



# The PVEC Happenings



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## 2006, the Year in Review

By Betty Schultheis

The church continued with implementing changes recommended by the Congregational Survey Task Force through the work of individuals and an additional three Task Forces. Individual spiritual growth opportunities were introduced, and fellowship opportunities abounded throughout the year.

- The year began with a bang as the church hosted the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. There was a panel discussion January 15<sup>th</sup> following worship service during coffee hour. The four founding denominations of PVEM fielded questions from the audience regarding denominational issues. The Pocono Choral Society presented a short concert prior to the afternoon program which was followed by a reception in Fellowship Hall.
- One of the three task forces, the Name/Identity Task Force completed their work on January 22 at the Annual Meeting with the results of the congregational survey regarding a name change. A motion was made, seconded and unanimously supported as we changed our name to the Panther Valley Ecumenical

Church and address to PO Box number 463 Allamuchy, NJ.

- PVEC hosted the Community Ash Wednesday Service February 1<sup>st</sup>. The Presbyterian cluster joined us for a Soup Supper before the service.
- The Community Relations Task Force held focus group interviews with the parents of children within the Sunday School program during February and received input to be utilized in planning future programs.
- Two daytime Lenten Bible Study groups met in March and April and there were Tuesday Evening Prayer Services held.
- Wanda Maltese invited the five Brownie and Girl Scout troops that meet in Allamuchy to join the congregation on March 12<sup>th</sup> to celebrate Girl Scout Sunday.
- Lindsay Alston, a student at Centenary College began an Internship as the “choir director” in April. New banners were purchased by the Worship Commission and led the procession before the service on Palm Sunday, and a slide show of “The Passion” was added following worship service.
- There was a “children’s service” open to the community on Good Friday and the fourth annual Easter Sunrise Service began at 6:30am Easter morning, followed by a delicious hot breakfast. Communion was served during the regular worship service at 10:00am.
- Confirmation Sunday, April 30<sup>th</sup> was spectacular. The nine confirmands signed the covenant after participating in a moving ceremony that included their parents and sponsors.
- Two new adult Bible Study groups began in May, one on Monday morning the other Tuesday morning. May 20<sup>th</sup> was the church auction “An Angelic Evening”. It was a fabulous evening of fun and fellowship and over \$8,500. was raised for Church and community programs.
- The congregational meeting on May 21<sup>st</sup>

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brought closure to the other two task forces: Community Relations and Internal Communications as Council Chair Evelyn Self brought the task force reports to the congregation with the Council's recommendation to downsize Council from 15 to 11 members and consolidate the current nine Commissions into five.

- The Worship Commission decorated the sanctuary with red balloons and white doves for Pentecost, June 4<sup>th</sup>. The annual picnic and Outreach Commission Strawberry Festival was June 11<sup>th</sup> and Youth Sunday was June 18<sup>th</sup>. The Confirmands and High School Students shared responsibility for the entire Sunday morning service. Thursday, June 22<sup>nd</sup> other community members joined us to discuss the DaVinci Code with Rev. Jeff Archer from Hackettstown Presbyterian and our own Rev. Mary Lou Howson. It was an invigorating evening of verbal exchange.
- During July the Stewardship and Communication Commission manned booths promoting church programs at Blairstown, Green Township and Independence Township. The congregation voted to accept the recommendations presented at the May congregational meeting and suspended the sections of the by-laws governing Council and Commission/Committee organization and to begin implementing the new organization in September of 2006.
- Christian Education Commission's Vacation Bible School was held for three evenings July 19-21 from 6:30-8:30pm. The program was for both children and adults and the Theme was "Could You Live Like Jesus?" and included jewelry making, cooking, dancing, building houses and a cook-out and bonfire with children singing outside and a Vespers service for the older folk, inside the last night.

Everyone had a wonderful time. The month closed with a BIG BANG as we crowded the parking lot on July 29<sup>th</sup> for the Billington Extravaganza "the Battle of the Bands" simply awesome. Over \$700 was raised for the Youth Program.

