

COMMUNITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF MT. BETHEL AND PORTLAND

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



Rev. John H. Heinsohn
Minister of Visitation

February 2023
Volume 10, Issue 2

Ash Wednesday is on February 22. We discontinued having a formal service on that day several years due to a lack of interest.

Some time ago, Rev Peter Jamison, from the Richmond Methodist Church, asked me and the Trinity UCC in Stone Church if we might be interested in doing some Lenten things together. I told him that we could be interested in joint services for Ash Wednesday and Good Friday (4 /7). Our Maundy Thursday evening service around tables has been meaningful to a number of people and I think we should continue that tradition. As of this writing nothing has been decided yet, but I think there is a good chance we will be doing something together for those two events. Stay tuned.

For the Wednesdays in Lent, which correspond to the Wednesdays of March, I will be organizing the **Soup and Study series** using the *Life and Works of C.S. Lewis*.

C. S. Lewis, 1898-1963 was an English intellectual who taught at Oxford and Cambridge Universities in England. But he is especially noted for: 1. His children's literature such as , The *Chronicles of Narnia*, which begins with the well- known story, The *Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. It has sold over 100 million copies and been the object of a couple of movies. 2. His thought-provoking writings pertaining to **the Christian faith**. Lewis was an unbeliever in the beginning of his adult life but underwent a conversion which led him to become a very influential apologist for the Christian faith. In that role he wrote a number of books that continue to be popular to this day.

During our Wednesday luncheons we will look at a few of the thirty books he wrote. ***Mere Christianity*** which was originally four radio broadcasts during W.W.2.is filled with his insights about faith in Christ. Other books with clear faith messages are: ***The Screwtape Letters, the Four Loves, and the Great Divorce*** (Nothing to do with marriage!). He also married late in life and experienced the unfortunate death of his wife which he writes about in ***A Grief Observed***, and ***Surprised by Joy. Shallowlands*** was a movie about this life which came out a couple of decades ago. There is plenty of material to consider in our five weeks together starting on March 1st.

As usual the Lunches will be begin at 12 noon and end at 1:30. No charge. Guests are very welcomed. I have a number of his books and multiple copies of several of them. You can take some home and look them over and purchase some if you wish.



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Worship Service: 10:30 a.m.

Bible Study: 9:15 am

Holy Communion:

1st Sunday of the Month

Session Members:

Deb Llewellyn
Laura Bocko
Jonathan Rush
Cher Mount
Kevin Correll
DaraSue Braun

Jonathan Rush – Clerk of Session



Below is the new link for our Zoom Worship each Sunday.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/8336293018?pwd=TmJoNnF1Zy8ranRjT3RMc0l5c3RiZz09>

Meeting ID: 833 629 3018

Passcode: 074935

One tap mobile

+19292056099,,81916811413#,,,,*743486# US (New York)

+13017158592,,81916811413#,,,,

*743486# US (Washington D.C)

Dial by your location

+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)



Prayer requests are to be made to

Laura Bocko, Prayer Chain leader.

Laura's contact info is:

(610) 452-2620 hlaurabocko24@gmail.com

If you would like to participate in the prayer chain, please contact Laura.

Prayerfully —: Carole & Henry Deibel, Betty Meixsell, May Nodzak, Marcia Pensack, Wendell Harford, Rosemary and Michelle Belverio, Sandy DePuy, Jane Horn and Phyllis Boisselle.



News & Events



February 3—Nancy Seas

February 6—Sonya Thiel

Allysse Kavanaugh

February 11—Ashley Kelton

February 13—Laura Bocko

February 21—Joshua Seas

February 22—Karen Kennedy



Session will meet on Wednesday, February 8th at 7:00 p.m.



Sunday, February 19th after worship. Remember everyone is invited because everyone is a sweetheart!

Will you be my valentine???

Our Per Capita Commitment for 2023 to the Lehigh Presbytery is \$48.00 per member or a total of \$1,968.00.



