



The Presbyterian Church of New Rochelle

Year 3, Vol. I

June 2015

From the Pastor

"So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation." (Genesis 2:3) It seems the idea of resting from our labors was a part of God's original plan. But it wasn't until 1938 that Americans were legally limited to a 40 hour/5 day workweek without "overtime" pay. But since I've been working, our culture has made it something of a badge of honor to work 60-80 hour weeks.

In a quick Google search it appears that a number of states are working toward amending that law to allow 60 hour work weeks. When individuals work for multiple employers in 60-80 hour work weeks in a desperate effort to pay rent or healthcare it is clearly time to revisit minimum wage. In other sectors the "bread winner" might worry about taking more than a three day weekend fearing it could send the wrong signal to the boss.

I strongly encourage you to resist that temptation and instead take some re-creational, out of the ordinary adventure to recharge your batteries. Visit a family member especially one you may not have seen for several years. Plan day trips to historic sites or find a shady bench in a quiet park and read a best seller to find out what everyone is talking about. Take advantage of the Gershwin brothers' wisdom, it's summertime and the livin' is easy!

My own plans include a visit to Briar in late July and hopefully a trip to see my sister in Richmond. But does it really make sense to travel south, away from the water in August?! Maybe I can slip away

in early September after everyone is settled back into their "normal" routines!

But it's already been an exciting travel year for me! Thanks to the generosity of your session I was able to travel to Turkey to walk in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul. There is an overview of that trip elsewhere in this newsletter. It is marked "Strictly Optional"! But as you heard me say on my first Sunday back it was an exciting, eye-opening experience, further heightened by being able to travel with my older daughter Jacqui.

And earlier this month I spent 3½ very full days at the inaugural Frederick Buechner Writer's Workshop at Princeton Theological Seminary. I listened to some of my favorite writers talk about their craft and was inspired by the reflective probing of their faith. There were seven or eight pastors from Hudson River Presbytery so there were familiar faces and meeting new and interesting people was easier than one might expect. People who write are always interested in listening to someone else's story; that is what they do!

The Sunday after Labor Day we will combine Name Tag Sunday with Bring a Friend Sunday – so give some thought as to who you will bring – focus especially on new acquaintances.

Enjoy this edition of the Newsletter and don't forget to thank Aurora Perez-Reddy, its editor and principal contributor **and** Clerk of Session. I assure you it wouldn't happen without her! Thanks also to Desiree Balbuena our roving photographer!

Have a wonder-filled summer,

From the Clerk:

Almost half of 2015 has already passed. During this time sad things as well as many good and positive things have happened in our congregation. Let's make a review:

Communion

In January the pastor's performance was reviewed resulting in an excellent appraisal. The church members are happy with his performance and that he decided to stay with us for another year.

Our dear **Mercedes** Rowe died early in the year. In February a beautiful memorial service was held. Her family, her sorority sisters, friends and her church family participated of the memorial which followed with a wonderful reception sponsored by the Women's Association.

The Congregational meeting was February 8, in this meeting Aurora and Audrey were re-elected as session members and Doreen Jones and Kerstin Cott were elected as Deacons. A review of the finances for the previous year showed that we finished the year on a positive note.

Ash Wednesday came early this year, February 18, and was observed with a service in the chapel. 22 congregants attended the service and participated of the Lord's Table and the imposition of ashes.

Dylan Elliot Melo, a beautiful baby born to Desiree and Edgar Melo in October was baptized February 22. Dylan was fortunate to have two godmothers. A celebration followed at coffee hour.

A **new member class** was organized and on March 29 the session approved the membership of the two candidates without objections. (see below)

On **Palm Sunday** palms were distributed to the congregants. 38 people attended the service.

Maundy Thursday was April 2 and a service took place in the chapel. It combined Maundy Thursday's new commandment, the Last Supper, and a Tenebrae service. An Oratorio by the English composer Martin Shaw, was interpreted by Hugh Moses, Baritone, Angelika Nair, Contralto, Karin Weber, Soprano and Tamara Cashour, the church music director.

On **Easter Sunday**, 74 people attended the service. On that day we baptized our two new

members: Jackie Grey and John Kachenjera. Jackie lives in the Bronx and is a real estate agent, John is from Malawi and works in the United Nations. He lives in New Rochelle with his wife and children. We are really happy of the two additions to our congregation. The service was followed with an Easter celebration at coffee hour. Victuals were provided by church members.

The pastor went on a **trip to Turkey** from April 7-16 as part of his continuing education program. He was accompanied by his daughter Jacqui. They were part of a group of ministers who visited the country. He described the experience as very enlightening since they travelled through the country and saw not only its beauty but many religious sites that belong to 3 different world religions and are part of world history.

