

What if we pray to be ‘a better person’ in 2021?

Let’s ask God’s help for our New Year’s resolutions for the coming year

“God, create a pure heart in me and make my spirit strong again. Don’t withdraw or take away your Holy Spirit from me.” Ps 51: 10-11

The only thing tougher than trying to make New Year’s resolutions is having to read others’ advice on how to do it.

Now that I have shared one of my pet peeves, allow me, please, to give you some advice on how to do it!

(That was sneaky of me, huh?)

Well, here is my advice re making resolutions: Don’t.

As in don’t try it yourself. As in don’t try it yourself, but instead, invite God into the process.

For starters, God knows you better than you know yourself. Trust me; it’s true.

That means God will likely have a better idea of what you can reasonably handle and accomplish.

More importantly, God can set priorities for us better than we can. Translate: What’s important!

Yes, I know most of you resist that idea, but God knows best!

Since God rarely texts, emails or gets on Twitter (let’s not rule it out completely), you need some alternative mode of communication for communing.

Something decidedly low-tech, simple but extremely effective. Yup, prayer! But try generic prayers, instead of specific ones.

How does that work?

Well, instead of praying to lose 10 pounds, pray for better overall health and reflect on suggestions gleaned from discernment.

If you listen carefully and patiently, I believe God will provide you with some surprising insights or alternate guidance.

About 30 years ago, I had low back pain not connected to a skeletal issue. My lower back was so tight around 1994, for example, that I took three sick days off over a 10 day work period. And I hurt!

I read all the articles about how to handle back pain – I think there were as many theories as vertebrae (33 if you are curious) in the human back!

Instead of praying “God, please heal my back pain,” I asked God to help me figure out what was causing my back pain.

I finally made a connection between interpersonal conflict with another editor at work and my lower back pain.

When I arrived one day to receive a scowl to my “good morning,” I felt a tinge of pain. My back got tighter when I saw him. Hmm.

I prayed for insights and realized I had not expressed appreciation for his help in the past.



When I shared my gratitude, his attitude changed and we worked better together. My pain eased.

We were never going to be good friends, but we had an improved work relationship.

Let’s be honest. It’s easy to pray for things that require other folks to change or respond differently.

Resist that temptation and instead ask God to make shifts and changes in how you hear, interpret and handle things.

Example: My persistence can feel like pushiness. Yikes! Yes, I want the best for Redeemer and the church universal, but I can relax some and trust more.

That is a New Year’s resolution. I’m also praying to be as kind, thoughtful and flexible as our leadership chair, music director and office administrator.

Their overall graciousness to me is inspiring – even when I make mistakes or fall short.

So start praying and await God’s help for your New Year’s resolutions. Happy New Year!

*Blessings,
Pastor Tom*

Leadership Team Update

By Kim Merkert, Chair

The Leadership Team met on December 10 for its regular monthly meeting. After our opening activities, we discussed the Treasurer's Report. Our Treasurer, Jonathan Bell, works tirelessly to keep Redeemer's finances in order. We discussed ideas for offering more support to Jonathan because of the volume of work he manages every week. Lorna Davis, our Vice Chair, offered to help Jonathan by learning how to download reports from QuickBooks to Excel. The two of them will work together on this in the coming weeks. We offer a huge thank you to Jonathan for his faithful work as Treasurer, and to Lorna for offering to help.

Love Inc is updating their church member rolls. Jan Stong will liaison with Love INC to update Redeemer's contact information. Early in 2021, our Office Administrator, Jorja Barton, will work with George Kapp to learn how to update Redeemer's web site. George has been the one maintaining and updating the web site, and he feels that it is to a point that Jorja can take over that project. Thank you, George and Jorja.

A search committee update was presented to the Leadership Team. Redeemer received a profile from a second candidate, who will be interviewed after the New Year.

The meeting was adjourned with the Lord's Prayer. Our next Leadership Team meeting will be held on Thursday, January 14 at 7pm. As always, please reach out to the Leadership Team if you have any questions, comments, or concerns.

Respectfully submitted,
Kim Merkert
Leadership Team Chair



A Note from Pastor Tom

Dear Leadership Team Members and Friends,

Thank you so much for the generous Christmas gift and kind words of support and encouragement in December. I was so touched to hear on Christmas Eve your gracious appreciation for my work, guidance and preaching.

Special thanks to LT Chair Kim Merkert and member Mike Wojdylak for their patience, hard work and creativity in planning, preparing and assisting with worship.

Few of you may realize how much additional work goes into planning, filming and editing the high-caliber recorded services we release each Wednesday.

Kim, in particular, and Mike, in general, spend many additional hours on the audio-visual presentation. I just need to show up, read my lines and preach!

