. And they come with messages of love, support, and guidance from a generous Lord. While I leave you at the end of the month, I do so trusting that God will send along such messages, whether through the lips of human prophets or through the embrace of the Holy Spirit during times of prayer and discernment. I encourage you to trust in these experiences of divine engagement, just as Mary and the shepherds did at the pronouncement of the coming Messiah.

During this time of change, as you await the calling of a new pastor, it’s important that you entrust the church’s future to God and allow God (and God’s agency through the Pastor Nominating Committee) the time and space needed to provide new pastoral leadership. One aspect of our parting as Interim Pastor and Congregation is the willingness to “let go and let God.” While this severance may not be a welcome one for all, it is an important part of any pastoral transition. As I leave, the Spirit shall guide in making room for new leadership, new energy, and new imagination to rise to the fore. God will not ignore or neglect you. So, trust in God. Be constant in prayer. Awaken to the Spirit’s presence. And heed the messages of purposeful faith and ministry that come your way.

I know that some of you are sad to see me leave. But I have felt the need to move on to the next phase of my life as an honorably retired pastor. I don’t have the energy I had even 2 years ago, and it’s best I heed my body’s signals that this is the time, myself, to “let go and let God.” I don’t know whether God will lead me to another part-time ministry closer to my home in Ulster County; but for now, I will satisfy my need to refresh and renew with time away from active service in the church.

This, of course, means that I will commit to a covenant of closure as determined by the Presbytery of Northeast New Jersey and be unavailable for pastoral service to the congregation.

But please know that I will treasure the friendships made here, and I will continue to pray for you as I do the other congregations I have served. But offering the pastoral functions of counseling, calling, conducting weddings, funerals, or baptisms are not appropriate. And I'm sure you understand that.

As we share our last Advent season together, I invite you to make the most of it. Join us for worship. Sing with the choir. Take part in our Book Study. Be open to the Spirit at work in our midst. Listen for the voice of God, even if mortal in flavor rather than angelic in origin. Welcome the Incarnate Savior of the world. And trust that Jesus comes for all, even us mere mortals, with a summons to serve with gladness, love, and the conviction of faith born anew each Christmas.

With love and thanksgiving,

*Pastor Rhonda Myers*

**Advent Book Study**

Join us for a study of Adam Hamilton's book, *"Faithful: Christmas Through the Eyes of Joseph."* While much is not known about Jesus' earthly father Joseph, Hamilton has done some good research and, through prayer and biblical discernment, has created a moving story that gives background on Joseph and speaks of his role in rearing the Christ-child. Each night will begin with a short video based on the book, followed by a discussion on each chapter's contents. We'll meet in the Sunday School room on Mondays @ 7pm. Books are available from the church office. Here is the schedule:

- November 25<sup>th</sup> Chapter 1: A Carpenter Named Joseph
- December 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter 2: Whose Child is This?
- December 9<sup>th</sup> Chapter 3: Raising a Child Not Your own
- December 16<sup>th</sup> Chapter 4: The Journey to Bethlehem
- December 30<sup>th</sup> Chapter 5: The Rest of the Story

<b>2024 CHURCH OFFICERS</b>			
<b>SESSION</b>		<b>DEACONS</b>	
Cathy Franco Donna Lauckner Christopher Kiel Donna Kiel	Deborah Michelsen Marilyn O'Neill Margaret Whiting	Kathy Dougherty David Haimann Matthew Koroluk Michael McGough Trevor Mescia	Willow Pomponio Tennille Wasek Barbara Haimann Marion Shine Daniel Uniss
Margaret Whiting, Clerk of the Session Council Dr. Michael Duhaney, Corporation President Ken Lauckner- Treasurer Kathy Dougherty & Donna Lauckner- Financial Secretaries Kathy Dougherty - Deacon Chairs			



## **INTERFAITH THANKSGIVING SERVICE AT THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

On November 24<sup>th</sup>, at the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service at the Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit Pastor Rhonda received a special service award for her work with the "Clergy Council"



## **BLUE CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SERVICE**

The Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit and the First Presbyterian Church of Verona will be leading a Blue Christmas Worship Service on Thursday evening, December 12<sup>th</sup> @ 7pm. It will be hosted this year by Holy Spirit Church, 36 Gould Street, Verona.