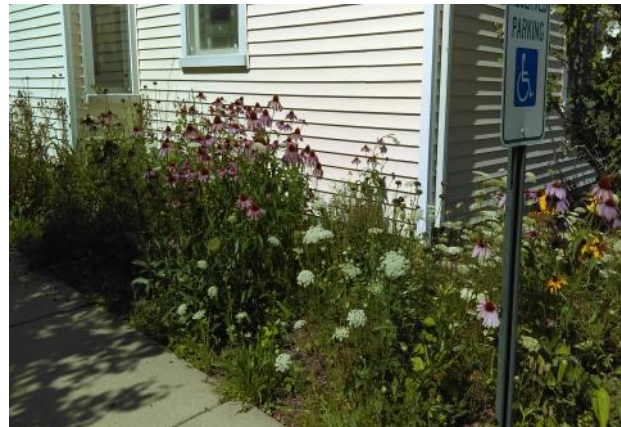
Sunday morning Bible study continues at 9:15 am. The zoom account will also be used so that others who are unable to come to Mt Bethel can join in. The study will be zoomed each week by Rev. John.

Spring isn't far off—we turn our clocks ahead on March 12th



Our Family Photo Album

As a new year unfolds, let us take the time to smell the flowers along the way, cherish your moments, your family and friends, and be thankful for the things that you have attached into your life.





Happy February. . .

*May the month ahead be
peaceful & beautiful...*

inhale new & vital,

exhale old and useless,

inhale peace, exhale stress,

inhale faith, exhale worry,

inhale courage, exhale fear,

inhale love, exhale gratitude.

Just Be and Breathe!

The Story of a Small Country Church by The Rev. John H Heinsohn

A few years prior to my retirement, I was the chair of the Presbytery's Committee on Ministry (COM). One of the decisions that came before us was what to do about a small village church south of Flemington which some people felt was approaching a crisis in that they would be running out of money to pay their part-time pastor. I appointed a commission to study the situation and make a recommendation to Presbytery. Their recommendation to Presbytery was to close the church even though the church did not want to be closed and the church was not in debt. The debate at the Presbyterian meeting where this was presented was long and passionate but in the end the Presbytery voted to close the church. I was saddened by the decision and felt that the history of relations between the church and the Presbytery had been one of many missteps on the part of both. I also felt that the decision was wrong and unnecessary. Part of the reason for my feeling this way was due to my experience at a small country church in Wisconsin many years ago. That story follows.

In 1969 when I transferred to the University of Dubuque Seminary, I went to the Field Ed office of the seminary to see about a church assignment on the weekend. The director suggested I consider preaching at a small country church in southwestern Wisconsin about 40 miles from Dubuque. The weekly stipend would be \$35. The church was called Carmel- Peniel because it was really two churches that were just a mile apart and were now combined with a total membership of less than 50 people. These two church buildings were in the middle of farm country several miles from the nearest town of Rewey. I do not remember the story of how it came to be that there were two Presbyterian church buildings so close together in the middle of nowhere but it must have had something to do with the splits and mergers of our denomination over the years.

On our first Sunday there in September, we were told about how the Presbytery wanted to close the church and had almost done so except that someone spoke in defense of keeping the church open and that person was persuasive enough to convince the Presbytery not to close it.

The building at Carmel was the smaller of the churches but it was the more picturesque. It looked like a small New England Colonial building. It had no electricity, lanterns on the sides, two big pot-bellied stoves and a pump organ behind the pulpit. Services were held there every other week except in the cold winter months. The Peniel church was a bigger building with two kerosene stoves in the rear of the church with stove pipes traversing the length of the church on each side and exiting in the front high above the pulpit. I am sure it was an efficient arrangement to have those long pipes radiating heat in the building before their exit but it had no beauty and some might say it was an ugly arrangement. This church had electricity but only an outhouse for a bathroom.

The service was held at 2:00 so as to accommodate the farming community. After a few months that was negotiated to 11:00 AM. Attendance varied from around ten to twenty people but the people were friendly and we grew quite fond of them over the year and a half that we were at the seminary. It was a good fit for me given my dairy farm upbringing as well as my need for preaching experience.

After a few weeks at Carmel-Peniel, my wife and I noticed that one farm family had three youth in their early teens and that there were several others of similar age in the area whom we gathered for some fun times. This led to a confirmation class of six youth which I taught each Sunday before the church service. As the year progressed, we would have various evening youth activities including a weekend camping trip. The six youth were confirmed at the end of the school year: three girls and three boys.

