

## **An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for January 15, 2022**

Hello Everyone – I hope you are all keeping warm and safe. I'm really enjoying the cold – but I'm strange – I'm from New York. First, I want to welcome all the new committee members on our leadership teams. All right – I know most of you aren't new – just in a new position. Anyway, you know who you are I hope – and I welcome you to that new position as I send my thanks to everyone who is willing to step forward and help direct our ministry into the future. We will be sending, as an attachment to this encouraging word or the next, a listing of all our committees.

Much of the rest of this first section is repeated information. Please note that this coming Sunday worship will still be a Zoom only gathering. We'll re-assess at the Administrative Council meeting this coming Monday night.

### **The Church office will be closed this Monday, January 17<sup>th</sup>.**

**An important reminder** to members and friends who enter the building – through either entrance – **while the Child Development Center is open and operating: Please be sure you are masked** – even if you are just going to the office or sanctuary. This is critically important for keeping our unvaccinated children safe and for setting a tone of caution for those using our facility.

**If you have prayer requests**, even if you plan to share them at Sunday worship, you may forward them ahead of time to Jen at the church office and she will compile a list to be used on Sunday morning.

**The next bible study** will begin this Tuesday at 7 p.m. We will be using the book by Adam Hamilton entitled "Words of Life". It's a ten week long study on the Ten Commandments. The book is available from Amazon and Cokesbury. This will be a Zoom class since that format seems to work very well for most of us. I have sent the Zoom invitations to the list compiled from past bible study participants. If you would like to be included on this list, please let me know or notify the Church Office.

**Signing On For Zoom Worship Services.** As most of you who Zoom our worship services know, I greet Zoom attendees as they sign on, take Zoom attendance, and assign names to phone numbers as phone callers sign on. I open the Zoom meeting at 9 a.m. in order to give people time to sign on. **I encourage you to sign on early to avoid the crush of people signing on at the last minute.** The earlier you sign on the easier it is for me to attend to the greeting responsibilities. It also gives us a chance to chat, and share prayer requests

**The Announcements and Bulletin for Sunday's service are included as attachments to this encouraging word.** Please feel free to print them out and either bring them with you to the service or to use them as your guide as you Zoom the service.

**A Word About Giving.** As we begin a new year, we face several challenges as a congregation. One of those challenges is financial. Your faithfulness and diligence in giving helped us weather many of those challenges and for that I and the leadership team thank you. We were fortunate to have received several large memorials that allowed us to break even for the year. However, last year we also had federal help, and assistance from our annual conference, which we will not receive this year. This presents yet another challenge – to meet the financial obligations of our congregation while supporting the mission and ministry needs of our community. Our greatest and perhaps only means of support in meeting this challenge in this coming year will be through your prayerful and faithful giving. You can help in several ways. First by prayerfully considering increasing your weekly or monthly offering. Secondly by enrolling in our E-giving program. However you choose to support this ministry know that it is deeply appreciated and will enable our continued ministry presence in this community.

**End of Year Giving Statements** - Once again, to save paper and postage, the church will not be doing widespread printing up and distributing annual giving statements. Everyone can now easily generate their own statements from their Realm account whenever they like. If you do require a hard copy done the traditional way, please just let the office know and we can provide one. If you haven't accessed Realm and need a new invite sent, just let the office know. You can also see all your current giving and history all the way back to 2008. Below are easy step by step instructions to print your giving statements.

### **Accessing Giving Record & End of Year Giving Statements**

To generate and print out giving statements from your Realm account-

- Log into Realm
- Click on "Giving" on the left side of the page. It will automatically show your gifts for *this* year, to date, to verify your gifts.
- For Yearly Statements, click the Filter button (that droopy triangle symbol) and change the Gift Date Range to "Last Year". then click the blue "Filter" button.
- To print, simply click the Printer Icon. A report will generate, and you can click the Printer Icon in that window to print your statement.
- Done! 😊

Respectfully,  
The Church Office & Finance Committee

### **An Encouraging Word**

I have wonderful memories of my Grandma Beall's house. It was filled with icons of love. Grandma Beall had not had an easy life. She had been widowed when my dad was three, and so was a single mom for a few years - until marrying my Grandpa Henry Beall and moving to North Syracuse. When my mom and dad married, they moved in with her parents, my other grandparents, who lived twenty miles away from where grandma and grandpa Beall made their home.

I sometimes wonder what it was like for her, living in a kind of exile from our growing family. My maternal grandparents were right on our doorstep and in the middle of all the action as I entered the world, followed by my brother, and then my sister. They were close at hand to enjoy a daily presence in our lives. When babysitters were needed, they were close at hand and eager to serve. Grandma Beall did not have those opportunities. She lived on the other side of the city, and she couldn't drive. Henry – during the time we still lived in New York – worked six hard days a week as a freight manager for Railway Express so there wasn't a lot of time available to them for traveling. Ironically, for Grandma Beall family was everything! But she rarely had the opportunity to be with her family.

