

The Visitor

Schoharie Reformed Church

May—June 2020

Pastor Mike & Pastor Sherri



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Schoharie County Against Racism

Rev. Dr. Sherri Meyer-Veen

As I mentioned in my sermon on Sunday, June 7, I was asked to speak at a gathering of clergy, law enforcement, and concerned citizens desiring to take a stand against racism, with peaceful protestors around the country calling for change. A few of the things I have noted as I have listened to the news and interacted with others, hearing multiple different perspectives:

- Riots and looting is a very different activity than protesting. The news is confusing these two very different groups of people.
- Given the high level of social anxiety due to polarization, pandemic, and all of the changes caused by pandemic, there was a lot of reactivity already, before the current eruption of anxiety related to racial justice. My observation is that there is a lot of anger on all sides. This all makes listening hard, reactivity rampant, and jumping to assumptions and conclusions really easy, among all kinds of other anxious reactive responses. Recall the document I sent at the beginning of the pandemic. This is all really helpful to keep in mind and to monitor in ourselves.
- Some believe there is no racism in Schoharie County. I find this surprising, given the stories I have and continue to hear from people of color within the county and the various flags and signs that are emerging around the county. I want to invite us to wonder

together about the things we do not know and open ourselves to listening to perspectives from minority groups as well

as opinions different from our own.

Our Wednesday book group has spent the last two weeks discussing and wondering together what is happening and what might our next faithful step be as we consider informing ourselves and engaging this topic as a church family. You are invited to join the conversation.

Here is my manuscript from Saturday's gathering.

I am a white woman... and I feel inadequate to speak about racism and racial injustice. Yet I hear Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr reminding me of his call to repentance in his time, "not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people." (Letter from the Birmingham Jail) and the Archbishop of South Africa through apartheid, Desmond Tutu when he says, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor." I know that I must speak what I know. Here is what I know:

While I grew up in a family that taught me to see color as a blessing and gift of God and I have black friends, that does not mean I know what it is like to be a person of color. While I hear appalling stories, I know I need to hear more, I know I need to learn more, I know that I have racial misunderstandings within myself and that I am a part of systems that harm people of color.

I know that changes of policies mean nothing if hearts are not changed. I want change desperately, and I know that it starts with you and me. When the people rise up and allow our voices to be heard, change must follow! We are a part of the systems and structures, we need to see our responsibility within them, and we need to work at our own change as a first step.

I know I need to start, and I invite you to start, from a place of recognizing my own racial bias as best I can, not denying it, and being open and aware of it so that I can become a better anti-racist.

While I do not always recognize it, I have power and privilege that others do not have.

I know that I need to increase my awareness.

I need to let go of my own defensiveness.

I need to be curious and listen well.

I want to teach my children to be aware of bias, to stand against it, and to see the beauty of God's creation in all people...

I need to ask questions, and cultivate relationships...

I need to allow myself to be uncomfortable so I can learn to be a better advocate, human, and contributing member of society.

We are living in anxious times. We are experiencing social upheaval in a number of areas that only increase the amount of anxiety and reactivity in our society. Locked in polarization, struggling through pandemic, we have all felt multiple layers of this loss and upheaval. We are dealing with various levels of grief in all of the sudden change, loss of role, systemic losses, loss of routines, and for some of us, loss of loved ones... All of this makes all of our work at maintaining our own centeredness more and more difficult. It is harder for us to stay in our thinking brains and harder to keep ourselves from reacting in ways that go contrary to our values. A part of our work becomes acknowledging and recognizing our grief and loss, getting clear about our values, naming the positive future that I want to see, and aligning my actions with this vision and my values.

Do not be sucked into the myth of polarization. Our way through to the positive change we so desperately want will not come from dehumanizing another perspective, staying locked in our ideological bubbles, nor closing ourselves from perspectives we do not understand.

Racism grows when we hate back. Racism is defeated by love. Love is the only thing that can counter both fear and hate. Only love can strip away the walls that divide us, and it takes courage to love in the face of great hate.

Dr. King tells us, “darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.” (A Testament of Hope: Essential Writings)

“No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.” Nelson Mandela

Jesus of Nazareth, whom I call Messiah, Christ, and LORD says, “I say LOVE your enemy and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:43ff)... . Only perfect love can cast out fear.

How do YOU effect change? You cannot control anyone else. You can be apart of change... You can change you!! You can stop making assumptions, you can open yourself, you can stop telling the stories you are telling, you can open yourself to another persons’ story. You can seek to ask questions when you don’t understand.

