

November 18, 2020

## STATE COLLEGE DISTRICT NEWS & NOTES



Bishop Jeremiah J. Park

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
HARRISBURG AREA – SUSQUEHANNA CONFERENCE

303 Mulberry Drive, Suite 100 • Mechanicsburg, PA 17050-3198  
Phone (717) 766-7871 • Fax (717) 766-3210 • Email: bishoppark@susumc.org

Christy Mackey  
Executive Admin. Asst.  
cmackey@susumc.org

Rev. Gregory C. Myers  
Clergy Assistant  
gmyers@susumc.org

Rev. Dr. Thomas Salsgiver  
Clergy Assistant  
tsalsgiver@susumc.org

Sarah Filizzi  
Admin. Assistant  
sfilizzi@susumc.org

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*“We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield.  
In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.  
May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you.”  
(Psalm 33:20-22)*

*“...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,  
looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.”  
(Hebrews 12:1-2)*

Dear Sisters and Brothers of the Susquehanna Conference,

Grace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, Healer of our Brokenness, and Hope of the World!

As we approach Thanksgiving, we think of the many things for which we thank and praise God. Even in these uncertain times of a pandemic, when we have suffered loss and anxiety, God still upholds us with grace and love, more than enough for us to share with others.

One reason to praise God is the announcement that a promising new vaccine for COVID-19 is showing significant success in trials. The manufacturer hopes by the end of the year to receive approval to distribute the vaccine.

This news comes at a time when new cases of this coronavirus are surging in our state and across the country at an alarming rate. As a matter of fact, the national infection rate is at its highest these days. In some counties in our conference, it is reported that the risk level is as high as 58 percent. I am hearing of increasingly more new cases among our people. In many areas of our conference the rate of infection equals or surpasses the rate in April.

We are all disappointed that this upward trend comes just before Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas. This is a time of year when we gather for celebrations with family and

friends and plan joyous worship and fellowship. Often, we see new faces at our holiday services, providing us an opportunity to welcome more people into the body of Christ and a life of Christian discipleship.

However, for the health of our church members, neighbors, and loved ones, we must renew our vigilance to safety practices. Safety and wellness must be our number-one priority.

Therefore, I ask you to continue to limit indoor gatherings as much as possible to stop the spread. Observe social distancing at all times and wear face coverings when you may be in the presence of others, especially during worship. Continue to keep surfaces at your church disinfected after every use. Keep plenty of hand sanitizer available. ([If you need more sanitizer, you can contact any of the locations listed here.](#))

As a church, we have to practice more rigorous safety protocols than the government directs for such a time as this. As we watch the infection rate break records almost daily—which may grow worse as the flu season continues—we must keep indoor gatherings to a maximum of 25 people, if at all possible. And we must be prepared to face the possibility that even stronger, short-term measures may be needed, if the virus continues to spread among our friends and families.

The past nine months have dragged along. However, this has not been the longest experience of a persistent pandemic. The flu outbreak of 1918 lasted for about two years. We as a nation have endured this before, and, with God's grace, we will prevail again.

The last mile of a race is the toughest. The Bible teaches that God will help us to persevere. The Christmas story provides an example of patient waiting that led to fulfillment. Simeon had grown old watching for the Messiah to arrive. Before he died, though, he was able to hold Jesus in his own arms. His prayer at that moment continues to resound: "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation." (Luke 2:29)

We, too, will bear witness to God's generosity and salvation this Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas season. This may happen in some unfamiliar ways. Yet, does not God often surprise us, and appear in very unexpected ways?

May God hold you, your churches, and your neighbors in wholeness and peace. And may you be to all you encounter a beacon of God's light, which pierced the darkness forever.

In Ministry with You,  
Jeremiah J. Park



**“Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me;  
to those who go the right way<sup>[a]</sup>  
I will show the salvation of God.” Psalm 50:23**

When everything is going well, it is easy to give thanks, but what happens when things are not going well? Is it possible to give thanks even then?

Even in the darkest of times, there is so much to be thankful for, and in a year like this one that has been bombarded by a global pandemic and an ongoing civil rights movement, Thanksgiving can be a day to remember all of the things, big and small, you have to be thankful for.

**Thanksgiving is so important;** It acknowledges God in the situation.

I am sharing some Thanksgiving quotes and scripture verses to emphasize the role that being thankful can play in your life, and how gratitude as a practice and as a mindset can be life changing.