Mothers' day was May 12. The Women's Association provided a cake and bought some presents for the mothers as a token of appreciation. Also, Monica Balbuena brought a fascinating display of her creativity applied to discarded items headed for the landfill. There was a zippered purse, lined with a T-shirt and protected by an armor of pop tabs, a carry-bag made of empty soda bottles, jewelry and much more.

In May Pastor Buchanan celebrated another birthday. Many blessings and many more.

We also want to congratulate all those who have had birthdays during these months.

Pentecost - Pentecost means fifty. It is the 50th day after the Sabbath of Passover week. For the Christian church marks the beginning of Christianity. This year was celebrated May 24. There was a nice service with an enlightening sermon and music. After the service we all enjoyed a delicious lunch during coffee hour. We want to thank all the people who contributed the delectable food. **Pastor Buchanan** attended a writer's workshop at Princeton from June 8-12 as part of his continuing education.

The Women's Association meets in the church library the second Sunday of each month and join for lunch on the last Friday of the month. We will be happy to see all of you attend our meetings.

The Women's Association held a front yard sale on June 13 from 10-3. A group of us met several mornings in the main office to sort and price the received items. We got plenty of donations for which we are very grateful.

On June 13 we met in the church very early to start the process of setting up the sale items. We requested everybody's collaboration on that day, men and women to attend and help us. God gave us a great day and we got great help from our fellow parishioners. We want to thank all.

We made just over \$1,000 that will be put to good use as the group decides. The proceeds will go to charities and activities associated with the church. So far this year the group has made contributions to Wounded Warriors, Guardians of the Rescue, Meals on Wheels, the Soup Kitchen to name some.

The Women Association also has provided us with food and cake to celebrate several occasions. We are grateful for your support on June 13, so that the group can continue helping others.

Look for a follow-on sale in early fall.

On a sad note, **Ms. Madeline Muller** a long time church member died June 13. A celebration of Resurrection and Remembrance was led by the Pastor on June 23. May she Rest in Peace.

The **choir** has recessed for the summer. It will come back in September. If you are interested to be part of it please talk to Tamara or to the pastor. The choir usually rehearses before and after the service. We will love to have you become part of it.

We are already half way through the year. The Pastor is planning a **new member's class**. Talk to him if you are interested in becoming a member. We will be delighted to have you.

Soon fall will be back and we will have stewardship campaign. To do this we will need your prayerful **pledges** knowing that it isn't the amount that matters but the commitment it signifies. Remember that giving is a way of thanking God for providing for us. Usually we have more than we are aware we do. Your contributions will assure our presence in New Rochelle for another year and that we will have enough to pay for our pastor. Your pledges help us budget, so have this in mind for next year.

Please read the newsletter and the back of the bulletin where we put information that is useful for you to know. We will also welcome your ideas and input. Check to see if I have your information so I can add you in the next revision of the directory.

Pastor's Report on Turkey

Shortly after Easter, your Session was generous enough to approve a very special study leave to Turkey. In many respects it was the trip of a lifetime. Although I made some brief remarks the Sunday I returned, Session urged me to write a more formal report. I hope you find it informative, interesting and perhaps insightful.

Turkey is an ethnically homogenous country of 75 million, making it approximately the same size as Germany, the largest member of the EU. It's land mass is roughly 20% greater than France. Since Ataturk consolidated power after WWI Turkey has been a secular democracy based on a free market economy although the current government has made disturbing moves to consolidate power in the office of the president. Turkey was a founding member of NATO and has its second largest standing army with nearly 500,000 deployable troops. It has been an applicant to the European Union for more than 15 years but a number of requirements remain unmet. Turkey is overwhelmingly Muslim although Christians and Jews worship without fear of reprisal. Notwithstanding recent events, Turkey is the only westward leaning, secular democracy in the region. That alone makes it an important country both for our nation and the stability of the region.

The capital city of Istanbul is the only major city in the world situated on two continents. As we traveled across the Strait of Dardanelles on a bridge that was always stop and go in both directions! we were greeted by a sign that said you are now entering Asia. Istanbul was formerly known as Constantinople and served as the capital of the Western Roman Empire for several centuries. It was of course named after the

Emperor Constantine who made Christianity the official religion of the Empire. Indeed it wasn't until 1453 that the city fell to the Ottoman Empire and became the center of the Islamic world for the next four and a half centuries. Throughout the 12th century, Constantinople was the largest and wealthiest European city and was instrumental in the advancement of Christianity for nearly a millennium. As we toured this remarkably rich and geographically fascinating country we saw 7,000 years of human civilization.