Why is it called a Blue Christmas Service? Because it is designed to respond to the needs of those who feel "blue" during this season of growing darkness. (Some call this a Longest Night Service.) Not everyone feels up and cheery for the Christmas holidays. Dealing with the death of a loved one, facing life after divorce or separation, coping with the loss of a job, living with cancer or some other dis-ease that puts a question mark over the future, and a number of other human situations can make parties and joviality painful. This worship service is intended to offer a time of healing, hope, and reflection. Even if this service is not for you, spread the word to those for whom this service is being offered.

## **STEWARDSHIP**

Session will begin working on the 2025 Budget in December and pledges are a significant part of that budget, so it is critical that we wrap up our pledge drive this month. With 78% of our pledges in, we are nearing, but we have not yet reached our goal. We are confident that with everyone's participation, we will. If you have misplaced your pledge card, please contact the church office or Barbara Haimann and a pledge card will be mailed to you.

Thank you to everyone who has already responded to our Pledge Drive.

Barbara Haimann, Donna Lauckner, Marilyn O'Neill

## **CHRISTMAS JOY OFFERING**

Our Christmas Joy Offering will be received on December 22<sup>nd</sup> at Sunday worship. This congregation has a long history of supporting this special offering of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) The Offering distributes gifts equally to the Assistance Program of the Board of Pensions and to Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color. The Assistance Program provides critical financial support to church workers and their families. Presbyterian-related schools and colleges, such as Bloomfield College, provide education and leadership development while nurturing racial and ethnic heritage. Please consider making a generous gift this year.

## NEWS FROM THE MUSIC DEPARTMENT



### We wish to welcome our Interim Music Director, Kyle Blackburn

Kyle will be with us at least through the month of December as we search for a new Music Director. He will be encouraging the children to sing, while he continues to practice with the Chancel Choir prior to Worship Sunday mornings at 9:30.

### CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

We are making it to the end of another calendar year. The students have been busy studying about many things. The younger ones are learning stories of the bible and how to be a good person and follow Jesus & God – who loves us no matter what we do. The older class is learning who had written the different books of the bible to help give more understanding when they hear the words of scripture and connect them to their own lives.

As our adults have been pledging for Stewardship Sunday, our students would not be outdone and did the same thing. After discussing what time, talents, and treasures are, each one who could write identified what they have to give to help the church out. Our church is blessed by having these talented and helpful children as our future leaders. You can see them all hanging on the first floor bulletin board.

The 7<sup>th</sup> annual **Sock Drive** to help those less fortunate begins on December 1<sup>st</sup> and runs through February 23<sup>rd</sup>. Please donate the most requested item at shelters of warm socks for individuals of all ages.

Our annual **Children's Christmas workshop** will be held Saturday, 12/14 from 10am – 1pm for children ages 3-12 years old. Pre-registration is required; there will be NO in person registration. We have a core group of loyal volunteers however; we can always use more help.



Keep your eyes and ears open for what the children do for Christmas with our interim Music Director Kyle Blackburn.

The adults are doing a last book study before Reverend Rhonda retires the end of December. They are studying *Faithful: Christmas Through the Eyes of Joseph* by Adam Hamilton. Joseph says no words in the Bible but plays a big role that the group will be exploring. The book study will be offered Hybrid again. We have moved to Mondays at 7pm meeting 11/24, 12/2, 12/9, 12/16, 12/30.

Cathy Franco Christian Education Chair

## HUMAN RESOURCES

**Kyle Blackburn** has been hired as our Interim Music Director through the Christmas holidays. Candidates will be accepted through the end of this calendar year and then a recommendation for hire will be made.

**James Shorten** is filling in during holiday break from school with the Sexton responsibilities and we are thrilled to have him back. The part-time Sexton position has been posted within the Presbytery “Next Call” online posting, is on our website, posted in the church and the Thrift Shop for the public to see as they use our building, and has been shared with individuals who have contacts with individuals in the field.

**The West Orange HS students** are doing a great job supplementing by cleaning bathrooms, kitchen counters, floors, vacuuming the Sanctuary, & even cleaning the padded pew cushions! The students are in the 18-21-year-old Structured Learning Experience at the high school where they are gaining hands on learning with jobs to prepare them for employment when they finish their 21<sup>st</sup> year at the school.