“For my part, I am almost contented just now, and very thankful. Gratitude is a divine emotion: it fills the heart, but not to bursting; it warms it, but not to fever.” — Charlotte Bronte



"Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow." — Melody Beattie



"Not what we say about our blessing, but how we use them, is the true measure of our thanksgiving." — W.T. Purkiser

"As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them." — John Fitzgerald Kennedy



"You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God." 2 Corinthians 9:11

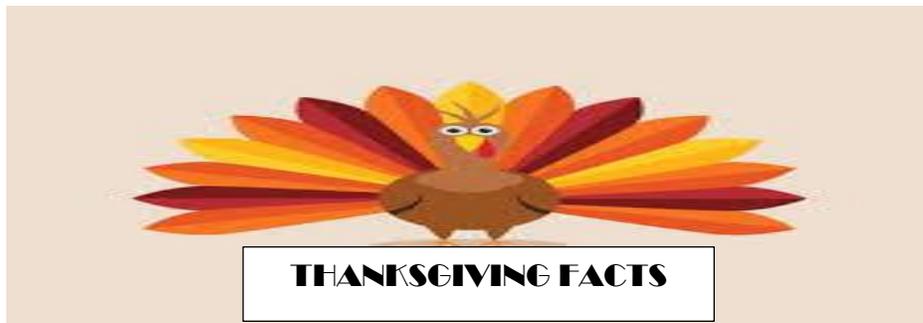


"The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him." Psalm 28:7

I am truly thankful for all of you! You stepped up and responded in some amazing ways to be sure your congregations were cared for spiritually and pastorally during this pandemic. Please know I thank God daily for you and I pray that God will continue you and great and wondrous ways as you are a blessing to so many!

Thanksgiving Blessings,

Brenda



**Sarah Josepha Hale was actually the "Mother of Thanksgiving."**

Famously known for writing "Mary Had a Little Lamb," Sarah Josepha Hale was a 19th-century writer and editor who was nicknamed the Mother (or Godmother) of Thanksgiving. The name seemed fitting after she wrote a letter to President Abraham Lincoln and Secretary of State William Seward in 1863 calling for the declaration of Thanksgiving as a national holiday.

**Thanksgiving was once celebrated on the third Thursday in November.**

Decades after President Lincoln officially declared Thanksgiving a national holiday, President Roosevelt wanted to mix things up by moving it up to the third Thursday in November instead of the fourth. By doing this, seven shopping days were added to the holiday season in 1939, but the change upset football coaches whose weekend Thanksgiving games were switched to regular weekday games. Plus, calendars were printed with incorrect dates.

**"Jingle Bells" was originally a Thanksgiving Day song.**

Before becoming a Christmas anthem, "Jingle Bells" was an 1857 song titled "One Horse Open Sleigh," and its composer, James Pierpont, intended it to be a Thanksgiving Day song. But it became so popular around December 25 that in 1859 the title was changed to "Jingle Bells" and the rest is history!

**Black Friday, aka the day after Thanksgiving, is the busiest day for plumbers.**

Sure, it is a big day for shoppers—but also drainage professionals. Plumbing and drainage companies do not really get the Friday after Thanksgiving off, since it is one of their busiest days of the year. (Why, you can only imagine.) In fact, the day is so busy for these services that Roto-Rooter Plumbing and Water Cleaning company actually calls it "Brown Friday!"

## Thanksgiving and Christmas Worship Resources during a Pandemic

Victoria Rebeck has pulled together some resources to give to churches some ideas (or in some cases, fully scripted services) on how to offer worship during Advent and Christmas that maintains good safety protocols during this pandemic.

You can find them here: [susumc.org/worship-resources/](https://susumc.org/worship-resources/)

By the way, there is a Thanksgiving video there as well, created by Marcia McFee, that churches can use as well.

### **Prayers and Praises**

*Rick Conklin – hip surgery*

*Helen Gates – health issues*

*Frank Hartzel and family – brother in law and sister in law  
and friend in bad accident, brother in law passed away*

*Rachel Horst – Migraine issues*

*Becky & Mark McGee – death of Mark's mother*

*Gloria Reese – skin cancer operation*

*Lori Steffensen – surgery to repair traumatic rotator cuff tear*

## Growing Spiritual Transformational Leaders



2 Chronicles 7:12-18 recounts God's acceptance of the Temple that Solomon built. It is a bargain between God and Solomon (and his descendants) to stay in relationship. We are most familiar with verse 14: "if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (NIV). Spiritual Transformational Leaders have to work hard at one word from this scripture in their relationship with God and others –

humble. Humility and non-anxious leadership go hand in hand – know who you are, be willing to admit you could be wrong, stay in relationship with the people who differ from you. **How will you practice humility today?**

I am writing to ask if you would place the following link on your district website so that we can encourage more people to consider different ways to offer their gifts and explore their calls in our conference.

<https://susumc.org/nominations-form/>

## Recording Available: The Financial Challenge Webinar

If you were not available to attend the webinar, "The Financial Challenge", with Scott McKenzie and Gary Shockley, it is now available to [VIEW ON YOUTUBE](#).

This webinar is designed for churches of all sizes, to learn of current giving trends in churches and other non-profit groups that will help you connect with people who want to give to very specific causes. Receive practical advice for helping your people exercise generosity. And learn a simple short-term process that will help your ministries to end strong in 2020 and set you up for greater financial strength in the coming year.