We visited five cities, flew in five airplanes, traveling well over 12,000 miles. We went to Tarsus and visited a stone structure said to have been the house where Paul was raised. In Antioch we walked along a colonnade that Cleopatra and Mark Antony walked more than 2,000 years ago. We visited Ephesus where Paul lived for several years and where he was jailed and perhaps wrote his letter to the Romans. We also drove to the top of a mountain where the disciple John was said to have built a house for Mary mother of Jesus. It has been restored and has become a shrine for many Christians, especially Catholics. We saw underground cities that housed up to 3,000 people and were 4 stories deep. In Cappadocia we visited what might be called a very early seminary. Several of the caves, three or four stories above the valley, were carved into small chapels with a baptistery, altar and richly painted, vaulted ceilings still intact. We saw beautiful stone carvings from the Hittite era and exquisite mosaics from the homes of wealthy merchants who lived near the spice road that ran through Antioch. The 13 of us were the guests of families in Tarsus and Izmir where we enjoyed a fabulous home-cooked meal in their homes and where we met the families and shared impressions of the world and our respective faiths. The Turkish people are without question among the most gracious hosts of the world.

Of course our focal point was the life of the Apostle Paul who Raymond Brown a respected New Testament scholar says "Next to Jesus Paul has been the most influential figure in the history of Christianity." Paul was a tireless missionary who

started churches in half a dozen cities from Rome to Antioch. Paul had no doubt that he was called to preach to the Gentiles which often put him at odds with the "power structure" back in Jerusalem. As pastor to the Gentiles his understanding of circumcision, dietary law, and the importance of doing good works got him in trouble wherever he went. He was a strong influence on St. Augustine and it's not too big a leap to say that he was largely responsible for the Protestant Reformation! It was Luther's repulsion of the church practice of buying indulgences that caused him to read critically Paul's letter to the Romans.

Luther understood from Paul that justification came through faith, not good works or adherence to the law, or financial contributions to the church however they might be named. Earlier in his letter to the Romans Paul says "For no human being will be justified in his sight by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)

I found it interesting that according to Wikipedia, Muslims have long believed that Paul purposefully corrupted the original revealed teachings of Jesus, through the introduction of such elements as paganism, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_the_Apostle - cite_note-152 the making of Christianity into a theology of the cross, and introducing original sin and the need for redemption. Unfortunately that was not a topic of discussion while in Turkey. Beyond Islam, I have heard several Christians wish out loud that Paul's letters had not been included in the canon! So clearly, Saul of Tarsus, whom we know as Apostle Paul was and is a controversial figure.

Paul was probably born within five years of Jesus in the town of Tarsus in southern Anatolia (modern Turkey). He was a Roman citizen raised in an observant Jewish household and studied under renowned Rabbi Gamaliel. As a young man in his first job as a legal enforcer for the High Priest, he witnessed the martyrdom of Stephen, the first Christian deacon, who was accused by the Jews of blasphemy and stoned to death.

When Saul was about 36, he was carrying an arrest warrant for a group of Jews living in Damascus when he was struck by a blinding light knocking him to the ground. Although he could not see, he heard a voice asking "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." Within 3 days he was preaching the Gospel to a very wary crowd in Damascus! (Acts 9:4-5)

Paul's career is generally divided into three major missionary journeys: 1) Antioch (Antakya); 2) Philippi; 3) Ephesus. (We visited both Antioch and Ephesus.) Paul traveled countless miles crisscrossing the Levant and western Mediterranean boldly proclaiming the Good News from Thessalonica to Antioch. He preached, taught, cajoled, and organized wherever he felt the Spirit called him. This remarkable story is told in the second half of the Acts of the Apostles. It was not a cushy job! Remember how Paul described it in last week's Epistle:

as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as

sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything. (2 Cor. 6:1-13)

In about 57 A.D. Paul returned to Jerusalem where he was arrested and charged with bringing a Gentile into the restricted areas of the temple and later of being a "pestilent fellow". As a Roman citizen his request to be tried in Rome was granted and he was eventually transferred to Rome (another hair raising story!) around A.D. 60. The timing or manner of his death is not recorded in the Bible but one Roman historian writing in the fourth century wrote that he was beheaded during the reign of Nero.

Paul wrote some of the most soaring words in the Bible but he has also written some of the most impenetrable and controversial verses. He wrote the sublimely about love (although he wasn't describing romantic love), fascinatingly about the resurrection, and with passion on the power of the love of God in Jesus Christ. But his words have also been used to justify homophobia and limiting a woman's role in the church and home. We can never hope to fully penetrate his intended meaning. We can continue to wrestle with these verses in the months ahead as we seek to understand our Creator as a God of love.

If interested, you might want to look these up:

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 **Love**

Corinthians 15:51-52 **Resurrection**

Romans 8:31-32 **Who can separate us from the love of God?**

Romans 1:24-27 **Homosexuality**

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 **Role of Women**