Chris Kiel HR Chair

## UPDATE ON ANDY TURNER

Special thanks to all who have donated to Andy’s medical expenses. Approximately \$15,000 has been raised thus far. Andy continues his healing journey at Saint Barnabas Medical Center and appreciates the calls, cards and texts.” - Dotty Ostella

## BUILDING AND GROUNDS

The new ADA compliant bathroom on the first floor was started. There will initially be some jack hammering to put in the plumbing and then the hammering will start. It will be a noisier that usual December, but the result will be wonderful. This is another important project funded by the Plansoen Trust.



The **Annual Leaf Raking** took place on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, starting at 8:30 am. The local Boy Scouts helped us as they have for many other years, but we needed a good turnout of our membership too. (Has anyone else noticed that there seem to be more leaves this year?) Leaf bags have been donated by the town of Verona.

As you no doubt have noticed, our Steeple is in need of repair. Quotes are being gathered in preparation to the work being done in the spring. A second bronze plaque honoring members who have passed will soon be hung on the wall near our main entrance.

Debbie Michelsen & Charles Heyer—co-chairs

## LAY READERS FOR DECEMBER

December 1	Dotty Ostella
December 8	Chris & Andrea Kiel
December 15	James Shorten
December 22	Pat Heyer
December 24	Cathy Franco
December 29	Janice Tierney

## REMEMBERING CHARLOTTE CUNNINGHAM

(A Memorial Fund will be set up in Charlottes memory with the donations and the fund will be used for something very special.)

Taken from Charlotte's obituary:



.... But Charlotte's true passion in life was her love of music. She was an extraordinarily talented and accomplished pianist, organist, vocalist and accompanist. She was hired as the Minister of Music, First Presbyterian Church of Verona, in 1971. **She served in that capacity for 43 years before retiring and moving to Florida in 2014.** During this time Charlotte was the director of seven full-time choirs and played the most beautiful pipe organ and piano arrangements that anyone has ever heard. She would also frequently dazzle audiences inside and outside of church by playing piano for hours without using a single piece of sheet music. Despite working two demanding jobs, her boundless energy, attentiveness, devotion and "southern class" allowed her to be a wonderful mother, grandmother, aunt, sister, daughter and friend to all who knew her. Her beautiful smile, patience, and demeanor were a window to her precious soul and love for Jesus and her fellow man. She is now undoubtedly directing the choirs of angels in hymns of praise to her Savior. Charlotte will be buried next to her adoring parents, George and Frances Bowman, at Mountain View Memorial Park in Boones Mill, on Wednesday, November 20, 2024 at 2:00 p.m. **In lieu of flowers, the family wishes donations would be made to the Charlotte Cunningham Memorial Fund, First Presbyterian Church of Verona, 10 Farview Ave, Verona, New Jersey, 07044.**

## PNC COMMITTEE REPORT UPDATE:

The search for a new permanent Pastor is now well underway. Your search committee is meeting weekly reviewing the qualifications of each Pastor that has been "matched" to our Church's Mission Profile, which was taken from your responses to the recent survey. During this process your search committee respectfully reminds the congregation that we are bound to rules of confidentiality and cannot discuss specific details about any possible candidates. Your search committee members wish everyone a Blessed and Merry Christmas!

*Ernie Kiel and Kathy Dougherty. PNC co-chairs*



## HOLY SPIRIT FOOD PANTRY



The Holy Spirit Food Pantry continues to need our help. You may use our drop-off bin in our Narthex. Donations are delivered to Holy Spirit each Tuesday from our Church. Please consider writing a check to: Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit with "food pantry" in the memo line

## GRANDPARENTS GROUP

Grandparents Group meets the second Thursday of the month via Zoom. Please email [patheyer75@gmail.com](mailto:patheyer75@gmail.com) or call 973-239-3592 if you'd like to join us.

## THRIFT SHOP

**Good News - The Thrift Shop will be open during the entire month of December 2024** with regular hours, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays all from 10 am to 1 pm. However, the **Thrift Shop will be closed beginning January 4<sup>th</sup> through February 6<sup>th</sup>.**

**Our gift to you is this lovely holiday cake recipe**

### *Scripture Cake*

#### **Ingredients**

- ½ cup butter - Judges 5:25
- 1 ½ cups sugar - Jeremiah 6:20
- 1 teaspoon of each: cinnamon, mace, cloves - 1 Kings 10:10
- ½ teaspoon salt - Leviticus 2:13
- 3 eggs - Isaiah 10:14
- 2 teaspoon baking powder - Luke 13:21
- 2 cups flour - 1 Kings 4:22
- ½ cup water - Genesis 24:11
- 1 Tablespoon honey - Proverbs 24:13
- 1 cup raisins - 1 Samuel 30:12
- 1 Cup figs - 1 Samuel 30:12
- ½ cup almonds - Genesis 43:11

#### **Directions**

Blend butter, sugar, spices and salt

Beat egg yolks and add to butter mixture

Sift in baking powder and flour, then add the water and honey

Put fruit and nuts through food chopper and chop well. Fold into batter.