This brings me back to her house being filled with icons of love. The word "icon" has many definitions. An icon can be a person that is widely admired – like Elvis Presley. An icon can be an emblem or symbol, representing an important idea or belief – like the Christian Cross or the Star of David. An icon can be pictorial – like Rosie the Riveter from WWII or iconic photos from 9/11, pictures which stir our emotions. Of course, icons can also be those symbols at the bottom of the computer screen where you are reading this that represent and open programs currently running on your computer. Icons are windows through which we access memories, emotions, and ideas. My grandmother's house was filled with a particular kind of icon.

There was not a spare horizontal surface in that house that was not covered with pictures of her family. Everywhere one looked there were pictures of me, my brother, my sister, my mom, and dad all smiling back. Scattered in amongst them were pictures of her own parents, her two sisters, nieces, and her nephews. She was never without a camera. We knew upon arrival in her domain that we would be the subject of numerous snapshots which would soon appear somewhere in the ever more crowded gallery her furniture and walls provided. So, even if the rest of her family was far away, she was surrounded by our smiles and reminders of our love. Since she couldn't always be present with us, she had surrounded herself with pictures of her family, a collection of icons of love that would transport her close to us.

In this I learned something of the secret of living in exile. Surround yourself with icons of the things and the people that really matter. In that way we are always connected. Neglect this one important thing and the connections begin to fade. Without those important connections to the things that really matter we become anchorless and adrift on a chaotic and dangerous sea. Grandma Beall knew this. We were her anchor, and even though we couldn't always be together, and were often separated by great distance, she could always look up from whatever she was doing, see at least one photo, and be reminded that she was part of a family that loved her. No matter what crisis presented itself she always had, close at hand, reminders of her connection to her family.

Many of us are living in a sort of exile these days. Some of us are physically exiled from one-another. It's harder to gather as we once did. In some ways we may feel exiled from the community. Some of us haven't been physically with our church family for many months. We may also be finding ourselves exiled in a different way, from the lives and joy we had before the Coronavirus. In the strange terrain of this new reality, where fear threatens to eclipse hope, where anger and intolerance is prevalent, and even our families are being polarized and divided, we may feel exiled from the world we once knew. It is critically important in these times to surround ourselves with the reminders that despite all we are experiencing we are still connected in a community of love and connected with our gracious and loving Creator. We need to surround ourselves with reminders and icons of love.

We need to surround ourselves with these "icons" and reminders of our connections each day. For instance, as I write this, I'm sitting in the Church sanctuary, surrounded by beautiful stained-glass windows each containing icons of God's love. There's a picture of Jesus on the front wall made up of the individual photographs of church members – truly symbolizing our connectedness. The cross is evident everywhere, reminding me of how my connection to God was sealed on the cross.

I don't have to be sitting in the middle of a church sanctuary to be reminded of our connection to each other and of God's love. At home there are similar mementoes and icons that serve as reminders. There are Christmas cards sent from many of you on display – icons of connection. There's a painting of the Madonna and Child over the fireplace, angel figurines on the mantle, and bibles all over the place (I am a pastor after all). These icons of our connection to God and to each other are critically important just now and are keeping me anchored and steady during a confusing time. I pray these kinds of icons are visible in your home as well. Yet we may need even more reminders, especially now.

Even though we are not present with each other we can connect with each other and with God in prayer. Consider the prayer list that is included each week as an attachment to these Encouraging Words. Each name on that list is an icon. As we pray for one-another and for everyone on that list it becomes a reminder that we are connected. Often, as I see a name on that list, I visualize a face, either of the one being prayed for or the person who made the prayer request. As that happens a connection is made.

On Sunday mornings, on the Zoom Screen, and especially while we are doing Zoom only worship, I'm seeing a gallery of faces smiling back at me, not unlike the collection of photos that greeted me in Grandma Beall's house, and I'm reminded of our sacred connection, as God's family. Even when the frame on the computer screen only shows a name or a phone number, the face of that person comes to my mind's eye, and I'm connected.

The symbols and icons of our faith, our prayers, cards and notes lovingly exchanged, our faces or names on the Zoom screen are just a few of the ways that we are reminded that we are part of the loving family of God and anchored in that love, even when we feel exiled and separated. I encourage you to find ways to be reminded of and connected to the things that really matter – our place in God's family – and know the hope that it brings. Take note of the icons in your lives. Without that connectedness they represent we can easily find ourselves alone and adrift on a chaotic sea. Surrounded by them we know we are safe holding each other in love.

It's been many years now since my Grandma Beall passed away in a nursing home with my dad at her side. Most of us couldn't be there. But I had been in that same room just weeks before and I knew that every surface, the counters, the bedside tables, anything that could support a stand-up picture frame, was covered with a sea of faces, icons of love, all the people she loved and that loved her, everyone to whom she was connected with bonds of love.

That's all for today. I'll see you on Sunday on Zoom. Until then be well, stay safe, make good decisions in this Coronavirus environment, and in please stay connected to each other and to God.

Blessings & Peace, Mike