

**FAITH MATTERS**

# Recovering the Christian funeral and the perspective of faith

Our time with Covid has given birth to some peculiar practices. One concerns funerals. For the past two and a half years, when a loved one died and friends inquired about



**Rev. Nancy Raabe**

when services would be held, they were typically told, "Oh, we are just having a celebration of life later on." Why hurry, the family is thinking?

Why not wait weeks or even months to assemble? No rushing to make expensive flight reservations. No concern about the body since either cremation or private burial has already taken place.

Nowadays these tend to

be more casual affairs in funeral parlors, with photos, a slideshow and reminiscences of family and friends who dutifully file up to the microphone. If there is any music, it's the likes of Elvis. Maybe there is a reading from scripture, maybe a pastor or chaplain is present, but the main purpose is to remember the departed one and give thanks for who they were.

This is fine as far as it goes. Yet for those who have died in the faith, it is no substitute for a Christian funeral in a church. Reminiscences can take place during the luncheon, where slideshows and photo boards can also be enjoyed. But the funeral liturgy properly located in a church, enacted in sacred space, is something else altogether and occu-

pies a holy place in our life as well as in our death.

The funeral brings together the body of the deceased with the gathered in the body of Christ so that those present may grieve their loss, commend the person into God's care, and accompany them on the start of that great journey in the conviction that death is not the end — that God's last word is resurrection.

We need to hear this word of life as often as possible and especially when death is staring us in the face. The belief that life is stronger than death is what carries Christians through every day and enables us to cope with all manner of worldly setbacks and losses.

If we live out this truth in our life, then when our final moment on earth comes we will meet it in

that same spirit.

The "celebration of life" is not a Covid phenomenon. The practice has been on the rise for decades. But our newfound adaptability acquired during the pandemic makes this an ideal time to return to a more faithful witness not only of life but of death.

Let us grasp this moment to rediscover the Christian funeral as a great drama that connects death, our final baptism, with the ritual of our initial baptism. In the words that open the Lutheran funeral liturgy, "When we were baptized into Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death. We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life. For if we have

been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."

As Tom Long has written in his book "Accompany Them with Singing—The Christian Funeral," the ritual is not just a litany of inspiring words; rather, it is a dramatic event in which the church acts out what it believes to be happening from the perspective of faith. Those present are not mute observers but "actors, speaking, singing, and praying their lines in the great drama of death and life."

And what is the point of this drama? That death is not the end. That the deceased is going somewhere!

Just like a loved one heading off for any great journey, we want to be present to give them a good send-off. The Christian funeral

gives us this great farewell. In hymns we pour out our lament and hope. Through scripture we affirm the truth of the gospel. With glad hearts we receive proclamation that elaborates on that truth. And with prayers we come into God's presence and are bound more closely together for our own healing and the healing of the world.

Why go to all this effort, you might ask? Doesn't the deceased end up in the same place regardless of how or whether they are accompanied? Yes, but why would we miss out on the chance to surround them with hymns, psalms, prayers and promises that lift them into God's care using the treasures of worship handed down to us across the ages? Through these means, their cry becomes ours: "Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!"

## Worship News and Notes

By MediaNews Gro up

Send items for Worship News to religion@thereporteronline.com. Address questions to Nancy March, editor, at nmarch@thereporteronline.com. Deadline is noon Thursday to appear in the Saturday Worship News and Notes.

■ **St. John's United Church of Christ** celebrates World Wide Communion Sunday at the 8 a.m. and 10:15 a.m. services on October 2. Gluten-free bread is available at both services. The Chancel Choir will sing "O, Lord, Increase My Faith" by Orlando Gibbons. Later the service is available on St. John's website, Facebook page, and YouTube channel: youtube/stjohnsucc. The church is at 500 W. Main St., Lansdale. All are welcome. Call 215-855-5489 or visit www.st-johns-ucc.org. The church will receive its annual Neighbors in Need (NIN) offering during both services. NIN is a special mission offering for the United Church of Christ that supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. For more information visit www.ucc.org/nin

■ Beginning on October 2, **St. John's United Church of Christ** will offer a Sunday School activity from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. on the first Sunday of each month. For more information about the Carry Out Connection Sunday School Program contact Pastor Addie at addie@st-johns-ucc.org. All are welcome to participate.