Because of copyright concerns, Kim and Mike often need to prepare, perform and record an alternate version of recorded music than you hear live on Sundays.

On Dec. 20, they both arrived early at church to play and record music for the Dec. 23 service. Then they sang and played for the live Dec. 20 Advent service.

If that wasn't enough, they stayed after worship that day to perform and record with me for the Christmas Eve service. Then many more hours of technical work for Kim later.

Finally, both of them were largely responsible for the altar decorations, Advent candles, setting up Mike's Christmas village and the beautiful new banners behind the altar.

Mike also put in additional hours training, rehearsing and performing the Bell Choir music on Christmas Eve. Everything was done with care and concern.

Folks who watch our recorded services are amazed by the quality, details and spiritual impact of our worship. It's all for the glory of God, of course!

But most of all Mike and Kim graciously put up with my stream-of-thought conversations, worship changes and fussy insistence on attention to detail.

Finally, many thanks to the behind-the-scenes support our office administrator Jorja provides in work on bulletins, inserts, printing and coordinating worship details!

How blessed we are to have them here! And what a privilege and honor it is to serve as your interim pastor for these past 25 months. How blessed am I!

In Christian love,
Pastor Tom

Reminder: Advent Book Study Session

The final session of the Book Study will be held in the sanctuary on Monday, January 4, at 6 pm. We will be discussing the book of Titus as a Christmas letter from Paul to his congregation.

Stay tuned for upcoming 2021 Soup for the Soul dates!



PENN CENTRAL CONFERENCE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Members and friends of Penn Central Conference-

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (John 1:14a)

Years ago at my ordination exam I was questioned about my perspectives on the cross and resurrection and how important they were to my own experience of faith. I don't remember my exact answer. But I do remember that it was short – because I went on to say that for me, the incarnation of Jesus had just as much impact on my faith and I felt it wasn't discussed often enough. The power behind the idea that God came to dwell within human flesh is staggering. The idea that the Creator of the Universe (and my own Creator) somehow joined with our humanity was transformative for me.

The Christmas story is a beautiful one and it is responsible for some of the best music, writing and art in the world. The story has elements that please all audiences. The image is captivating: a seemingly mess-free birth occurs in a stable with soft-eyed donkeys looking on, there are angels outfitted in gold and glitter, and shepherds on hillsides with sheep look up at a star that burns brightly. There is hope and promise and glory. After the visit with three men in gorgeous robes, the family flees away from Herod. And our liturgical year moves on.

As a child I loved the story. As an adult I revere the message – and I spend a great deal of time thinking about what it means for God to dwell in an actual person. The power of the miracle has to do with the inherent messiness of human flesh. If God chose to “make a tabernacle” within a human, then that means our lives – our very bodies - can be holy and good and beautiful. As a woman raised in middle-class American culture I learned through advertising and the media that my physical self was certainly not beautiful. Not according to what “they” depicted. For many, the experience of trauma to our bodies reinforces this – beauty and goodness of the physical self are buried under shame and self-loathing. And we easily slide from “not beautiful enough” to “not good enough” and back again. Those messages, over so many years, wear deep grooves into how we think about ourselves. I know this because when I ask clergy what voices they hear in their heads, the most common one says, “I am not good enough.”

The incarnation burns away our meager cultural notions of what is beautiful and good and demonstrates that the Creator favors our living selves – our whole selves – for a dwelling place. Mary carried the Word-made-flesh in her own imperfect, young, vulnerable body. The physical body is indeed good enough - to house our savior and to house the Spirit of the Lord. The body we often reject is loved and made holy in our faith. This is the miracle of Christmas to me: Mary carries God-with-us in her womb and makes a sanctuary of her body. Redemption is not only for our hearts and minds – it is also for our physical selves. Thanks be to God.

Peace,
Carrie

Rev. Dr. Carrie Call
Conference Minister
Penn Central Conference

We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly, but does not take place within myself? And, what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and my culture? This, then, is the fullness of time: When the Son of Man is begotten in us. – Meister Eckhart (1260-1328)



A Prayer for the New Year

Lord,
Whether I leave behind
a year of joy or of trials and difficulties,

I pause to *give thanks*.
Thank you for being with me
every day of every year.

Thank you for making all things **new**
and for giving me the grace of
fresh starts

and *new beginnings*.

Remind me of your presence in the days to
come,
even when I feel pushed and rushed by
busyness.

Be glorified in my life this year.

