

MRC NEWS

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD: Good News. Great Joy.

By Mary Lou Ryan

2014 was another exciting year for Operation Christmas Child! As a church we exceeded our packing party goal of 280 shoeboxes by 4. During collection week members of our church family delivered more gifts to the relay center taking our total up to 339! Thank you to all who were involved in this outpouring of love to children who live in want.

For the sixth year, MRC hosted a drop-off site for shoebox gifts. Volunteers from several churches served during the third week of November. Thank you to all who gave of their time or provided delicious snacks. We were pleased to welcome new church project leaders as well as those who have faithfully packed shoeboxes for years. We received, counted, and “cartonized” 1,433 boxes. Praise God for a bountiful harvest of gifts!

We have Boy Scout Troop 2 and Cindy Barber to thank for making it possible for the shoebox-filled shipping cartons to be delivered to our area collection center. The scouts, with the help of Keith Wynia and Jim Meinsma, hauled and hefted the cartons onto a truck provided by Barber’s Farm. “Santa” Cindy and I then took the gifts on the next leg of their journey to Colonie.

To accommodate the growing number of shoeboxes, Samaritan’s Purse has opened additional processing centers in recent years.



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Updates from the Property Committee *(from Leslie Hooper)*

The property committee maintains oversight of community use of our building and deals with maintenance issues as they come up. Recently, Consistory adopted the following vision statement for use of our buildings:

Recognizing that everything we have is through the grace of God, it is a mission of this church to graciously share our facility with anyone who intends to use it for the purposes that fall within our core Christian values of Fellowship, Discipleship, Stewardship, Lordship, Worship, and Leadership.

After much discussion about what this means, we reviewed our procedures and guidelines and revised our building use application form. The new guidelines and forms are now available. We continue to regularly host a variety of meetings and activities that keep our building a very busy place. Donations for building use are appreciated and help with expenses.

Since March 2014, we have had volunteers cleaning the sanctuary each month. This has helped to reduce our cleaning expenses and provides a new opportunity for involvement. The sign-up for 2015 sanctuary cleaning is available on the table in the foyer. Our property caretaker, Doug Kingsbury, is in charge of general buildings and grounds maintenance, as well as overseeing the building use calendar. Each year we have two church family work days, spring and fall, to complete tasks too large for one person. The Boy Scouts have helped with yard work.

We welcome anyone who would like to be part of the property committee. There are decisions to make and things to be done which are always easier when the work is shared. See Doug Kingsbury or Leslie Hooper if you are interested in joining the property committee.

A Fellowship Committee update *(by Mary Lou Ryan)*

It is the mission of our committee to promote and facilitate fellowship opportunities within the church family and the community. It is we who plan and coordinate events, but it takes the cooperation of the whole church family to make them happen. On behalf of our committee, thank you for all the times during 2014 when you set up, cleaned up, cooked, and baked.

**You have been
the eyes, ears,
hands, and
feet of Jesus...**

Thank you also for doing so with an attitude of enthusiasm and joy. You have been the eyes, ears, hands, and feet of Jesus to those you served.

Events coordinated by the fellowship committee in 2014 included:
coffee hours, welcome refreshments and lunch for a Classis Meeting, community Easter breakfast, NET dinners, rally day Lunch, OCC packing party lunch, annual meeting brunch and funeral receptions (5)

As we look forward to our service in 2015, we invite you to consider joining the fellowship committee.

Each year during Advent, we place lights on the bushes in front of our church in memory or honor of loved ones. The names of those being remembered are then placed on a "Remembrance Tree" which will be displayed in the sanctuary the following year. Donations for each light will be used for programs and activities for the youth of our church.

It's not too late to participate. If you would like to remember a loved one and make a donation for this Remembrance Tree, please contact Leslie Hooper (518) 827 4754

The Pastor's Post

Happy New Year! I hope you can hear through the reports in the newsletter how the Lord has been faithful this past year. We have said 'farewell' to several friends who have moved to be closer to family. We have also mourned the loss of others who have died in the Lord and now await the resurrection. I am grateful for our church family- commitment to help each other and others in the community. I am blessed to be able to serve among you. There are many doors that are opened because of who you are and what you do.

