

We have journeyed by faith another year through seasons of common grace (Epiphany, Pentecost) interspersed with seasons of preparation (Advent, Lent) followed by celebration (Christmas, Easter) of God's faithfulness in Jesus Christ. Salvation (our life with God) is revealed in these seasons through the sacraments. Baptism celebrates the free gift of God. Communion celebrates faith's work: union with God (in Christ--this is my body...this is my blood) and with one another along faith's journey.

Fellowship is the strength and joy of congregational life. We work, we listen, we pray, we hope, we grieve--*together*. Though we often tend toward quietness regarding the challenges and joys of our lives, our quiet sharing is essential in our gathering. Our unity in hope flows from the life and death of Christ—God's Word to us. In the cross, our Lord did not run from pain, but willingly accepted it. The cross shows his decision to identify with those who suffer and welcome those on the fringes rather than follow instinct to identify with those who appear powerful and successful.

This year some of the practical aspects of our life together have become a greater challenge. Namely, financial challenges that required Emmanuel to cut back their payments to the parish, have left a shortfall in office and pastoral expenses. That said, a word of gratitude to Emmanuel who held off as long as possible before they cut their monthly payments. This allowed me to continue serving each of you full time without needing to search for another partner church until now. As of November, Emmanuel and St. John's are paying Barren's \$500 monthly for office and pastoral expenses and St. Michael's is paying Barren's \$300 for office expenses (they now receive their pastoral care solely from Vicar Micki). I continue to lead services at Emmanuel and am reimbursed \$200 for each week I do so. Barren's is currently paying 60% of my original 2017 budgeted salary plus my benefits—for which I am very grateful! In an effort to be fair to all parties, now when I lead a service at one of the churches (besides Barren's) I will be paid by that church with the going "supply" rate set by the synod. That will help make up for the reduction in my bi-weekly salary.

We have seen this reality coming for some time now and will continue to work with our Synod's Bishop's office to find another congregation with which I can work so that I may continue to engage in full time pastoral ministry. As of mid-November, I am not aware of any such congregation. I have been assured that there will be possibilities arising in the coming months. Lower Susquehanna Synod's resources have been stretched since most churches are not able to contribute toward their expenses as they have in the past. The Bishop's office has been significantly involved in helping us through these periods of transition and needs our continued support to the extent that we can share our resources. This would be much more difficult if we did not have their support.

Finally, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God and everyone who loves, is born of God and knows God." In the spirit of Martin Luther and our Lord Jesus, we are not *commanded* to keep congregations open. We *are* commanded to love our neighbor. So, let us love and serve our neighbor, as we live into the goodness and mercy which the coming year will bring. God is with us, leading us into hope and peace. We are secure in the unity and mercy of God.

Ever Grateful, --Pastor Roy