- The Sunday School teachers met in August to review teaching materials for the upcoming year and to establish their teaching teams. Growth in attendance caused the addition of another class this year. Teachers include Nursery and Toddlers: Diane Ward; Pre-K/K: Heidi Itkor, Lauren Wittig, and Melissa Billington; Grades 1-3: Barbara Hikel and Diane Wilson; 4-6 Grades: Lisa Blake, Nadine Robinson, and Kate Stiner; Grades 7-8: Dave Robinson, Amy Testa, and Rick Wilson; High School: Bill Dowd.
- Sunday School got off to a dynamic start with the Karaoke Kick Off Saturday night September 9. A potluck dinner followed by a bonfire and lots of music. The musical headliner was the energetic accomplished accordionist, Pat Billington with a strong back up of Mike Billington and Ron Reece on guitar and Jessie Randis on the Karaoke machine. Sunday morning, Rally Day, Dave Robinson cooked hundreds of pancakes to feed children and parents. This year the children all received "giving" envelopes so that they might learn to tithe and they have a mission project to provide books to the children of Cameroon.
- Something new was added to the Sunday School program this year. The regular teaching staff now attends communion the first Sunday of each month and a Bible character presents the lesson. A picture of Ron "Moses" Reece graces the bulletin board in Fellowship Hall. The first Sunday of Advent Amy Testa and Lauren Wittig taught the children about communion and then the children joined their parents in the sanctuary to participate with their families in receiving communion.

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### **Please Honor the Happenings Deadline**

Please submit all articles by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month for timely publication. It takes time to build the newsletter; however, if for some reason you don't have the information for the article that you know you will need space for, just let us know so we can reserve the space. We realize that sometimes events create the need for a last minute addition, so we will try to be understanding. Otherwise, any late submissions will be in the following issue. Thank you



is moving forward and some changes will be found on the back of the bulletin insert.

As you already know our minister Rev. Mary Lou Howson, has submitted her letter of resignation which Council has accepted. Rev. Howson will be with us through April 8, 2007. Before we begin the search for a new leader, we need to have a meaningful dialogue. According to our current by-laws, the next minister will be Episcopalian. As you may or may not know a rotational order of the founding denominations was established in the by-laws at the time the church was established.

You have already approved suspending the portion of the by-laws relevant to the "organization/membership of Council and Commissions" for 2007; it may make sense to make further changes.

You are invited to join us for a congregational meeting, Sunday, January 14, 2007, immediately following morning worship. Joining us to help facilitate this meeting will be representatives of our founding denominations: Rev. Sherry Taylor, United Church of Christ Associate Conference Minister for NJ; Presbyterian Rev. Jean Johnston, Acting Executive Presbyter; and Episcopal Canon, Carter Echols, Diocese of Newark. Rev. Renee McCleary, the District Superintendent of the Skylands District of the United Methodist Church was unable to clear her calendar.

The purpose of this meeting is to have an open discussion about the future of our church and the search for a new minister.

Some of the issues that we need to discuss are:

- What does it mean to be a multi-denominational church, and the rotation of ministers associated with that?
- What is the/your vision for PVEC?
- Today (in 2007), what are we looking for in a minister?
- How do we call and dismiss a minister? Do we need to amend our by-laws?

- How can we improve communications and reduce negative behavior within our congregation? Where/how does communication break down?
- How do we avoid isolation and lack of dialogue?
- Why do you choose to worship at PVEC?

This is a meeting to discuss our future, the type of church that we desire to become and how we can work together to realize our hope. We welcome your participation as we exchange ideas and thoughts about the future of this church.

Please mark your calendar and join us for this important meeting on 1/14/07.

Evelyn Self

Council Chair

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## A Senior Exercise Program.

I came across this exercise suggested for seniors, to build muscle strength in the arms and shoulders. It seems so easy, I thought I'd pass it on. The article suggested doing it three days a week.

Begin by standing on a comfortable surface, where you have plenty of room at each side. With a 5-lb. potato sack in each hand, extend your arms straight out from your sides, and hold them there as long as you can.

Try to reach a full minute, then relax. Each day, you'll find that you can hold this position for just a bit longer. After a couple of weeks, move up to 10-lb. potato sacks. Then 50-lb. potato sacks, and then eventually try to get to where you can lift a 100-lb. potato sack in each hand and hold your arms straight for more than a full minute

Once you feel confident at that level, put a potato in each of the sacks.