*...when true life
is gifted we can't
pack it away with
the holiday
decorations.*

And Happy Epiphany! January 6 is feast day of Epiphany that celebrates the manifestation of Jesus Christ to the world as represented by the wise men from the East (Matthew 2) and Jesus' baptism by John in the River Jordan. Before the 20th Century 'epiphany' meant a revealing of the divine; namely of God in the face of Jesus. But since James Joyce wrote *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (1916), epiphany has changed in nuance. To say "I had an epiphany" now means something like: I realized something; it's the ah-ha! moment in reading a novel or realizing how to fix the tractor without spending a dime. The epiphany has largely been separated from the original sense of the divine revealing. And this was Joyce's intent. Being an Irish expatriate Joyce saw the trappings of religion and institution in his homeland. He wanted to cast the self-expression and seeking understanding in terms of the religious experience- but without strictures of religion or messiness of God. We can agree that this idea has traction in our culture, as it is clear from people's practice. Being authentic and true to one's self is one of the truisms in the Temple of Self. Credit card companies look at our bills to see what we value. If only they could also see how we spend our time. Even religious devotion is tolerated to a point. It was said of our recently passed Governor Mario Cuomo, he was an intensely religious and devout Catholic, except when it came to important social issues where he "did what was right," (according to a local commentator). We applaud the individual and heap shame on the crowd. Yet, both miss the dynamic action of the Holy Spirit in creation in the Church. For real manifestation, God has done the foolish thing (in the world's eyes) and reveals Jesus in the Church. That is where we become true persons even while we grow more and more in love for the other. I love Joyce, but he was dead wrong.

An antidote to the lonely search for transcendence is our worshiping community. It is a wonderful gift to be received and to share. We worship and relish not for what we have done- but what God has done on our behalf. We bow and present our gifts. We step out and are known a little more and dare to enter into another person's life, even when it is not convenient. And when true life is gifted we can't pack it away with the holiday decorations.

A couple recommended books that I read recently:

[Descartes Error: Emotion Reason and the Human Brain](#), Antonio Damasio. (1994). A neurosurgeon explores how emotion and reason are not separate functions, but dependent on one another.

[The River Why](#), David James Duncan. This is an emotionally taut tale about growing in love, with some fishing.

[Out Stealing Horses](#), Per Petterson. a 70 year old in a remembers a life changing summer in a Norwegian cabin; about loss, growing up, how the past never leaves us, even if we try.

- Pastor Jeff

Sunday School happenings *(by Sarah Bramer)*

Sunday School began again in September. We were very excited to begin with a great “rally day” and a hike up Vroman’s Nose with our church family. Once we settled into our routine, we covered lessons on working willingly for God (wherever we are), obedience (a favorite with parents) and what it means to have a “Christ-like” attitude. One of our favorite new songs says,

“Attitude is everything! What kind of attitude will you bring? You gotta have the same attitude that Jesus had.”



One of our goals in Sunday School this year is to encourage the children to think intentionally about their own giving. With the offering money they collect each week, they decided to sponsor 10 Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes! They have money left over and our school year is far from over, so stay tuned to see what else they decide to do!



On December 21st, we presented our annual Christmas Program, which was a “traditional” pageant. The older students read the Christmas story from scripture while the younger ones took on the roles of angles, shepherds and wise men.

I think it’s safe to say that everyone who sees our Sunday School kids in action, enjoys the life they bring to our church family.

Ecumenical Food Pantry *(by Russ Ryan)*

The food pantry continues to be housed in our church. The hours of operation are Wednesdays 4 to 6, and Saturdays 9 to 11, or by appointment. During these hours the food pantry is staffed by 2 volunteers from the community. We are always in need of additional volunteers, either full time or on a substitute basis.

This past year has seen an increase in the number of clients served. From December 2013 to November 2014 we have served 940 clients. This increase in usage has stretched our resources.

We are very grateful to all the individuals and organizations that support the food pantry. Donations of non-perishable food items and money, help us keep the shelves stocked. Donations of time by the volunteers allow us to keep the food pantry open.

For more information on working at or donating to the food pantry please contact Russ or Stan.

Operation Christmas Child continued *(by Mary Lou Ryan)*

(continued from page 1) The newest is in Baltimore. Most shoeboxes processed there were loaded into sea containers. However, 60,000 shoeboxes from Baltimore were airlifted to Erbil, Iraq for distribution to Yazidi children. Can you imagine the delight a shoebox gift could bring to a refugee child? Can you imagine the impact it could have on a family who has faced extermination by ISIS?

Shoebox gifts from the 2014 campaign will be distributed in more than 100 countries. They will be given to children who are victims of war, disease, natural disaster, or poverty. Please keep this ministry in your prayers.



