



Philadelphia
BAPTIST ASSOCIATION



Metrolines

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Moving Towards a “New Normal”

Written by Rev. Julia Bruton-Sheppard, PBA
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“Some skeptic is sure to ask, “Show me how resurrection works. Give me a diagram; draw me a picture...We do have a parallel experience in gardening. You plant a “dead” seed; soon there is a flourishing plant. There is no visual likeness between seed and plant. You could never guess what a tomato would look like by looking at a tomato seed. What we plant in the soil and what grows out of it don’t look anything alike. The dead body that we bury in the ground and the resurrection body that comes from it will be dramatically different.” 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, Peterson’s. The Message



Christians have celebrated Easter also called Pascha or Resurrection Sunday since the 2nd century A.D. Some Baptists may not follow the entire Christian calendar, but Baptists unite with all Christendom to commemorate the event many Baptist preachers describe as “Early Sunday morning, Jesus got up, conquering sin, death, hell and the grave.”

This year Easter arrives Sunday April 12, 2020. Decades of predictable ritual, carried out in street processions or in churches won’t occur. The sounds of

organ and piano or acapella voices that normally fill sanctuaries worldwide heralding the miraculous resurrection of Jesus from the dead will not be heard. A microscopic organism, called Coronavirus/COVID-19, is threatening the lives of both young and old, rich and poor alike. It has no military or economic or political power, but it has forced the world into “social distancing.”

It remains for us to consider how the Church of Jesus Christ will celebrate Easter, 2020. We will continue to embrace the spirit of this season, by accepting that the grace of resurrection power always brings about new life. It has inspired and empowered churches to use current video communications systems to present new dimensions of worship. ZOOM meetings keep vital ministries connected in order to provide ministry to the membership. “Prayer Meeting” can remain personal on Facetime.

However, if you don’t have computer access to view live or recorded worship messages, you might consider formatting your own worship service at home. You can recite the Lord’s Prayer together and please include prayer for those suffering from this disease, for the families who have lost loved ones and the formulation of a vaccine. How about singing your favorite hymns and share why they are near and dear to you? Your sermon for the day can come from each persons’ reflections on one or more these Scriptures: Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118: 19-24; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-18 (the gospel account of the resurrection). <https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu>

Using Paul the Apostle’s garden metaphor, take time on Easter and the days ahead to practice being still until distractive thoughts die down and we reap God’s assuring peace to calm our fears. Take time to be still until the internal must-be-doing-something engine shuts off; and we reap the stress reducing quiet that benefits both body and soul.

When we come to the other side of this pandemic, we will be different. Resurrection power guarantees a “New Normal.”

As is often the case, crisis surfaces the better angels of our humanity. We seem to become more aware of our common fragility and vulnerability. Our response is to join forces to find creative ways of caring for one another: From singing to each other on balconies, to applauding the valiant efforts of health care workers every evening, to leaving bags of groceries on the doorsteps of those suffering from this disease. However, from Paul’s view what we’ve done cannot compare with what we will become. *“What we plant in the soil (of this crisis) and what grows out of it don’t look anything alike.”*

Our “New and Better Normal” will be one where humankind, working together will plant and harvest groundbreaking approaches to make life better in this world and the cosmos, regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, religious or non-religious creeds, because...

I serve a risen Savior; He's in the world today.
I know that He is living, whatever men may say.
I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of cheer,
And just the time I need Him He's always near.

He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.
He lives! He lives! Salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know He lives?**He lives within my heart**

He is Risen; He is Risen, Indeed.

Worshipping Amidst COVID-19

During these times we are sharing from two of our PBA churches.

SALEM BAPTIST CHURCH

Please click this [link](#) to hear an encouraging message from **Pastor Marshall Paul Hughes Mitchell** from a message to his congregation on March 29th. "In times of darkness, the need for light is most evident. These days have brought darkness and its attendant quality of being unknown. In these times, we desperately need the light of humankind and the light of Jesus Christ."