■ **St. Peter's Lutheran Church**, 211 S. Main St., North Wales, celebrates Sunday, October 2, with a Communion service in the sanctuary at 8:30 and 10 a.m. The service will be live streamed for those unable to attend in person and can be accessed from www.stpetersnorthwales.org. SPARK (children's Sunday school) is at 10. Third graders will receive their Bibles. Confirmation class is 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Also Sunday evening is a Peace Vigil at 6 p.m. in Weingartner Park. Bring your own chairs and a candle. If inclement weather, service will be in St. Peter's Sanctuary. A Red Cross blood drive is Monday, Oct. 3, in the fellowship hall from 2 to 7 p.m. Register online for appointment. The Thrift Shop is open on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

■ **Gwynedd Square Presbyterian Church PC(USA)**, 837 Summeytown Pike, Lansdale: Please join live in the sanctuary or for live online services via Zoom with an internet-enabled device or by telephone. Sunday Worship is at 10 a.m. and Early Worship is at 8:30 a.m. For web links or dial-in numbers, please visit www.gwyneddsquare.org. Weekly Bible Study meets at 10 a.m. in the pastor's study and on Zoom and will meet every Wednesday from now on. The Adult Forum will resume on October 3 and continue to meet every Monday at 7 p.m. on Zoom and continue with the video series of The Great Courses Videos: Comparative Religion with Prof. Charles

Kimball of the University of Oklahoma. For web links or dial in numbers for activities, please send an email to office@gwyneddsquare.org or call the church office at 215-699-9159

■ **Faith Lutheran Church** 615 Cowpath Road, Montgomeryville continues to worship in the sanctuary as well as on Zoom at 10:30 a.m. Sunday School is held Sundays from 9:45 to 10:25 a.m. for ages 3-11. Nursery will be provided for the 3- to 5-year-olds during the 10:30 a.m. service. On Sunday, October 2, the church will welcome Vicar Ethan Doan to preach at 10:30 a.m. Following the service will be voting on making Vicar Ethan the permanent pastor. All services will also be uploaded to Facebook. Find that at www.faith-montgomeryville.org and click on "Connect on Facebook." For the Zoom link or more information, please email faithmont@verizon.net

■ **The Church of the Holy Spirit of Harleysville (Episcopal)**, 2871 Barndt Road at the corner of Summeytown Pike, Upper Salford, holds Communion services in-person at 8 and 10:15 a.m. on Sundays. The church also live-streams the 10:15 a.m. services on Sundays on the church website and Facebook page — Church of the Holy Spirit, Harleysville. Church school for preschool through adult classes begins at 9 a.m. Services are led by the Rev. Kathy Andonian, Rector. Bring your companion pet to the Blessing of the Animals service at 10:15 a.m. on Sunday, Oct. 2. It will be held outdoors, weather permitting, so bring chairs or blanket. Pets must be caged or in appropriate containers. A Choral Evensong for St. Frances Day will be held at 5 p.m. on Sunday, Oct. 2, sung by the Holy Spirit Choir and the Choir of All Saints Church in Princeton, N.J. For more information, call 215-234-8020 or visit the webpage, www.churchoftheholyspirit.us

■ **Montco Bible Fellowship**, 160 E. Main St., Lansdale: Join virtual services accessed via website or in-person each Sunday. Adult Sunday School begins at 9:30 a.m. and Worship services at 10 a.m., along with Children's Church at 10 a.m. On Wednesdays at 7:20 p.m., we hold virtual Bible Study. Call 215-855-0899 for the Bible Study Zoom link. Visit our new website at www.montcofbf.org.

■ **Indian Creek Mennonite Church**, 647 Harleysville Pike, Telford, will conduct services as follows: Sunday school, 9 a.m.; worship service, 10:15 a.m.; revival meetings, Nov. 7-13, 7:30 p.m. Speaker: Matthew Bennetch, of Bethel, Pa. Questions? Call Kevin Moyer (215) 721-9127.

■ **Grace Lutheran Church**, 40 N. Main St., Hatfield, with Pastor Nancy M. Raabe continues its fall worship schedule of 8 and 10:30 a.m. with Sunday School at 9:15 a.m. A new worship experience, Contemplative Connection, is held from 7:30-7:50 p.m. on last Wednesdays of the month. During these times of pressure, draining schedules, and demanding responsi-

bilities, our hearts and souls long for refreshment and peace that only comes from a deep connection with God. Here we will have the invitation to sit in silence and pray through simple songs and chants. Casual attire and floor seating are encouraged. Grace will also host a Blessing of the Animals on Saturday, Oct. 8, at noon. Bring your animal friends for a special blessing, a song, prayers, and a treat. Sunday worship at 10:30 is streamed live under "Online Worship" at gracelutheranhatfield.org. For more information, call 215-855-4676.

■ **Gwynedd Square Presbyterian Church:** We were blessed with North Wales Day being a great day for GSPC. The children had a great time spinning the prize wheel and getting a prize and getting a bracelet with the church's name and web site on it. Adults were given a reusable shopping bag with interesting contents. We talked about our Fall Mission Week and our participation in the Habitat Faith Build with many of the adults, and five members of the community are going to join us in our next Build Day on November 5 or on Community Build Days with Habitat in October or November. We are now looking forward to a great day at Towamencin Day on October 8. We'll have the prize wheel and the adults will be able to visually see, on photo posters, the local mission work we'll be doing in Fall Mission Week from October 30 to November 5 and see the progress of the homes on Cowpath Road in Hatfield for the Habitat Faith Build. Please visit our booth and join us for Fall Mission Week or on the Faith Build. Towamencin Day is at Fischer's Park located on Bustard Road in Towamencin Township, noon to 4 p.m.