Some of the shoeboxes we packed in 2014 were delivered to Kenya, Zimbabwe and Colombia



Deacon's Report *(by Leslie Hooper and Mary Lou Ryan)*

The focus of the Deacons is on service to those in distress and need both in the world and in the church. Some recent initiatives include; contact with the school to offer supplies for students when needed, creating a list of volunteer drivers for those in our church family who may need transportation, and a proposal to "adopt a family" for Christmas. Additionally, Deacons encourage continued support for our Food Pantry and participation in activities which are designed to benefit those in our community. The Board of Deacons also oversees the Church Benevolence Fund, under the following

Statement of Faith:

As custodians of God's resources, the Reformed Church of Middleburgh allocates outreach funds to people, programs, and institutions with a sincere desire to promote God's work through the church in the community and the world.

Benevolence Fund spending in 2014 totaled \$4,605 and included:

- \$380 - World Vision for Support of our foster child Dedy in Indonesia
- \$500 - Assistance to Families
- \$2,325 - The Rodriguez' mission in Peru, La Casa del Maestro (½ of '13 pledge and all of '14)
- \$200 - Project Night Night
- \$200 - Christmas Family
- \$500 - Prattsville Reformed Church
- \$500 - Schoharie Reformed Church

The Board of Deacons also recommended that \$200 be earmarked for future mission trips.

Guiding principles for the determination of benevolence distribution:

- To meet basic needs of sustenance, shelter, and social services
- To serve both the local area and the world
- To support programs or initiatives that are compatible with the statement of faith

News from the Church Archives *(by Marian Bouck)*

Looking through the archives, we came across a document entitled “Vital Records - Reformed Church, Middleburgh, N.Y. 1797 – 1899”. This document contains many interesting remarks and provides a glimpse into life here in Middleburgh during that time period.

For example on pages 130-134 we find recorded the manes of 140 deaths, with remarks following each. We learned that 19 infants and children under age 6, as well as 6 teenagers passed away within a few months of each other. We also learn that two of those deceased were “colored”. This is interesting to note due to the historical setting and time period of this document. It is noted that 6 deceased members were living in the “Pauper House” at the time of their death. The large brick building (formerly Mountain View Manor and other things) was the “pauper house”. We also get a glimpse at longevity in this time. It is noted that a Mrs. Houghtaling lived to nearly 100 years old; that Judge Danforth live to a “ripe old age” and that Catherine Borst (also recorded as Aunt Katy) lived to 99 years old. It’s so wonderful that we have these records to provide vital clues and information into the history of Middleburgh and specific families.

2014 Ham Supper Report *(by Susan Pendergast, Ham Supper chairperson)*

I am very happy to report that the **34th Annual Ham Supper**, held on Nov. 8th, was another great success for our church family. It was not a success because we served 496 dinner guests and fed approximately 60 workers or because we offered good food, served with a smile. It was not successful because we were able to profit close to \$3,900.00, which will be put to good use in our church’s general fund. It was successful because we worked together, as a church family. The people who served, scooped, cooked, washed, sliced and greeted our quests, did it with the love of our Lord in their hearts. That is what made our Ham Supper a success.

We enjoyed each others company and appreciated each others hard work. I know the dinner guests could feel it, too. One of them told me, “I always love the atmosphere here. It doesn’t seem like a typical church supper.” We were successful!

It takes many people, who begin working many weeks in advance, to make it all happen. So, to all those who helped put together lists, went shopping, placed orders or drove the ‘ham pick-up truck’, a heartfelt Thank You. To the many people who came early to set up, spent 3 hours working and serving, or stayed late to clean up, a huge Thank You.

I cannot end my report without thanking all those who donated food items or extra time to make our supper a success. Thank you to Barber’s Farm for donating all the squash and potatoes. Thank you to Meg and Betsy for donating the ingredients and making the delicious raisin sauce, once again. Thank you to the potato bakers for providing the butter and sour cream. Thank you to the pie bakers for all those tasty pies. Thank you to Leslie and the “Squash crew” for taking on the huge task of cooking that very popular side dish.

Finally, a warm Thank You, to our community of church friends that come to support us year after year. I will leave you with the same invitation that I extended last year. We invite you to join us and be a part of our worship and fellowship each Sunday. Let the warm feelings and good friendships that surround us at Ham Supper time continue to keep us together all year round. Good Friends should gather and share the Good News.

