

UNITED
CHURCH
OF CHRIST**Communitas**

PENNSYLVANIA SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE

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November 5, 2023

All Saints Sunday

All Saints Sunday is celebrated by most of our churches, today, the first Sunday in November. We celebrate long ago saints and those known to us as saints; people who inspired us by grit and determination to “keep on trying.” Many of those people are the pastors who lives shaped and influenced our own. Some of the PSEC pastors who retired years ago are now in need of special assistance. Because their retirement income is low, the churches of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference supplement the cost of their health benefits.



We remember these saints as we receive the PSEC special All Saints offering. Your generosity will bring peace of mind and improved health to those who have served the church so faithfully in the past. The entirety of the offering is used to supplement the needs of the retired pastors, spouses, and widows in the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference who need assistance with health and dental insurance.

Be a saint to those who have been saints and support this vital ministry this first Sunday in November.



2023 PSEC Fall Meeting

Registration Closes Wednesday**Hybrid Meeting @ St. Paul's UCC, Amityville****1979 Weavertown Rd., Douglassville, PA 19518****NEXT SUNDAY—November 12th****Registration opens at 2:00 pm****Meeting: 3:00 pm—5:30 pm****Register at: psec2023fall.eventbrite.com**

From the Conference Minister, Rev. Bill Worley:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” — Matthew 22:35

It’s a simple concept: “Love God, love neighbor.” As with most things about our faith, the hard part is in the practice. Everyone I know who has made a serious, lifelong effort to live out these simple commands has struggled with one or both. Who is God, and who is my neighbor? What does it mean to love them? What do you do with people you can’t seem to like no matter how hard you try? And what about bullies, people who threaten your safety and those for whom your love is meaningless? Being a student of Jesus means wrestling with the questions and fumbling with the answers but always making one more try.

For that reason, the world’s great religions have always required communities of people in which to practice Jesus’ two commands. Whether they are congregations, or house churches, or people gathered around the table of a local coffee shop, these communities are the places where we practice loving. One look at the headlines will let you know we are out of practice and have been for a very long time. Look too long at the headlines, your social media news feed, or the unrelenting places of division and violence and you can be easily seduced into not trying at all.

Where that practice is going well in Christian communities and in congregations around our Conference there are people who truly enjoy being together. Joy and creativity and trying new things have found a home. Where it is not, there is decline, and fear, power struggles, petty arguments, boring meetings and parking lot conversations. The observation of poet Jonathan Swift is true of too many churches, *we have just enough religion to make us hate one another but not enough to make us love one another.*

Barbara Brown Taylor was not the first to observe that *the hardest spiritual work in the world is to love neighbor as self — to encounter another human being not as someone you can use, change, fix, help, save, enroll, convince or control, but simply as someone who can spring you from the prison of yourself, if you will allow it. All you have to do is recognize another you for whom you may care as instinctively as you care for yourself. To become that person even for a moment, is to understand what it means to die to yourself. This can be as frightening as it is liberating. It may be the only real spiritual discipline there is — the one that guarantees us that we, like the scribe speaking with Jesus, are not far from the Kingdom of God* (Taylor, *Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*, p.93).

With prayers for our practice of love, Pastor Bill