CANAAN BAPTIST CHURCH CELEBRATES VIRTUAL PALM SUNDAY

During this crisis, the Canaan Baptist Church, *the Gem of Germantown* is striving to maintain a sense of community, while fulfilling its mission. Canaanites and others are wrestling with how to navigate these rapidly changing times. Consequently, they have started Virtual Coffee and Conversation, on Thursdays at 10:00 AM to discuss relevant topics. Everyone is invited to join via Zoom to dialogue about faith, health, economics, education, and so much more. Cody Anderson, a Canaanite and local broadcasting legend conducts interviews with guests who are leaders in their respective fields. During the segments, questions are submitted from the online audience.

Though worship is virtual, *the Gem*, continues strengthening their bonds, through the at home Sunday celebrations of Holy Communion and Special Christian Calendar days i.e. Palm Sunday. To facilitate this, while remaining safe, Canaan has organized Saturday drive through pickup. While parishioners stay in their cars, a Deacon deposits materials inside the passenger seat window. At another station, a Trustee is present to receive tithes and offerings from members who prefer to continue donating in person.

A Statement from the Board of Directors of the Philadelphia Baptist Association

We have been ordered to stay at home. Doing so is the best way to protect ourselves and the best way to reduce community spread of the coronavirus. **Each PBA congregation is autonomous and sets its own policy.** You have our firm recommendation that it is time for all staff and all members of every church to comply with the mandate of the Governor and remain in place at home. Essential entrance into the church building should require the use of masks and gloves.

It is time to be creative and to use electronic media and communication technology to stay connected to one another. Please use pre-recorded worship

music from your church and combine current sermons and announcements recorded by the Pastor or worship leader from their home whenever possible. Live streaming is risky in this environment. Please practice extreme caution requiring social distancing, gloves, and masks if live streaming is your choice. We have reports of choirs being utilized in live streaming and a demonstrated lack of discipline in social distancing when members gather, even in small groups.

The habit of warm embrace among us is hard to break and we may be putting members at risk. We have recent reports of persons attending gatherings who died days later from COVID 19. We have reports of church staff testing positive for the infection. Be mindful of your witness if someone contracts the virus because your church put them at risk in any way! Be mindful of your witness if your church staff becomes exposed because of your policy and/or lack of safety precautions. Be aware that lawsuits have been filed against churches regarding social distancing and some may be filed by unscrupulous lawyers.

Please use electronic methods for giving your offerings and/ or mail in your contributions as designated. Please be mindful in keeping the continuing work of the church moving forward. Your staff, both administrative and clergy, are working diligently from home caring for the congregation. Let your church know of your needs with regard to employment, nutritional support etc.

We want you to be safe. Please remind your members to be extra careful and safe in providing care to the elderly and persons with medical conditions that place family members at higher risk of severe reaction to the coronavirus. If your congregations are among the racial, ethnic, or class groups experiencing disproportionate impact, be particularly deliberate in monitoring the recommendations of the medical experts.

Pastoral Thoughts

Go and Wake Jesus

Written by *Rev. Dr. James E. McJunkin Jr., PBA Regional Executive Pastor*

This day I feel like the disciples of Jesus must have felt while on that boat in the Sea of Galilee. You remember the evening when the big storm came up. They felt threatened. They said to themselves, let's go find him and wake him up. Just ask him if he cares and see if he understands that we may drown.

.... Today I want to find Jesus and wake him up and ask him if he doesn't see this pandemic. Jesus, will you let the world go through this, do you not care that thousands of us are dying? Do you know the pestilence that is coming? I want to ask him this.

The disciples were able to find Jesus. He was right in the boat with them, facing the same storm. In the back of the boat, Jesus was able to quiet himself and remain asleep. As the boat rocked, and the water lapped over its sides Jesus remained calm. And as the accounting unfolds, Jesus is awakened, and standing up he commands the storm to quiet itself. The storm obeys his will and calm returns. Then Jesus teaches his disciples lessons about faith and trust in him.

.... This day, I want to find Jesus and tell him about the storm I'm in and ask him to fix it. I want him to wake up, stand up and say "Peace Be Still" once again. I want him to use his miraculous power and stop the COVID 19 pandemic.

While I am certain of it, having seen Jesus Christ's power in facing down storms, I like the disciples feel utterly helpless. I cannot command this pandemic to quiet and collapse itself.