- World Communion Sunday, Oct.1 was celebrated with artisan breads from around the world. There were baptisms on Oct. 8 and 15<sup>th</sup>., and on October 28<sup>th</sup> the Christian Education Commission partnered with Cub Scout Pack 160, whose charter we hold, to sponsor a memorable Halloween Party. Over 70 people of all ages actively participated. We will do it again next year for sure.
- November 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> the Christian Outreach Commission held their fantastic annual Harvest Bazaar. Congregation members ate homemade soup for lunch, then shopped for wonderful Thanksgiving and Christmas treasures. Members of the Commission decorated the side entrance to the church with cornstalks, gourds and mums.
- The Stewardship and Communications Commission sponsored their annual pancake brunch, November 12 in thanks for the just completed Fall campaign. The Worship Commission set up the “harvest table” on November 19<sup>th</sup>. Girl Scout troops meeting at the church decorated the front of the church with cornstalks, mums and pumpkins. It was new members’ Sunday, with five people joining the church and an adult and a child being baptized. Christian Education sponsored a book signing in Fellowship Hall that afternoon and hosted a reception afterwards. The Cub Scout Pack provided the turkeys for the baskets that Christian Outreach provided to needy families for Thanksgiving.
- Christian Education provided a light lunch on December 3 and then hosted the Advent Workshop from 12-2pm. The Junior High School students custom decorated wreaths for members. December 10 was the annual “hanging of the greens” during Sunday worship and was followed by a wonderful musical treat. The Pocono Choral Society provided a concert of carols that afternoon at 4:00pm and was followed by a reception of Christmas goodies in Fellowship Hall. December 11<sup>th</sup> the “angel tree” provided opportunities for everyone to share Christmas gifts for others less fortunate than we. In addition to that Christian Outreach provided

sweatshirts to Carmen Ministries. Christian Education sponsored a potluck dinner and Christmas caroling on December 16<sup>th</sup>. Twenty some carolers shared Christmas music with residents of Heath Village and patients at Hackettstown Hospital. It was a rewarding experience.

- Because Christmas Eve was on Sunday this year, the Christmas pageant was our morning worship service. The High School students provided the reading of the scriptures while the children acted out the story in costume. Baby Jesus was portrayed by the Pflugfelder, Jr. twins. The 11:00pm candlelight communion service was also well attended and we were all captivated by the beautiful luminaries provided by the Zinckgraf family to line the driveway of the church.

This has been an awesome year, six baptisms, nine confirmations, five new adult members, 40 children in Sunday School, 30 adults involved in Bible Study, countless fellowship activities, an active “outreach” program, task forces that completed their assignments, a Council that has accepted the charge to streamline the church organization. This was a year of accomplishment, of spiritual growth, of Christian fellowship, a year to rejoice about.

Sadly, instead of rejoicing because we have a leader who is creative and has brought us so many wonderful ideas and programs...we are losing her -- she is resigning, because she was being undermined. How could this happen? How could we be so blind? A person as talented and caring as Mary Lou Howson doesn’t come along very often and we let her slip away. Shame on us all.



## Greetings in Christ,

I would like to share with you and your congregation a new resource for the Episcopal Church today: *Do You Believe? Living the Baptismal Covenant*. This book has been described by various people and clergy as interesting and inspiring, wonderful, magnificent, and enjoyable.

In exploring baptism and the implications of that covenant made with God, this book is a solid resource, not only as background for clergy and staff, but it is designed for adult education discussions as well. Furthermore, the nature of the book and the research upon which it is based makes *Do You Believe?* ideal for vestry formation and study -- especially for those seeking renewal or who are in transition.

Morehouse Publishing webpage:  
<http://www.morehousepublishing.org/booksmusicItemView.asp?bookID=12261>

Also available through Amazon:

[http://www.amazon.com/Do-You-Believe-Baptismal-Covenant/dp/0819221929/sr=8-1/qid=1157376688/ref=pd\\_bbs\\_1/103-5786796-0771810?ie=UTF8&s=books](http://www.amazon.com/Do-You-Believe-Baptismal-Covenant/dp/0819221929/sr=8-1/qid=1157376688/ref=pd_bbs_1/103-5786796-0771810?ie=UTF8&s=books)

I respectfully ask that you consider studying this book and using it to further develop your congregation's relationship with God. If you have any questions, or comments, or if you would like a review copy, please contact me. Thank you.

