

The Messenger

Orchard Covenant Church
95 Berkshire Street
Indian Orchard, MA 01151
413-543-4204



Volume 49, Issue 3

October, 2018

THE PASTOR'S PAGE

One Seed, 2,649 Seeds

In June, before I left town to greet my new granddaughter, Fiona, I planted a few sunflower seeds from a packet labeled “gigantic” in the little raised garden bed between the church and the parking lot. The seeds sprouted and the seedlings stayed small for a while, but then before our eyes the stalks grew solid and tall – the largest one 9 or 10 feet high - until it started to bend under the weight of the huge flower. When the yellow petals fell off, I cut it. So many seeds, in geometric pattern! Curious, I resurrected my long-unused school geometry (by googling the formula) and calculated the area of the face of the 15 inch- diameter sunflower – 176 square inches! I multiplied that by about 15 seeds per square inch: **2,649 seeds**, give or take a hundred! All from one seed!!!

At church we talk about growth – always hoping for more people to join us, more people to choose Jesus, and to grow in maturity and knowledge of God. But the sunflower makes me think of a different kind of Kingdom growth, which happens when, as Jesus said, we respond to “the least of these” in his name.

Kingdom growth is growth in the practices of the Kingdom: kindness, patience, mercy, forgiveness, justice, equality – each welcome, each act of grace, each Christ-like encouragement, is an act of planting a seed of the gospel of Jesus. These seeds, if watered and given sunlight (Sun-light!) can multiply exponentially to build God’s Kingdom of love and light. Sun-flower light!

One thing we do at OCC is plant seeds. Sunday School, church, Munch n Mingle care of people – all relational moments in which the Good News of Jesus can multiply. Does anyone have a story of planting a gospel seed and seeing growth, in your life or someone else’s? Please share.

See you in church!

Pastor Nancy Ebner



Covenant Justice Coalition Conference:

Once again the New York Covenant Church in New Rochelle will host the Covenant Justice Coalition Conference, October 19 -20. This year, the conference focus will be about creating strategic alliances to build “21st Century Biblical Coalitions.” That is, churches working together with other churches and organizations to ignite and encourage ministries that focus on biblical justice. This should be very informative and stretching! Do we realize that some of OCC’s ministries are about biblical justice in the name of Jesus? Pastor Nancy plans to attend, and can share her hotel room with other women – but men are invited too! Registration fee is \$95. Contact Pastor Nancy

*Pastor Nancy Ebner, Orchard Covenant Church, 95 Berkshire Street, Indian Orchard, MA 01151
413-543-4204 pastor@orchardcovenant.org*

OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS

October 3 – Debora Amina
October 5 - Jen Mullins
October 6 - Mark Thomas
October 12 - Daniel Glassman
October 13 – Nathaniel Niyuhire
October 13 - Pastor Nancy Ebner
October 21 - John Howell
October 22 - Amanda Kenyon
October 22 - Liz Bromage
October 27 – Mafumbo Nyabenda
October 28 - Kyle Thomas
October 28 - Sue Warner
October 30 – Evangeline Nbtayi

ANNIVERSARIES

Art and Diane Lawler – 2nd

[If your date is wrong or your name has been omitted, please contact the editor.]

DATES TO REMEMBER

October 1 – Council prayer and meeting
October 2 – Immerse Study at the Hokanson's each Tuesday 6:30
October 3 – Immerse Study at the Church each Wednesday 1:00
October 4 – Choir each Thursday 7:00
October 6 – Walk n Roll for Joni 3:00
October 7 – Immerse study at the Foster's each Sunday 2:30
October 13 – Food Truck Festival at Survival Center Noon to 6:00
Dinner at St. Cecelia's 5:30
October 14 – Youth Hike after Church
October 17 – Gamblers Anonymous Dinner
October 19-20 Covenant Justice Coalition, New Rochelle
October 20 – Men's Breakfast
October 27 – Clean-up Day
November 3 – Council Mini Retreat

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Mike Foster

Adults: Sunday mornings at 9:45, we are studying the Gospel of Mark together, working from both English and Swahili translations. We take our time, asking each other questions and offering our understandings. Insights from our various cultural backgrounds enrich our study in ways that could not happen in an English-only study. We hope you can join us to see Jesus again: moving towards the cross, healing the sick in mind and body, teaching his sometimes thick-headed disciples, dealing with his enemies, blessing

Domestic Violence Awareness Month

There's a lot of talk about domestic violence and sexual abuse and misconduct these days, with #MeToo and #ChurchToo conversations going around and several disturbing cases involving sexual violence in the news every day. Though these stories are upsetting, it's important to bring evil out in the open. When secrets are kept, and people pretend all is fine, victims continue to suffer and even die.

If you or someone you know, needs to talk about violence in the home and/or sexual assault, you may call Pastor Nancy at 896-8875. There are also hotlines with people trained to listen and help a person take the steps they need towards healing.