■ **Gwynedd Square Presbyterian Church** is hosting a Blood Drive on Tuesday, Oct. 4, from 2 to 7 p.m. The need for blood is constant. Your donation is important for a healthy and reliable blood supply. One unit of blood donated can be used as whole blood transfusions or separated into components which will help 4 individuals. It is best to make an appointment but the Red Cross will take walk-ins if openings occur. They are asking anyone who feels ill, please do not donate. Face masks must be worn and temperatures will be taken at registration. Please contact our blood drive coordinator, Jennifer Clements-Rhoads at (215-661-1300) to make an appointment. Please consider your much needed donation.

■ A Trivia Night fundraiser for the American Cancer Society will be October 22 at **St. Helena's Church** in Blue Bell. The 14th annual event will be at 6:30 p.m. at The Empress Room at the church, 1489 Dekalb Pike. Gather some friends and don't miss the delicious buffet dinner and fun trivia competition for a worthy cause. Visit the website at https://bit.ly/ACSTriviaNight22 for more information or contact Lori at 610-283-2932.

## LANSDALE



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Brittany Pointe Quilters at Brittany Pointe Estates in Lansdale have donated quilts to patients and their families at the Coatesville VA Medical Center for the fourth year. The project co-chairs Bonnie Hurd, Lita Star and Helen Lindquist thanked the many residents who crafted the 18 quilts this year. Pictured are: Eric Tatlonghari, executive director of Brittany Pointe Estates; Co-Chairs Bonnie Hurd, Lita Star and Helen Lindquist, and Jennifer Lilly from the VA Medical Center in Coatesville.

## Quilters donate to VA hospital

By MediaNews Group

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are: Eric Tatlonghari, executive director of Brittany Pointe Estates; Co-Chairs Bonnie Hurd, Lita Star and Helen Lindquist, and Jennifer Lilly from the VA Medical Center in Coatesville.

## RELIGION DIRECTORY

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	Sound Assistance Available		Sign Language Worship Aid		Special Greeters		Large Print Worship Aids Available	
<b>BAPTIST</b>			<b>LUTHERAN</b>			<b>PRESBYTERIAN</b>		
<b>Bethlehem Baptist</b> Penllyn Pike and Dager Road Spring House, PA 19477 Ph: (215) 643-4977 • Fax: (215) 643-4474 www.bbc4Christ.org Worship: 9:00 a.m. & 11:15 a.m. Sunday Bible Study (Church School) 9:00 a.m. Midweek Bible Study-Wed. 11:00 a.m. & 7:15 p.m. Pastor Charles W. Quann			<b>TRINITY</b> EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH 1000 West Main Street, Lansdale <b>INDOOR WORSHIP</b> Sat. 5:30 pm, Sun., 8:30/10:45 am <b>LIVESTREAM:</b> Sundays, 8:30 am Facebook, YouTube, trinitylansdale.com <b>RADIO:</b> 97.1 FM - Sundays, 11 am <b>FEAST COMMUNITY MEAL</b> Every Monday, 5:00-6:00 pm trinitylansdale.com			<b>Gwynedd Square Presbyterian, PC(USA)</b> 837 Summeytown Pike, Lansdale, PA 19446 215-699-9159 office@gwyneddsquare.org Sunday Worship 10:00 am Sunday School at 9:00 am Youth Fellowship Sundays at 7:00 pm "Growing Spiritually through Service" For details and program information GwyneddSquare.org		



<b>PRESBYTERIAN</b>	<b>METHODIST</b>	<b>EPISCOPAL</b>
<b>Lansdale Presbyterian Church</b> 450 Oak Park Rd. Hatfield, PA 19440 Ph: (215) 368-1119 www.lansdalepres.org Sunday School for all ages 9:15 am Worship Service 10:30 am Nursery Care is available Children Ministry, Jr & Sr High Youth Groups Small Groups, College & Career MOPS & Active Senior Adults Group	<b>Lansdale United Methodist</b> 300 North Broad Street, Lansdale, PA 19446 Ph: (215) 855-8364 www.lansdaleumc.org Worship Schedule Join us online at our website www.lansdaleumc.org each Sunday morning. Announcements and Music at 8:45 a.m. Worship at 9:00 a.m.	<b>Church of the Messiah</b> 1001 Dekalb Pike, Lower Gwynedd, PA 19002 215-699-9204 office@messiahgwynedd.org www.messiahgwynedd.org Sundays Holy Eucharist at 8 am & 9:30 am Nursery Care & Church School begin @ 9:15 (Children join services @ Communion) Refreshments follow both Services Wednesday Rector's Study at 11 am & 7 pm

For information about this directory call 215-648-1140 or hpolak@adtaxi.com  
Deadlines: Wednesday at 4 p.m.