Yours in the service of God's Kingdom,

Nancy Ann McLaughlin, D. Min.  
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## Heating and Cooling System


Very special thanks go to Ron Phillip and Sylvester Fletcher for their work these past months on our heating and cooling system. As many of you know, the system in the office and church school wing has been erratic for quite some time. It has finally come to the end of its life. Ron and Fletch have interviewed four contractors and received bids from three. At the November council meeting they presented their recommendation to council. Council voted unanimously to accept their proposal and to proceed with the work. Fletch was authorized to sign a contract on behalf of the church. Work will begin as soon as is practical.

The bid was about \$38,000 but we expect the cost to be somewhat higher because, unexpected but necessary repairs always show up when work of this sort is done. For instance, we already suspect that some new electrical work will have to be completed.

The funds to pay for this endeavor will come from the bequest left us by Viola Kuehne, the contingency fund, and the maintenance fund. We should have enough to cover the cost. However, doing so will significantly deplete our reserves. Therefore, we are requesting that you consider an additional donation to the maintenance fund. This is the perfect time to express our thanks to all those who have helped us prepare for such a situation by helping those in the future who will no doubt face a similar expense.

Mary Lou





# FROM THE PASTOR

## “THE DAYS ARE SURELY COMING . . . “

Today’s Gospel text is one that we moderns have great trouble dealing with – it’s frightening; it’s weird; it doesn’t fit any of our rational categories. It’s a type of literature called apocalyptic. The word comes from the Greek for “to reveal what is hidden” – literally to roll the stone away. It is the same word in Greek that is used when the stone is rolled away from Jesus’ tomb thereby revealing the truth of the resurrection – the astonishing new life that God has worked out of the worst death human beings could inflict.

Apocalyptic writing always deals in visions, dreams, and heavenly messengers – the non scientific, extra-rational ways of knowing that a deep and mature faith can open up. Because it announces the birth of the new which will transcend and shatter the old, it always speaks of suffering and death – not because suffering and death are the last word but because we cannot receive the hope of the new without killing our bondage to the old.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record Jesus’ apocalyptic teaching spoken just a few days before his crucifixion. These texts are always read on the first Sunday in Advent to remind us that the birth of the Christ child crashes into history proclaiming the death of the old powers that think they are in control. Herod was right to be afraid – for when God enters history in this new way, Herod’s reign and all the powers of this world are revealed as contingent, not absolute. Jesus’ birth signals and initiates the death of the old and the beginning of the new. For Christians, then, our new year always begins with the question: Where is your loyalty? To whom do you belong – the kingdoms of the world or the kingdom of God?

Now to be honest, apocalyptic moments happen

not only on the grand scale of history but also in our lives. We have all experienced moments when the angel of God crashes through our ceiling, leaving debris everywhere. We always have two choices: retrenchment or openness. We can cling to the old or we can step into the terror and hope of the new. In reality, our lives are a perpetual Advent: God is just waiting for us to allow the holy to break through.

So Advent is meant to be what Neil Young calls plowing time – a time when we rework the earth of our hearts and lives – stir it up, loosen the clods, turn it all over – for it is only in a disturbed, plowed-up ground that the seeds of grain that we plant can grow. Only through this internal plowing can the renewing, regenerative power of new life take root and flourish in our lives. Kathleen Norris has written:

We know that marriages, families, communities, nations often come together and discover their true strength when some apocalypse – some new revelation of the fault lines in our lives – has occurred. Hospital chaplains see this all the time. For some reason we human beings seem to learn best how to love when we’re a bit broken, when our plans fall apart, when our myths of our self-sufficiency and goodness and safety are shattered. Apocalypse is meant to bring us to our senses, allowing us a sobering, and usually painful, glimpse of what is possible in the new life we build from the ashes of the old. . . .

The apocalyptic vision is meant to give us the hope that, despite considerable evidence to the contrary, in the end it is good that will prevail. At the end of the Revelation to John we find justice restored, and a God who comes to be with those who have suffered the most in a cruel, unjust, and violent world. A God who does not roar and strut like the ultimate dictator but who gently “wipes away all the tears from their eyes.” (AG, 321)

This year, as Advent begins, you as a congregation stand at an apocalyptic moment of your own. It is a time of loss and confusion, but it is also a time of challenge and hope – an apocalyptic time. What hidden things need to be revealed. What ground needs to be plowed? What weeds need to be pulled? How do we let the Holy Spirit in to fertilize and give new life? Those questions need to be the focus of your contemplation and efforts.