(Photos from the Ham Supper are on page 8)

The G– Force: Generosity *(by Stan Roesler)*

In last year’s Newsletters, we began to explore the deep relationship between divine grace, gratitude, and generosity. Someone has cleverly dubbed this connection as *The G-Force* (or, for the musically inclined, *Living in the Key of G*).

It has been said that the three G’s – Grace, and Gratitude, and Generosity, together form the spiritual foundation of Christian stewardship and discipleship, which are two of Middleburgh Reformed Church’s five core values.

The February 2014 Newsletter considered the first G - Grace - which is the utterly amazing, unearned, gift of God’s unconditional love.

June’s Newsletter probed the second G – Gratitude - experiencing the feeling, the emotion, of thankfulness. Putting gratitude in a Christian context, Terry Lynn Taylor adds that gratitude “is our most direct line to God.” And in *Space for God*, Don Postema points out that “Gratitude receives. It also recognizes the giver. Gratitude *recognizes* that a gift has been given, a favor has been done by someone. There is a gift and a giver. But there is more. Gratitude also calls for a *response* to that gift.”

Which brings us to the third G – Generosity. In *Contagious Generosity*, Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard offer a working definition of generosity: “Generosity is at its core a lifestyle, a lifestyle in which we share all that we have, are, and ever will become as a demonstration of God’s love and a response to God’s grace. Generosity embraces a biblical understanding of stewardship:

- God is the owner of everything.
- What we have has been given to us by God.

The resources we possess are assets to be invested in the Kingdom.

Generous behavior is the best validation that Christians believe what they profess about God, faith, the Bible, and eternity.”

Also, it seems that generosity is a lot like ice cream: it comes in many different varieties. Generosity can be Intentional, Sacrificial, Posthumous, Contagious, Cheerful, Sporadic, Extravagant, Anonymous, Biblical.

And in at least one instance, Pathological. In 2013, a Brazilian man survived a stroke but underwent a strange personality change afterward -- he developed ‘pathological generosity’. His willingness to give generously to others - including people he barely knew -- dramatically changed his life. The stroke apparently left the man with ‘excessive and persistent generosity,’ the researchers from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, concluded in the report published August 20, 2013 in the journal *Neurocase*. ‘Stroke can cause a whole variety of neuropsychological and behavioral changes,’ said Dr. Larry Goldstein, neurologist and director of the Stroke Center at Duke University, who wasn’t involved with the case. ‘Although the observation of personality change is not that unusual, this particular one is apparently novel,’ he said.

“Generosity does not require a certain amount of money. Instead, it seems to begin with some sense of having ‘enough’. Whenever we feel we have enough of something, a sense of sufficiency, we can look to see how we can share what we have. We may even feel that as we give, something is being simultaneously given back to us.” – The Fetzer Institute.

“Generosity does not require a certain amount of money.”

“You do not have to be rich to be generous.
If he has the spirit of true generosity,

**CONTACT
INFORMATION**

Pastor Jeff Kelley

827-8785, home

email: jeffa.kelley@gmail.com

Church

827-5134, office

email: reformed@midtel.net

Mailing Address:

PO Box 112

Middleburgh, NY 12122

Property Caretaker

Doug Kingsbury

827-7791

email: dougk@midtel.net

Consistory Members

Sarah Bramer, Vice President

Kim Smith, Elder

Joan Youmans, Elder

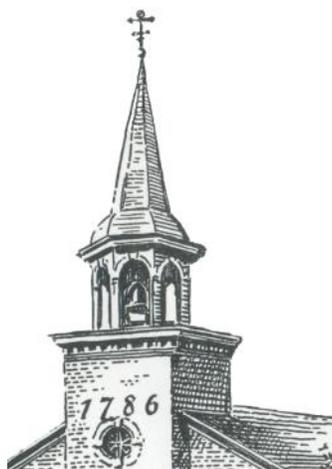
vacant seat, Elder

Leslie Hooper, Deacon

Arlene Kingsbury, Deacon

Mary Lou Ryan, Deacon

vacant seat, Deacon



How do you get your news?

Here are some options for you when getting your church newsletter.

Newsletters and Monthly Events sheets are available on our website:

www.middleburghreformed.org

Please contact us via email: reformed@midtel.net if you would prefer to receive our newsletter electronically and stop receiving the paper version.

Thank you for helping us save paper and postage.

P.S. You can also find us on Facebook!