Fold in stiffly beaten egg whites Bake for 1 hour in 375 degree oven.

Thrift Shop wishes you all a very Happy Holiday Season and Blessed New Year

Thank you for your continued patronage




**POINSETTIAS TO DECORATE OUR SANCTUARY**



Please make a donation for the poinsettia plants that decorate our sanctuary during the Christmas season. Write a check to the church with "Christmas decorations" noted on the memo line. Mail it to church (attention: Donna Lauckner) or place it in the offering plate **before December 6<sup>th</sup>** to ensure acknowledgement in the bulletin.

Thank you and God Bless You for your generous donation!

**CHANCEL FLOWER DONATIONS**

<i>What a beautiful way to remember our loved ones at Sunday Worship. Your name and that of your loved one will be included in the bulletin</i>		
December 1st	Peggy Whiting in loving memory of her parents, Doris and Marion Whiting	
December 8th	Flowers from December 1 <sup>st</sup> remain	
December 15 <sup>th</sup> - 19th	Sanctuary decorated for Christmas	


**VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES**



There are numerous opportunities for church friends to share their talents. Opportunities are published from time to time. Ideas are always welcome. Feel free to speak with a Session member, Deacon, or Pastor at any time. Lay Readers for Sunday Worship are always needed. If you would like to volunteer to lay read, please contact Patti Beirne for information: 973.230.3561.

**WISHING BIRTHDAY CELEBRANTS...**

a very Happy Birthday (no age required)

<b>DECEMBER</b>	
Bonnie Mc Carthy 1	
Joyce Cougan 12	
Clover Burgos 18	
Ralph Ostella 27	

If you would like to be added to the Birthday list, ask a Deacon!

## CALENDAR FOR DECEMBER 2024

Thursday November 28 – *Happy Thanksgiving Day*

Friday November 29 – *Staff Day Off*

Sunday December 1 *First Sunday of Advent*

10:15 am Worship Service – Holy Communion Sunday  
Deacons Meeting during Coffee Hour

Monday December 2

7:00 pm: Pastor Rhonda's Book Study  
Sunday School Room

Wednesday, Dec 4

7:00 pm Worship & Music Meeting

Saturday December 7

12:00 Noon:-Fair in the Square, Verona NJ

Sunday December 8 *Second Sunday of Advent*

10:15 am: Worship Service with Children's  
Christmas Participation  
Christian Education Committee Mtg. during Coffee Hr.

Monday December 9

7:00pm: Pastor Rhonda's Book Study  
Sunday School Room

Tuesday, December 10

Presbytery of Northeast NJ mtg., Zoom

Thursday December 12

11:00 am Grandparents' Group- Zoom  
7:00pm *Blue Christmas Service*, Holy Spirit Episcopal,  
36 Gould Street, Verona

Saturday December 14

10:00 am: *Children's Workshop* –  
*Pre-Registration IS required*  
11:00 am: *Hanging of the Greens*

Sunday December 15 *Third Sunday of Advent*

10:15 am Worship Service

- Guest Harpist - *Robbin Gordon-Cartier*
- *Christmas Cookie Swap*

Monday December 16

7:00pm: Pastor Rhonda's Book Study  
Sunday School Room

Thursday December 19

7:00pm: Session

Sunday December 22 *Fourth Sunday of Advent*

10:15 am Worship Service

Tuesday December 24 *Christmas Eve*

5:00pm: Christmas Eve Service of Lessons and Carols

Wednesday December 25 *Merry Christmas! – Staff Day Off*

Sunday December 29

10:15 am Worship Service

*Celebration Luncheon for Pastor Rhonda*

Chamberlain Hall following worship

Monday December 30

7:00 pm Pastor Rhonda's Book Study  
Sunday School Room

Tuesday, December 31 – Pastor Rhonda's Last Day



**Thrift Shop Closed from January 4<sup>th</sup> 2025 to February 6<sup>th</sup> 2025**

***Pastor Rhonda's last day is Tuesday December 31, 2024***