

The MESSENGER

A faithful, serving community joyfully sharing Christ's love.

The Rev. Courtney Smith Westerlund, Pastor
Church phone: 201-337-4900
Email: info@messiahoaklandnj.org

SUNDAY WORSHIP
Worship Service: 10:00am
In-person, live-streamed and on YouTube

NUMBER 3

MAY and JUNE 2024

From Pastor Courtney



“Erasure” by David Hayward (@NakedPastor) is one of the many pieces of art I have grown to love and cherish in my ministry. The image so accurately captures what I was taught and have grown to believe with all my heart: when we try to draw lines in this world that divide, God steps to the other side to say “but what about...?”

When we try to say “only baptized people are loved by God,” I believe God steps to the other side to say “but what about faith traditions that do not baptize? Can I not love them too?” God erases the dividing lines to remind us: God’s love is more inclusive than we can imagine.

When we try to say “only certain people can eat at God’s table,” I believe God steps to the other side to say “what about those who don’t share the meal with us? Is my grace not for them too?” God erases the lines we use to divide to remind us that all are welcome to know and understand God’s love and grace.

When we try to say “God’s creation is limited to binaries,” I believe God steps to the other side to say “what about the glorious spectrums I created? Are they not good and holy and beautiful too?” God erases the lines we draw in favor of spectrums. God didn’t just make night and day, God also created dawn and dusk. God didn’t just create land and sea, but also marshes and beaches. God didn’t just create one image of man and woman; God created all people holy and beautiful and in God’s image.

On Maundy Thursday, Jesus gives the disciples a new commandment, to love one another as God loves us (John 13:34). God loves us without ifs, ands, or buts. God loves us when we are saints and when we are sinners. God loves us in our imperfections and our shortcomings because God made us good and holy and loves us no matter what.

This image, of Jesus erasing the lines we draw around ourselves, reminds me just how boundless God’s love and grace are for us. In God “there is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus,” (Galatians 3:28). All are holy, beautiful, called to do God’s work, and loved fiercely by the God who erases all divisions. Let us seek to emulate Jesus by erasing lines in favor of love, welcome, and inclusion.

God’s Peace,
Pastor Courtney

What's Happening at Messiah

Meetings and Dates to Remember

May 4:	Property Work Day
May 5:	Reconciling in Christ Meeting following worship 6:00-8:00 pm Oakland Cares light supper and concert
May 6:	7:30 pm Finance Committee Meeting
May 9:	10:30 am Executive Committee Meeting
May 14:	7:30 pm Council Meeting
May 15:	7:30 pm Outreach Meeting
May 26:	Anniversary Meeting following worship

Church Council Highlights

- † Summer and Fall Planning is well underway. If you're interested in planning an event or have an idea, please talk to anyone on Council so we can schedule it.
- † Upcoming Outreach Events: April 19th Service Night with St. Alban's, April 21st Baby Shower after worship, May 5th Benefit Concert to support Oakland Cares.
- † We need people to help with the tech team. It is not as daunting or as involved as it may seem. Please talk to Alex Boyce if you're interested in helping.
- † The Council approved the proposal from the Finance Committee to invest some of our money from our savings account.

Fellowship

Coffee hour is a wonderful time for fellowship. Sharing coffee, treats and conversation with each other to cap off our Sunday worship. Please sign up for coffee hour if you are able.

Rockland Boulders

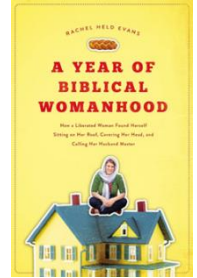
We are looking to arrange an outing to a Rockland Boulders baseball game on a Sunday afternoon in the future. The Boulders play in Pomona, New York, about a half hour drive from church. We are trying to gauge if there would be any interest in attendance at such an event. It should be a really fun event!

Please speak to Valerie or Len Nicolosi if you have any questions about coffee hour or the baseball game.