Amen

heathercking.org



Prayers of Joy for:

Adam and Tabitha Mongold, son & daughter-in-law of Pam & Barry, who were married on Dec. 28
Nancy and George Kapp's daughter-in-law, **Jamie MacLeod**, who has recovered from Covid and for their son, **Bryan**, who tested negative
Bev Patton's son-in-law, **Bill Sussman**, who is home from rehab and doing well
The FDA's emergency approvals for **Conavirus vaccine** and for the first wave of inoculations
The **Pandemic relief package** passed this week by Congress

Prayers for Remembrance and Thanks for the life of **Bill Baker**, whom we love and miss

Prayers for Comfort and Strength for:

Prayers for Strength for first responders, the medical community, and our nation as we continue to battle the Coronavirus, political strife and social injustice, particularly that addressed by **Black Lives Matter** leaders and advocates.



Redeemer's Christmas 2020 Images

Many thanks to the Leadership Team,
Audrey Baker, and Dick & Shirley
Conrad for helping to decorate our
sanctuary





January 2021

Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.
				Dec 31 Office Closed	1 Happy New Year! Office Closed	2 7:30 Sunrise AA 12 pm KISS AA
3 9:15 am Worship w/Communion 3 pm KISS AA 6:30 IPA	4 12 pm Noon AA 6 pm Advent Book Study 7:30 pm OA	5 8:30 am Hershey Ministerium 9 am FARA 12 pm Noon AA 6:30 pm KISS AA	6 Epiphany 12 pm Noon AA 6:30 KISS AA	7 12 pm Noon AA 12 pm Focused Prayer	8 12 pm Noon AA 6:30 pm KISS AA	9 7:30 Sunrise AA 12 pm KISS AA
10 9:15 am Worship 3 pm KISS AA	11 12 pm Noon AA 7:30 pm OA	12 9 am FARA 12 pm Noon AA 6:30 pm KISS AA	13 SCRIP ORDER DUE 12 pm Noon AA 6:30 KISS AA	14 12 pm Noon AA 12 pm Focused Prayer 7 pm Leadership Team Meeting	15 12 pm Noon AA 6:30 pm KISS AA	16 7:30 Sunrise AA 12 pm KISS AA
17 9:15 am Worship 3 pm KISS AA 6:30 pm IPA	18 12 pm Noon AA 7:30 pm OA	19 9 am FARA 12 pm Noon AA 6:30 pm KISS AA	20 SCRIP ORDER DELV 12 pm Noon AA 6:30 KISS AA	21 12 pm Noon AA 12 pm Focused Prayer	22 12 pm Noon AA 6:30 pm KISS AA	23 7:30 Sunrise AA 12 pm KISS AA
24 9:15 am Worship 3 pm KISS AA	25 12 pm Noon AA 7:30 pm OA	26 9 am FARA 12 pm Noon AA 6:30 pm KISS AA	27 12 pm Noon AA 6:30 KISS AA	28 12 pm Noon AA 12 pm Focused Prayer	29 12 pm Noon AA 6:30 pm KISS AA	30 7:30 Sunrise AA 12 pm KISS AA
30 9:15 am Worship 3 pm KISS AA	<p>Happy Birthday Wishes to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phyllis Phelps • Pierce Sube • Jan Stong 					

Church of the Redeemer UCC

500 W. Chocolate Avenue
Hershey, PA 17033
717-533-7300

www.redeemerchurchucc.org
info@redeemerchurchucc.org

Alcohol Abuse and Covid-19 Redeemer's Commitment to Support Groups

An editorial in the British Medical Journal gave a stark warning that we should all prepare to deal with the gigantic costs of the pandemic's long term social isolation and loss of employment, which will include alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, and other social problems.

"The toll of increased alcohol harm will be felt for a generation." Write authors Lora Finlay, chair of Commission on Alcohol Harms, and Ian Gilmore, chair of Alcohol Health Alliance U.K. "Our Health system must be prepared for a surge in the need for alcohol treatment services." The researchers identified two groups who will need attention from the medical community and "AA. "The first is those already struggling with alcohol dependence," they wrote. "Many support organizations moved services online with impressive speed, but the new format leaves others falling through the gap. The second group is those on the brink of dependence during lockdown and beyond. For them, dependence will be triggered by bereavement, job insecurity or troubled relationships".

Source: BMJ, May, 2020

In recognition of the fragility of many who experience addiction, throughout the epidemic Redeemer continued to accommodate our support group building partners by providing meeting space both indoors and outdoors. Time and time again, meeting participants reach out to the office with words of thanks and appreciation for this ongoing support.



500 West Chocolate Avenue
Hershey, PA 17033
717-533-7300
www.redeemerchurchucc.org

**Holidays might be
different this year, but we
still have each other, love
in our hearts, smiles on
our faces and so much
to thank God for.**

Amen



Pastor Thomas W. Caruso,
Interim
pastor@redeemerchurchucc.org
717-836-0368

The January 2021 issue of CONTACT is sponsored by Pastor Thomas Caruso in honor of Redeemer Friends and Family.