I can tell you that all your denominational officials want to help you on this journey. They are meeting this week to begin to work together on your behalf. I would imagine they would be seeking a meeting with you but I

*Continued on next page.....*

will not speak for them. They bring enormous experience, skill, talent, and faith to offer you.

Now is the time for plowing and new planting. Now is the time to roll away the stone so that new life can emerge.

Apocalypse is meant to bring us to our senses, allowing us a sobering, and usually painful, glimpse of what is possible in the new life we build from the ashes of the old. . . .

For ours is a God who comes to be with those who have suffered . . . A God who does not roar and strut like the ultimate dictator but who opens the tombs of our imprisonment, gently “wipes away all the tears from our eyes,” and calls us forth into the light of new life. That is the promise of Advent and it is God’s sure and certain promise to you.

## Editors Note

The preceding article was written before the congregational meeting was scheduled for January. The content is important and we should be ready to respond.

If you care about our church – please be there and be ready to talk about how you feel. Whatever you feel – we need to know so that we can continue the MINISTRY of our Church.

## Office Thefts

Several people have asked for a clarification of the thefts in the office. Below is a timeline of what we know. In some cases we can identify a timeframe during which the material was taken. In others we cannot. We do not know who is doing this.

Beginning probably in late July, files began disappearing from my desk: I think both from the top of the desk and from one of the file drawers. At first I thought I had misplaced one or two files. By mid August, I was beginning to think that someone had taken them. I began locking my door more often.

On September 25 we discovered that material we were preparing for the October council meeting had disappeared – it had been in the CE office. Amy, Betty, and I all agreed that we had seen it on Sunday morning. On Monday morning, it was gone.

We ordered a locking file cabinet for my office and for the secretary’s office.

On Worldwide Communion Sunday (October 1), I had prepared a special communion liturgy. The liturgies used for regular months remained on the shelf in the closet next to the mailboxes where they are always kept. During communion it was apparent that some people had the regular liturgy while others had the special one. The following Tuesday one of our members came to me to say that while it was impossible to prove it, he believed, based on the comments he had heard, that the confusion was intentional sabotage. We will never know what the truth is, but the information that negative comments were so intense was very upsetting. The idea that someone might be willing to sabotage worship in order to get at me was chilling.

I took this information to the October 16 council meeting. The general response was shock and concern. However, no action was taken.

On Monday, October 30, I realized that the key to the post office box was no longer in my desk. On Tuesday, October 31, we realized that the file regarding the bids and information on replacing the HVAC had disappeared from Amy’s desk along with directions for the thermostats in the sanctuary. She knows that the file was in her desk on Friday because she used it. On Sunday, November 5 we realized that the guest register from the narthex had disappeared.

On Wednesday, December 6 Amy began to prepare a letter and realized that all the church letterhead had been removed from her desk and replaced with blank sheets of paper. If you receive something on church letterhead that seems suspicious or confusing, please call the office to let us know.

We have now placed all of the personnel files in locked files. The risk of identity theft is not one we can take. I will present a procedure for authorized access to council at the December meeting.

We are in the process of working with our locksmith to re-key the locks in the office area. Once this is completed, access will be severely restricted. I have not wanted to take this step because it is not only an inconvenience to members but it also creates an atmosphere of distrust that violates the very essence of what a church should be. At this point, however, and after considerable discussion, I have decided that we have no other course. While the computers, to our knowledge, have not been breached, they contain financial records and personal information about all of you that we are obligated to keep confidential. That is a trust that I do not wish to violate. *Mary Lou*

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[hppnings@mindspring.com](mailto:hppnings@mindspring.com)  
We're on the web [www.pvem.net](http://www.pvem.net)



## Christian Outreach News:

Thanksgiving: We helped 32 families this Thanksgiving. Thank you for your generous donations. We would like to thank Cub Scout Pack 160 for donating 24 turkeys and helping pack up the food.

Christmas: Our Angel Tree was a success as well as our support for Carmen Ministries and our gifts for children at Camp Hope because of your support.

Thank you for all of your support,  
Christian Outreach