Here are some helpful numbers. Use them, and give them to others:

National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-7233
National Sexual Assault Hotline 800-656-4673
Springfield YWCA 800-796-8711

A NEW REFRIGERATOR



Most of us know that the refrigerator by the door was only good for keeping the lemonade cool all summer. It wouldn't freeze anything or keep other food at a safe temperature. We ordered a new one and it was delivered on Wednesday, Sept 26! Just a reminder about our kitchen and food service: Please Help! We need more people to help on a monthly Sunday serving team, and more people to step up and clean up. Our Sunday teams serve us at their own time and expense. Let's thank them and support them!

Reading the Prophets: Ruin to Restoration and a Christ-like God

"Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourself clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong; learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord! Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." Isaiah 1:16-18

In some seasons of life I had a hard time reading the Old Testament Prophets. Oh yes I've treasured a collection of descriptive sayings and hopeful passages that portray God's character of steadfast love and mercy and visions of the peaceable Kingdom. But the many pages of complaints against the nations and threats of violent and deadly destructions at times have blurred before my eyes. Does this ever happen to you? You're busy, tired, distracted—and you can't deal with the parts of God's Word that seem distant or difficult?

Reading through the prophets now for our 8 weeks of sermons and study discussions, I find the pages are alive and important for our world today. Do we live in a new era like that of the prophets? Actually, I'm sure every era has practiced idolatry, oppression of the poor for economic gain, religious pride and unjust judgment of others.

God's words are not just visions of the distant past or distant future, as many believe. They are grounded in history, filled with real names and real places. And they describe universal behavior of leaders and nations that we can recognize regardless of political party. No one is exempt. God speaks against evil, urges people to seek good, and promises restoration to even the worst offenders. That sounds like Jesus! Yes, the Bible says that *"Christ is the image of the invisible God, the exact representation of his being."* (Hebrews 1:2)

We need to understand God in the OT in light of Christ, who was non-violent, reconciling, merciful and loving.

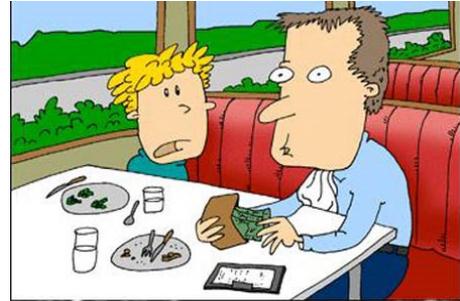
At our first meeting in the Fall series, our Sunday Night discussion group (6:30 at church) held a lively discussion of the passages, which to our group pointed to similar sounding injustices in Kenya, the U.S. and more. The Word of God is alive and challenging. Feel free to join one of the groups!

Pastor Nancy Ebner

PLAN FOR FALL!

"Immerse" Bible Reading Groups will begin again in September. We already have two or three groups who want to continue reading through the Bible, using the Immerse program. If you stopped for a while, here's a great chance to join again, reading the Prophets!

See the Pastor's Page for more details.



HOW COME THE WAITRESS GETS 15% AND GOD ONLY GETS 10%?

Stewardship Season = Gratefulness for all God is doing!

Stewardship simply means, "Taking care of what we have been given." Think of all that God has done through our church in 2018! Worship, welcome, service, growth as disciples of Christ as we care for each other and others around the world in Jesus' name... What story can you tell, about how Orchard Covenant has impacted you this year? Our stories are why we give our money. We have a vision of God's Kingdom come, on earth, in ways that really matter, through the people of this church. Thank you Lord!

The week of **October 21**, we'll send a letter asking for pledges for OCC's 2019 budget. We ask for all those pledges be returned by November 18. Please pray and consider what you may be able to give in 2019, and make a courageous pledge. Then watch how God will provide for all your needs - including the need to practice generosity.

Covenant World Relief: We need cans!



We'll be handing out soup cans later this month - but we need more soup cans for our soup-can banks! We need the smaller size classic condensed soup can, 10 or 11 oz Campbell's or store-brand. So eat soup and bring us the cans, so every family can have a soup-can bank on their table this fall. This effort helps the poorest of the poor" people of the world through various relief and development ministries.

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Pray for the children in our Sunday School, especially those in the Confirmation class.

Pray for all those who are still suffering the effects of extreme weather.

Praise that the church's financial needs are being met with generosity and abundance.

Pray for all our church families that are experiencing suffering and loss, especially the families whose loved ones are experiencing ill health.

Pray for the family and friends of Joanne Johnson, who died on September 30, 2018. Peace be to her memory.

PRAYER FOR AUTUMN

We see signs of summer's passing in golden leaves,
shortening days, misty mornings, autumn glow.

We sense its passing in rain that dampens,
winds that chill, Harvest's bounty placed on show.

Creator God, who brings forth
both green shoot and hoar frost,
sunrise and sunset,
we bring our thanks
for seeds that have grown,
harvests gathered,
storehouses filled,
mouths fed.

And, as your good earth rests
through winter's cold embrace,
we look forward to its re-awakening
when kissed by Spring's first touch.