In closing, I leave you with two more quotes, may we all seek to be the change we wish to see in the world, may it begin right here:

“It is in your hands to make a better world for all who live in it.” Nelson Mandela

“Do you little bit of good where you are; it’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.” Desmond Tutu

A Testimony from Liza Toborg

Dear Friends,

I’ve been doing a lot of thinking lately. Somehow a pandemic has brought out a more reflective side of me. Before, life was all about DOING. A good day was when I got lots of things DONE. Those of you who know me well, know I am a schedule maker and a list writer. My TO DO list grows ever longer.

At a recent consistory meeting, I expressed that I have been enjoying a slower pace of life. Most of you know that I am a first grade teacher. Teaching from home (while hardly ideal and definitely not easy) has afforded me additional time to be reflective. I am able to spend more quiet time with God daily. Pastor Mike questioned me about what I would do to allow space in my life to continue this practice. I responded, rather flippantly, that since I am retiring in the fall, I would have plenty of time on my hands to be reflective. In that gentle way that Pastor Mike has, he pushed back saying that in his experience, once people retired, they only got busier. Ouch! That hit home. He knows me so well!

So, I am committing to a more reflective lifestyle going forward. What will this look like? I am praying that God will show me. The one word that has been at the forefront of my mind is “discipleship”. If I long to be more like Jesus, then I need to do the hard work of discipleship. What will this look like? Once again, I am praying that God will show me. My part, right now, is to slow down and listen – be purposefully reflective and spend more time listening to the Master’s voice.

If you’re tired of being on the treadmill of life, constantly doing, I invite you to join me in this journey.

Thank you Pastor Mike for your gentle shepherding!

Until Next Month –

Yours in Christ –

Liza Toborg

An Update on Returning to In-Person Worship



As things around us continue to move more and more towards “re-opening” during this pandemic we recognize that the church has never “closed” but has always been open and has continually sought to provide for the worship and ministry needs of our congregation and community. Is there a way we could better serve you? Would you like to talk? Please call the pastors, email, or text. We’d love to hear from you!

Our church consistory continues to be holding hard and fruitful conversations about creating a plan for re-gathering for “in-person” worship. They are in the process of gathering and reviewing information on helpful precautions and procedures being put forth by the New York State Council of Churches, the CDC, the Regional Synod of Albany, and the Schoharie Classis. As they work to develop our own plan for returning to in-person worship, please know that when we are able to return to in-person worship, it will look and feel different than it did before. We recognize that this will be hard and challenging for many of us.

We know that we are a people of “Faith” and not “Fear.” We are not controlled or held captive by our fears, yet we also know that our faith is shaped by the guiding wisdom and patience of the Holy Spirit, and that wisdom and careful discernment is a part of living by faith. In faithful discernment, Consistory has named the shared values we believe we hold together as a congregation about creating a safe and welcoming place for all people to worship and gather in-person. We are sensitive to the reality that we have some beloved members of our congregation who fit into a high-risk category in regards to this pandemic. We also have many younger kids who love to run and play and be more active during worship. We are considering how we might best be able to welcome, worship, and minister together to all beloved members of our congregation, as well as every visitor who comes through our doors.

For the immediate future we will continue to offer worship through Zoom. We are exploring the possibility of holding outdoor worship with physical distancing during part of the summer, and working towards putting together a clear and helpful plan to return to in-person worship in our sanctuary when we can best accommodate the diverse needs of our congregation.

As we continue to move towards putting an action plan in place, we are aware that there will be things that will need to be done to help get our facilities ready for returning to in-person gathering. We hope you will please consider how you might be willing to help when it comes time to putting our plans into action. Consistory also welcomes your thoughts, ideas, concerns, and encouragements as they continue their work on our behalf.

We recognize that we are in a current reality that nobody wants to be in, it is difficult, anxious, exhausting, and filled with grief and frustration on many levels. We are grateful for all of you and if there are ways that we can better support you please let us know. Know that we are eager and strongly desire to return to in-person worship, yet we want to do so in a way that reflects our values and offers a safe and welcoming worship experience in the best possible way. Thank you for your patience and support in this time!



Food Pantry



The Food Pantry is providing for many families in the area during this special time of need. The Food Pantry is currently in need of: canned fruits like fruit cocktail, peaches, pineapple, pears, and oranges; canned vegetables such as corn, carrots, peas, green beans, yellow beans; canned ravioli/beef stew/soup/spaghetti o's/chili with beans; boxed macaroni & cheese, tuna fish, peanut butter, jelly, granola bars, cereal, pasta, pasta sauce, jello packs, pudding packs, snack crackers. During this time there is a special need for cleaning supplies in addition to food items. Cleaning items such as: paper towels, toilet paper, laundry and dish soap, toothpaste, shampoo and shower soaps are needed. Items may be dropped off at SUPC on Tuesdays or Thursday from 12noon till 2:00pm or they may be left between the doors of the SUPC educational building. Monetary donations are appreciated as well, checks may be written to "Schoharie Valley Food Pantry". *Volunteers are needed to help with the Food Pantry, if able, please contact Diane Walion at 518-868-4629.* Thank you all for your continued support.