Continued next page

After seminary, we moved back East and I took a call at Liberty Corner, NJ as an Assistant Minister. Three and a half years later we moved to Kingston and over time, we lost contact with the folks at Carmel- Peniel. While at Kingston, our church decided to enroll in the Bethel Bible Series which had its training in Madison Wisconsin. While I was in Madison for the two-week training, I decided to rent a car and travel down to Rewey on Sunday to visit the folks at Carmel-Peniel. It had now been ten years since we had been at Dubuque and I wondered if the church was still in existence.

With a state map and my sketchy memory, I was able to find my way to the church and was delightfully rewarded to see cars parked in front of the church. The service was just ending and it was a special day in which they were installing officers for the coming year. They ordained a young elder that day and you can imagine my delight to learn that the elder they ordained was **Jane Lee**, one of the youth in my confirmation class of ten years ago! I was thrilled to see the Lee family taking such an active role in the church and it was such a joy to catch up with the people.

Time moved on and again we lost contact with the good people of Carmel-Peniel until thirty more years had passed. The year was 2010 and my wife's 40th year of graduation from The University of Dubuque was coming up. We decided, along with several of her college friends, that the time was right to visit Dubuque for their fall homecoming celebration. Since we were staying over Saturday evening my wife and I wanted to try to visit Carmel- Peniel on Sunday before we headed back east. The Presbytery's web site did not list the congregation and I suspected that the Presbytery had finally shut the church down. In spite of that, I wanted very much to travel out to the church to see if per chance they still might be meeting. Forty years has a way of fogging up the brain and I had difficulty finding my way through the country roads. But finally, we did find the Peniel church and as we approached it, I could see some cars out front. We found a small group of about ten people watching a video of a local preacher. After the service, we were pleasantly surprised to meet Jane and her mother as well as her daughter and child. Jane told us how meaningful it was for her and the other youth of forty years ago to be in the youth group with the confirmation classes and the camping trip. They remembered us and our ministry with them with great fondness. They explained the improvements they were making to the church building as well as some of the community events they sponsored such as their Welsh celebrations. It was an overwhelmingly affirming experience for Shirley and me. We were pleased to see that although small, the church was alive and had a vision for the future.

Our joy was diminished somewhat from the news that they were no longer a part of the Presbyterian Church. The Presbytery had been pressuring them to close and join other churches but they did not want to do that. They loved their country church and they wanted to keep the buildings open for community events including worship services. Presbytery began to look for buyers for the property and things got complicated to the point that the church asked Presbytery if they could take care of their buildings and just leave the jurisdiction of the Presbytery. Presbytery could see no future in this small country church and apparently did not want to bother with them anymore so they agreed to let them go with their two buildings. They are now independent and they are charting their own course.

Small country churches such as Carmel-Peniel are somewhat unique. In many ways they are like other small churches under 50 members: small session, no committees, one or two families hold things together, buildings debt free, etc. With village, town or urban small churches there is a community of people living around the church building. With many small country churches there are few if any neighbors and no community center other than the church. And the potential for growth is very limited.

My experience tells me that there is ministry potential in the small country church but it may not involve an ordained pastor and perhaps it requires a different lens than what Presbyterians are used to using. But these small churches can be seen as mission outposts and if we are willing to invest our time and witness into the lives of some of these families and individuals' tremendous life-changing things can happen.

Perhaps now you can understand my disappointment at the Presbytery's closing of the village church south on Flemington just a few years ago.

February 2023

Sun

Mon

Tue

Wed

Thu

Fri

Sat

			1	2  Groundhog Day	3	4
5 Rev. Nichols 9:15 Adult Bible Study 10:30—Worship	6 AA 8:00 pm	7 AA 8:00 pm	8 Session 7:00 pm	9 5:15 pm Girl Scouts	10	11
12 Rev. Nichols 9:15 Adult Bible Study 10:30—Worship	13 AA 8:00 pm	14  AA 8:00 pm	15	16	17	18 8:30 Men's Breakfast
19 Rev. Nichols 9:15 Adult Bible Study 10:30—Worship 11:30 Sweetheart Luncheon	20  AA 8:00 pm	21 AA 8:00 pm	22  ASH WEDNESDAY	23 5:15 pm Girl Scouts	24	25
26 Rev. Nichols 9:15 Adult Bible Study 10:30—Worship 2:00 Writers Group	27 AA 8:00 pm	28 AA 8:00 pm				