

RIVERDALE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

SUMMER NEWSNOTES – 2015

From the Pastor:

New Questions for a New Day

It's time to start asking new questions. Better answers to the same old questions about the church will not get us through the tumultuous times in which we live. This is a time for out-of-the box thinking. Old questions keep us in the box. New questions invite us to move outside.

Phyllis Tickle, in *The Great Emergence*, talks about the need for today's church to have a rummage sale so we can rid ourselves of all those practices, beliefs and ways of being that are no longer effective, and that get in the way of being the church we are called to be. Many of the questions we have asked for centuries in the church need to be put in that rummage sale. They need to be replaced with new questions that lead us into new ways of being and doing – ways that are attuned to the time in which we live. It's not that the old questions weren't valid at one time or even that they have no place in the church today. Rather, the new questions – if they are the questions that form our approach to ministry – will lead us to new insights and new learning.

If you ask these questions there is no assurance that you'll find the way to renew, revitalize or redevelop your church. It may happen. But you may just as likely discover that asking these questions takes you down a road to some other alternative that you hadn't even thought of before. What I feel pretty confident about, however, is that asking these new questions will bring us closer to discovering what God is seeking from us in this time. I also believe asking these new questions will help ensure that whatever the future holds for us, our congregations we will be more faithful in the work we are about right now. And that is a pretty wondrous thing!

The Questions We Ask About Church

One tool that the session is using for our conversation about the future of Riverdale is a book by Rev. Dr. Jefferey Jones entitled "Facing Decline, Finding Hope: New Possibilities for Faithful Churches".

His thesis is basically that not all churches will survive and that many of the ones that do will be transformed by the experience. Phyllis Tickle, a respected expert on all things church, points out that religious institutions re-invent themselves every 500 years. Jones accepts that idea and points out that we are due for another re-invention. The world shifts over time. Our culture, identities, and expectations shift, too. Eventually the old institutions either adapt or make way for something new that works. This is a time for adapting or for making way. In a way it is a bummer. In another way it is a blessing to be right where the action is.

However, what Jones points out (and I agree) is that we don't really have much consensus around what the "new thing" will be. There are folks who are experimenting with a variety of models. Some succeed and some fail but all give us information. They all forge a path. Most people and institutions, though, aren't doing this. They are hoping to get by simply by tweaking here and there. It is hard to adjust when you do not know what you are adjusting to, after all. The problem is that tweaking doesn't cut it. It is a decision for irrelevance. The other problem is that tweaking is all we know how to do.

This doesn't mean that we need to run around like those metaphorical headless chickens! In fact, we have some time. The first step to entering into this new place is to ask some questions. In fact, the questions themselves need to change from what we once asked, to what we now must ask in light of that massive societal shift that is happening around us. Here are the questions that Jeff Jones asks in his book. Again, I will link to it at the bottom if you would like to purchase a copy

Old Question: *How do we bring them in?* New Question: *How do we send them out?*

You see the shift there right? The first question is about maintaining that institution. "How do we--short of kidnapping--get butts in the pews? How do we make Sunday School more interesting than soccer or sleeping in?" The second question is about how we empower our members and our community to interact with the world they live in. There is a risk in asking this question over the old one. But there are benefits as well if we take seriously the idea that the church is about sustaining people rather than sustaining itself.

Does the new question help answer the old one? I think it does in this case. People want to join a faith community that helps them to *live authentic and fulfilling lives*. They will join congregations that are able to do this.

Let's try another shall we?

Old Question: *What should the Pastor do?* New Question: *What is our congregation's shared ministry?*

There is that shift again! The first is about staffing and assumes that the role of the staff (not

just ministers) is to do the work of the church so everyone else can go about their business. The second flips that. The question is about how the church sees itself. What does the *community* do to minister?

Is there a place for the staff in this new question? Sure! However we are on a loooong road trip and the driving needs to be at least shared. Then the staff can take their turn at the wheel...and at the map...and leading the car games...singing the songs...picking the rest stop...changing the tires...you get the idea...

Old Question: *What is our vision and how do we implement it?* New Question: *What is God up to and how do we get on board?*

This is one of those questions where perhaps as liberals we enjoy over-complicating. We know that the word "God" means different things to different people but, really, it isn't so hard to grasp here is it? The old question asks how we as a community want to plan our future. The new one asks where we are being led or taken. The pre-socratic philosopher Heraclitus once said something to the effect that "you can never step in the same river twice". The new question is simply "where is that river taking us"? It is--no matter what theological language you prefer--a question of discernment.

Here is one that is common for many, many churches these days...

Old Question: *How do we survive? (or in churches that may be less desperate, "How do we restructure")* New Question: *How do we serve?*

I am not sure I even need to add much at this point. There is the shift again. We are hanging on to the old ways like a climber clinging to the cliff. How do we let go? How to we make the leap into the new?