The Food Pantry is open Tuesday & Thursdays, 12-2pm



A Special Thank You



A thank you to Pastor Mike, Pastor Sherri, Consistory Members, Sunday School Leaders and all of the Schoharie Reformed Church family for all the prayers, kind gestures, notes of kindness, phone calls, Easter baskets, Sunday School packets, Wednesday evenings and Sunday Morning Zoom gatherings, and for all the extra things you have done over the last past several months to help provide for worship, ministry, and keeping us connected.

Buildings & Grounds

Picking weeds

An unknown garden angle typically weeds and trims the landscaping out front. Well, it's that time of the year again... (Thank you.)

Remember the Clothing Drop-Off Shed

Here's an idea while you are sitting around the house. Be encouraged to clean out your closets. Bag old clothes to leave later in our clothing drop-off shed next to the Heritage House.

What kind of items can be donated? *Useable* clothing, shoes, belts, purses, blankets, sheets, curtains, pillowcases, and stuffed animals. Items need to be in tied plastic bags.

Unacceptable items are electronics, books, household items, toys, garbage, pillows, rags, or fabric scraps.



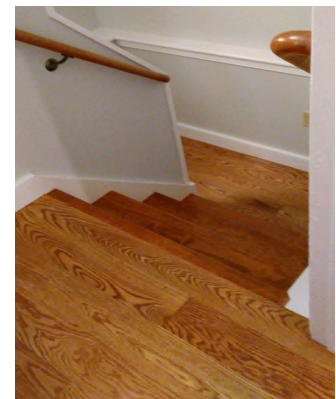
Buildings & Grounds

Building Work Continues

With the temperatures generally warm enough to paint, Dave Toborg has been prepping and painting the stairway leading down to the Fellowship Hall. Slow going due to the tight quarters; can only do a little part at a time.



The stairway landings have been sanded and stained. Four coats of polyurethane were applied. The last handrail is scheduled to be installed this summer.



There are plenty of other painting projects and other jobs needing attention. Contact Dave Toborg if you want to help.

Heritage House

Thanks to Dale and Trish (and son) Hotaling of Home Magic for rebuilding the front porch steps and levelling the side steps. Much better. After the pressure treated lumber seasons for a year, the steps will be painted.





Schoharie Valley Community Camp July 20-24, 2020

Our top priority is the safety and well-being of our families, campers and staff. Our goal is for every child to have an amazing camp experience, and we feel that we would not be able to effectively implement social distancing while maintain a traditional, in person setting. We are shifting our platform to a **virtual camp**, which will include recorded videos and online sharing. This summer will be different from any other year with being **online**, but we hope to make it the best we can for each camper.

*Visit: www.schohariereformedchurch.org/camp
for complete information and to register.*



Thank You

Dear Friends, Welcome Spring, I love the new beginnings and opportunities this special season brings. **I want to start by thanking you for helping the Reginal Food Bank accomplish so much last year.** We did more to help our hungry neighbors than ever before, and **it was all because of your generosity.** Together we: Provided 34 million meals to more than 300,000 people; Repackaged millions of pounds of donated food and personal care products with the help of 17,000 volunteers; Fed 6,700 children more than one million meals through our Backpack Program; Provided food, grants, training, and other resources to our member agencies to help them serve their guest more effectively; Laid the groundwork for exciting new initiatives targeted toward seniors, teenagers, health care interventions, and underserved communities. We hope you agree these are impressive accomplishments. **But at the heart of all we do for our hungry neighbors are the personal stories that express their needs and the difference our efforts make in their lives.** Like the people who waited in a long line on a cold February morning to get a variety of fresh, nutritious food at a special distribution we recently held in Albany-and then stayed longer to help an elderly neighbor get their food home. **Or the senior who thanked us with these words for the help she received through our new Senior Food Program. "It is such a blessing to be able to receive this food. My Food Stamps were cut and I don't have enough money to pay for the food I really need. I don't have a way to get fruits and vegetables regularly so this is a big help."**

Thank you again for your commitment to our work. I hope you have a wonderful spring.
Sincerely, Mark Quandt, Executive Director

Dear Friends, Thank you for your generous March 2020 donation to support the Regional Food Bank's mission. This contribution will help the Food Bank provide food and key supplies to countless people throughout northeastern New York. Our current focus is to feed and bring comfort to our neighbors whose livelihoods and communities have been devastated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Your generosity will make a real difference in their lives, as they strive to endure and recover from this unprecedented health and economic crisis. The food and other resources we provide would not be available without the support we receive from so many caring people. Thank you for your kindness and concern for your fellow New Yorkers.
Yours truly, Mark Quandt, Executive Director.



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