I'm often challenged to apply the teachings of Christ in my life. I'm still learning to lean into the power of the peace that Christ gives to us. Yet, I do have a sense of agency. I possess the ability to shift my consciousness through purposeful quiet reflection. As I wait and rest in Christ's presence, I realize that I am not alone. Quietly, I go inward and embrace the gift of power, the peace of Christ, and I do what I'm given the strength to do.

I stand up in the storm to provide care for those facing the torrents alongside me. I rise to protect others. I stand up. I urge people that are placed in positions of power to act, and I hold them accountable for protecting human life. I embrace those who are feeling isolated with a word of comfort. I've learned to emulate Christ, I stand up facing toward the storm, and I do that which I have the power, to do.

... Today I will stand in place and keep proper social distance as I have been asked, to aid in this storms' passing. I have the power to do that as well.

.... I am neither alone nor powerless. Jesus is present in this storm residing deep within my heart saying, "peace be still for my peace, my power, I give to you."

Join me and meditate on the words of the song "Sometimes He Calms the Storm" by Benton Kevin Stokes and Tony Wood:

Sometimes He calms the storm
With a whispered "Peace, be still."
He can settle any sea,
But it doesn't mean He will.
Sometimes He holds us close
And lets the wind and waves go wild;
Sometimes He calms the storm,
And other times He calms His child.

News and Notes

Around the Region

Pastoral Transitions

A new era begins...at the **Mt. Zion Baptist Church of Germantown**. Pastor-Elect, the **Rev. W. Douglas Banks** began his ministry December 1, 2019. He is pictured left with his wife, First Lady



The **First Baptist Church of Philadelphia** welcomed their new pastor **Pastor James Williams** who began his ministry on December 1, 2019. James is the son of the Rev. Dr. Jeri Williams, Pastor of The Green Church.



Pastoral Anniversaries



Congratulations to **Pastor John Loring** and his wife **Kim** on celebrating their ten years at the **Baptist Church in the Great Valley** in Devon.

Pictured left: Pastor and Mrs. Loring with the congregation.

In Memorium

The **Rev. Repsie M. Warren**, founder and overseer of **Philadelphia's Society for Helping Church** (Deaf and Hearing), died on Friday, March 20, 2020, at Wayne UNC Health Care in Goldsboro, North Carolina. She was 88.

A fierce educator, she received a bachelor of science degree from Elizabeth City State University in 1954, a master's in education from Philadelphia Antioch University in 1979, a master's of religion from the Philadelphia Lutheran Theological Seminary in 1983



and a doctorate of ministry from the New York Theological Seminary in 1994. She also did graduate work in deaf education at Temple University, Columbia University and Gallaudet College.

She taught students in North Carolina for two years prior to moving to Philadelphia, where she was assigned to the Martin School for the Deaf as a substitute while waiting to take her teacher's exam. According to family and friends, she knew after her first day that it would be her mission in life to help hearing-impaired people.

On Palm Sunday in 1976, the Society for Helping Church was officially introduced to the Philadelphia area. In 1977, Warren served as the executive director for the Society for Helping Inc., a social service agency for the deaf and hearing-impaired. Some skeptics thought it would not survive long because of the population it served and because it was shepherded by a female pastor. But today, almost 44 years later, Society Church has survived.

After retiring from teaching in the Philadelphia Public School System, Warren became an activist concerned about quality education for both deaf and hearing people. She worked under five Philadelphia mayors in positions including executive director of the Mayor's Commission on Aging, the Mayor's Commission on Women and the Board of License and Review and chairperson of the Civil Service Commission.

She played a vital role in many social and civil organizations in the Greater Philadelphia community. She was the first woman vice chair of the Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity, Inc. and vice president of the Southeastern Region of One Church One Child.

She was a member of the Martin Luther King Jr. Association, the Philadelphia National Black Deaf Advocates Association, the Metropolitan Christian Council, the National Kidney Foundation of Delaware Valley, the National Baptist Convention USA and the Philadelphia Baptist Association.

A service was held on March 28 in North Carolina.

Upcoming Events

◆ **November 14, 2020** - 34th Annual PBA Mission Banquet @ The Drexelbrook Events Center, Drexel Hill, PA

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