OK, finally, one that has caused some confusion in these parts. The fact is, our tradition has a particular way of talking that makes it hard sometimes to grasp points and concepts that are written or said in a way that comes from someone else's theological language. Still, hopefully by this point--given the other examples--we can see the same shift here...

Old Question: *What are we doing to save people?* New Question: *What are we doing to make the reign of God present in this time and place?*

At first in a liberal context the old question may not make much sense. In our church there have generally been two responses to "saving" language. There are those of us who do not believe people need saving and there are those of us who believe that "saving" people is something that the Great Whatever works out with individuals. Both groups make a point of not "witnessing".

HOWEVER, guess what? We do have strong opinions don't we? We like to talk about them. We like to bring folks around to our way of thinking. Yes, we don't bring people to Jesus so they can get to heaven but we sure do stake out a position.

With that in mind, let's look at that second question in this final pair. The question is simply "Are we just talking or are we doing?" "Are we trying to bring about the world we wish we lived in?" Or, perhaps more tellingly, "Are we just trying to change others or are we working to change ourselves?"

So there they are. The questions. Maybe we need be asking both sets, maybe just one.

Either way, it is worth discussion. One thing we do know is that the world is changing whether we like it or not...

I am looking forward to our session discussions this summer, as well as the dialogue we will have with the congregation beginning in the fall.

Yours in Faith and Hope,

Loril

Session News:

To our RPC family,

Thank you for participating in the Church Assessment Tool (CAT) survey recently. We had a total of 47 responses, which means the compiled results are statistically significant. That's the good news. Now comes the hard work – interpreting the results and beginning to discern the way forward.

On June 30, two members of the Presbytery, trained in CAT data presentations, showed our Session the results and indicators. While the data we received was not intended to lay out a roadmap of exactly what we should do next, it did provide indicators and evaluations of where we are emotionally, spiritually and motivationally. We're exploring the data, putting together a presentation, and would be happy to talk with anyone who would like to see the 18-page report or the executive summary.

The Presbytery Leadership Council/Church Development Committee assigned Denise Anderson, pastor of Unity Presbyterian Church, and Therese Taylor-Stinson (Elder) as our liaisons.

Their role is to provide interpretation of the CAT survey and to work with session to guide us through our development of goals.

They noted that there is some conflict in our congregation, some of which might have been brewing for years, and some which may be related to the recent sale of the church building. We need to address that conflict. This is an invitation to begin the process of healing those things in our congregation that need to be healed. We are used to things operating one way, but now things are different and it's jarring. Therese and Denise both point out that conflict is not necessarily bad and is understandable given the many changes we've gone through, but it does need to be addressed.

Adaptability is the very key of survival. Being adaptable also may mean walking alongside some folks who may struggle with adapting. We may need to move slowly, allowing time for them to grieve, express their fear and find hope in uncertainty and their ability and willingness to change.

Many things revealed in the analysis were as we suspected: our morale is kind of low, likely due to the uncertainties we all face such as the chaos attached to the sale of the building, changes in worship time, space sharing, etc.

At the same time, our spirituality factor is very high: we all trust God to speak to us about our next steps and appear willing to listen.

Two other high points from the results are that we have good flexibility and adaptability characteristics. This means we, the congregation of Christians who are RPC, are poised and ready to discern God's will for us as we begin to move forward.

It is very apparent in the results that RPC wants to be a missional congregation, reaching out to make a difference in the world and community where we live. We aren't exactly sure what that looks like, but we seem to want to learn.

We're working on making a fuller presentation to the congregation in the early September timeframe. With God's help, we can begin to move forward.

Yours in Christ,

The Session

Rev. Loril Hawk – Pastor and Moderator

Elders: Steve Andrews, Don Fink, Lori Jarman, India Kendall, Joyce Korab, John Prince, Frank Randall, Patty Rhule, and John Teke.

July 17, 2015

Happenings of the Church:

Coffee/Lemonade fellowship and sharing of joys/concerns every Sunday following worship in the parlor (second floor across from the choir/chapel room). Grab coffee and join in a time of fellowship, sharing of joys and concerns, and prayer.

Youth Ministry most Sundays at 2:00 pm with Youth Director Summer Pearson. Service projects, trips, nursing home visits, VBS, worship and study.



Children's Ministry: Every Sunday during the 10:00 am worship hour. WELCOME Elizabeth Rosenberg and Nick Rosenberg, our new leaders for children fourth grade and younger. Elizabeth and Nick are alumni of RPC work trips and various children's and youth events and ministries over the years. Both are graduates of the University of Maryland. Elizabeth is a social worker and Nick is in graduate school.



THANK YOU to Joanne Young for her two years of service as the children's ministry leader. Joanne generously and lovingly taught our children for the past two years and now her own family needs her. Joanne will continue to serve RPC as a deacon and prayer warrior, so please, take a moment to thank her for all she does for our church community.