## November – December Ministry Resource Packet

Check out the latest edition of the Ministry Resource Packet. Find announcements, flyers, and more to share with your church leaders and congregations. [VIEW PACKET](#)

## Safety Talk: Prepare Now for Winter Weather

This past winter several Conference employees were injured after slipping and falling on snow and ice. Our valued congregants, visitors, and early childhood “customers” (children and their parents) could also be subject to slips and falls in winter weather. [READ MORE](#)

**UMC discount** on cleaning supplies etc. from Lowes and Home Depot – Please check out the attachments.



**Together with God ... we are transforming the world!**

The **Building the Beloved Community Fund (BBCF)** will help Susquehanna United Methodists resist racism, promote diversity, and love their neighbors. [LEARN MORE](#)

This advent season, you and your congregations are invited to participate in giving to the **BBCF**.

[LETTER FROM BISHOP PARK](#)

[FLYER](#)

[POWERPOINT SLIDE](#)

## Encouraging Leadership with Thanksgiving

**Where do you see God working in our lives to develop leaders right now?** The Nominations Committee invites you to use our new link to identify leaders that could serve our conference in different or expanding ways. [VIEW FORM](#) **Please pray for God to help you discern and nominate at least one person this month who you see is emerging or growing as a leader.** Let's celebrate the people God is calling to service by recognizing them. The Nomination Committee members will pray for the nominees and see what potential opportunities might be offered to share their gifts beyond the local church. Thank you for your leadership. We are grateful for the ways you empower and lift up other leaders to serve God with you!

In times of crisis and difficulty, resilience is often a valued reality. One characteristic of resilience is to use it as an opportunity for profound personal growth. Interestingly enough, vision and purpose are ways in which individuals and organizations can manage resiliency. ***What picture is in your mind about what you and your congregation will look like when the current crisis passes? Is the picture one that reflects the attitude of a spiritually transformed leader and does it you and your church toward this future?***



## Christmas in the Time of Pandemic

Advent and Christmas will be particularly challenging to observe this year, due to COVID-19. A number of experts have created resources and suggestions for worship, given limits on social distancing, singing, and other considerations. Find these on the [WORSHIP RESOURCE PAGE](#).

## World AIDS Day

The United Methodist Global AIDS Committee has announced plans for a special service to commemorate World AIDS Day on **December 1** at **2 p.m.** The worship service held virtually on [Facebook](#) and [their website](#).

## Local Church learning sessions: Technology for worship, small groups and giving

### Boost digital ministry

A growing library of free, on-demand Local Church Learning Sessions now includes a [session exploring new features of social media platforms and ideas for using them](#). All of the sessions support your church's ongoing digital ministry, covering not only social media, but e-giving, text messaging, livestreaming and more.

[Begin learning](#)

## Thank you, State College District!

It is so exciting to share the blessing of the many generous donors from the State College District. Gifts thus far have reached **\$4701.39**. Awesome!

With Deep Gratitude:  
Kevin

Kevin Witt  
Director of Growing Spiritual Transformational Leaders  
and Camp/Retreat Ministries.  
[kwitt@susumc.org](mailto:kwitt@susumc.org)  
541-317-1615

<http://www.susumcamps.org/>

## Online Study: INCARNATION

Pastor Theresa Heiser leads this online Advent study **Monday evenings Nov. 23, 30, Dec. 7, 14 starting at 7pm.** We will meet via Zoom, online or by phone. The study is open to anyone, anywhere! The only cost is your book. **Pre-order the book now and save! [Cokesbury is offering the book for \\$13.49 for a limited time.](#)** Also available for [\\$19.99 on Amazon](#) / [\\$9.99 for Kindle version on Amazon](#)

[Click here to sign up now!](#)

### ABOUT THE STUDY

Learn the meaning behind the names of Christ and the difference He makes in our lives this Christmas. His parents gave him the name Jesus. But the prophets, the shepherds, the wise men, and the angels addressed him by other names. They called him Lord, Messiah, Savior, Emmanuel, Light of the World, and Word Made Flesh. In *Incarnation: Rediscovering the Significance of Christmas*, best-selling author Adam Hamilton examines the names of Christ used by the gospel writers, exploring the historical and personal significance of his birth. This Advent season church families will come together to remember what is important. In the face of uncertainty and conflict, Christians reclaim the Christ child who brings us together, heals our hearts, and calls us to bring light into the darkness. Now more than ever, we invite you to reflect upon the significance of the Christ child for our lives and world today!

State College District UMC *(please wear a mask when visiting our office - thanks)*

1200 Haymaker Rd., State College, PA 16801  
Office Phone: 814-237-4365  
Website: [statecollegedistrict.susumc.org](http://statecollegedistrict.susumc.org)

Office hours:  
Mon – Thurs 9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.  
*Closed Noon – 1 p.m.*  
Closed Fridays

*\*If you wish to be removed from this email list, please send a note to [statecollege@susumc.org](mailto:statecollege@susumc.org)*