Senior Ministry: Trips to Sound and Site Stage, Lunches, Ice-Cream socials, and game day. Thank you to Pat Grob and Irene Havas for organizing the many events.

Bible Studies: Horizons Bible Study first Sundays at noon (Rm #2) and Third Wednesdays at 11:30 in various members' homes. New series starting in September: "Come to the Waters." Monday Night Bible Study, 7:30 pm, Rm. #1, picks up again on August 10 with continued study of the Old Testament.

Don't miss our 4 week summer sermon series: Revelation Between the Lines. Throughout the history of Western Christianity, there have been misunderstandings and misconceptions about the last book of the Bible. With strange and frightening visions of beasts, demons, numeric symbolism and the supposed end times, the common belief is that the book of Revelation is solely written to predict the end times, reward the faithful and punish the unfaithful and, in effect, scare people into belief in Jesus Christ. During this summer sermon series July 12, July 19, July 26 and August 2, Pastor Loril will seek to unpack Revelation in its original context and reveal what is truly there: prophecy not as predicting the future but speaking the truth in love, and Revelation not as a fixed harbinger of fear and doom but a cosmic message of hope. Come be part of the revelation! (Sermons posted each week to the web site).

Monthly Sunday Session Report and Q/A is an informal offering provided as a way for the congregation to receive updates regarding session activity and general business news and happenings of the church. The next Sunday Session is August 9.

Renovations and repairs of the first floor fellowship hall continues. This is a top priority for Word of God to complete the work as quickly as possible.

Building a preferred service people list as a resource for all. Contact Jean (jfklne80@gmail.com). We need the company name, type of service provided, phone number, address, and favorite service person (if applicable). Once started, we'll post to the web site for easy access.

Session Summer book Reading and Discussion - "Facing Decline - Finding Hope - New Possibilities for Faithful Churches" by Jeffrey D. Jones. Look for small group discussions with the congregation in the fall.

The Friday email has a new look with the email program Constant Contact. The communications team is looking for many ways to reach our congregation with information on church activities and upcoming events. If you are not getting the email or know of someone to add to the list, email RiverdalePres@gmail.com or contact the church office (301/927 0477).

Stewardship enables RPC to fulfill its mission for God in this world. Remember the good work we are doing when you plan your giving. Consider financial giving via Sunday offerings, or on-line by going to "Donate" on the web site (www.rivpres.org).

Need a ride to church? The deacons support transportation needs. Contact the church office 301/927-0477 or Pete Pichaske (pete.pichaske@gmail.com).

Our Song of Preparation:

Spirit of the Living

Fall afresh on me.

Spirit of the Living God

Fall afresh on me.

Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.

Spirit of the Living God

Fall afresh on me.

Featured Mission:

C.A.T.E. - Community Action for Technical Excellence. In the first phase, RPC collected items and filled the container going to Cameroon and over \$1,000 was raised. Since then, Godlove Kobe and his family have spent many months in Cameroon establishing the new facility. Phase 2 established the school and library. Doctors are using the library as well as locals. Phase 3 connected them to the Internet. Phase 4 is a future hope that volunteers will visit Cameroon to represent RPC.



Leadership and Staff Contacts:

Pastor: Rev. Loril Hawk, 301-927-0477 (office); 301-262-1869 (hm); 732-856-1499 (cell); pastorloril@rivpres.org

Office Administrator: Peggy Lint, 301-927-0477, peggy@rivpres.org.

Office hours: Mon-Tues-Thur-Friday, 8am-1pm.

Youth Director: Summer Pearson, 240-277-9910 (cell); summer@rivpres.org

Children's Ministry: Elizabeth Rosenberg, elizabergrosenbeth@gmail.com

Nick Rosenberg, nickoolroseberg@gmail.com

Director of Music: Michael Hopkins-Gross, 410-258-0652, mhopkinsg@gmail.com

Church Officers:

2015 Session	2015 Board of Deacons
Rev. Loril Hawk - Moderator	Diane Byram
Steve Andrews	Marie Chvatal
Don Fink	Pat Grob
Lori Jarman	Jean Kline
India Kendall	Joy Kline - Moderator
Joyce Korab - Clerk of Session	Barbara Leath
Frank Randall	Margaret Lepore
Patty Rhule	Pete Pichaske
John Prince	Janette Prince
John Teke	Joanne Young

2015-2016 Corporation President: Brett Moore	2015-2016 Nominating Team: Session Chair Deacon Rep Members at Large: Deborah Moore, Lobe Martin, Jeff Studts
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Rev. Loril Hawk

Web Site: www.rivpres.org

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/RiverdaleChurchatUniversityPark>

No matter where you are on your faith journey, you are welcome to join us.