Synod Assembly Workshops:
May 9th on Zoom at 6:30 and 8:00 pm

For more information and Zoom links visit: <https://www.njsynod.org/assembly>
Workshops will be available on: NJ Synod Spending Plan, 25 Years of Mission in Wittenberg Germany, Proposed Synod Constitution and Bylaws Review, Stand Against Christian Nationalism, Congregational Generosity and Stewardship Mission, Mission Partnerships: The Beauty of Singing Together in Relational Harmony.

Summer Book Study:
A Year of Biblical Womanhood by Rachel Held Evans.



Join us this summer as a congregation to read through Rachel Held Evan’s fabulously funny memoir from her year of looking at and trying to live by various rules for women in the Bible. This book is sure to leave you laughing and pondering scripture in new ways. We look forward to providing opportunities to gather and discuss the book throughout the summer. If you’re interested in helping plan this event(s), please talk to Pastor Courtney!

Thrivent Members Action Teams

If you have an idea for a ministry project, please let us know so we can apply for a Thrivent Action Team to get \$250 towards starting it. The application is easy and the results are invaluable as they help support Sunday School, Faith Formation, Outreach, Fellowship, or Special Event projects at church. Want to help out or have an idea? Talk to Pastor Courtney.

Food Allergy Awareness

Please continue to label food items brought to church with the place cards in the sacristy so we might be conscious of those who have food allergies. Any food item that contains tree nuts or peanuts should have a note either generically stating it has nuts or specifically naming which nut it contains. Other prominent allergens to consider labeling include: milk, egg, and wheat. This is one of many ways we can be more welcoming to both our members and visitors who join us for coffee hour and fellowship activities.

Olive Wood from the Holy Land

Rooted in traditions handed down through generations, artisans in the Holy Land face a precarious situation amid the current global halt in tourism. Deprived of a means to sustain their livelihoods, there is a looming risk that these skilled artists may be compelled to leave the Holy Land in pursuit of alternative opportunities, potentially leading to the extinction of time-honored handcrafts and traditions. Touch of Grace is working with pastors and congregations around the world to help bring treasures from their home to yours.

Pastors Courtney and Jonathan continue to sell olive wood products from Bethlehem. If you are interested in learning more about what is available, talk to Pastor Courtney.

Serving Schedule

We will no longer be printing the serving schedule in the newsletter. Instead, Bea will send out the serving schedule each month and will continue to send weekly reminders.

As always, thank you to all who help during worship. If you are on the schedule and are unable to assist, please switch with someone and let the office know. If you would like to get involved, contact the office.

Outreach

MAY BENEVOLENCE OF THE MONTH:

Oakland Cares

Oakland Cares has been supporting several churches in Oakland in their mission to help residents in need. We have given food gift cards to the Mothers' Club every holiday season for more than a decade and helped many residents pay emergency bills. If this service is to stay available, it needs some continuing support from the community. This month a musical event is being held on Sunday evening at Messiah Lutheran Church on May 5th from 6:00 – 8:00 pm to raise funds for this cause. The music will include the latest Praise band contemporary songs, some inspiring '70's pop music, a piece by the Ponds Church Bell Choir and perhaps more.

A light spring supper will be available at 6:00 pm. A good-will donation of \$5 or \$10 is suggested and food-pantry items for the Ponds food pantry are also welcomed.

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JUNE BENEVOLENCE OF THE MONTH:

Cross Roads Camp and Retreat Center

Cross Roads is a welcoming, ecumenical retreat center and camp of the [Episcopal Diocese of Newark](#) and the [New Jersey Synod of the ELCA](#). Cross Roads Camp and Retreat Center is a welcoming and inclusive community providing life-changing and sacred adventures for renewal, growth, and joy. Cross Roads strives to facilitate renewal, healing, inspiration, and transformation for the body, mind, and spirit while helping individuals deepen their connection to themselves, others, the world we live in, and God. Children encounter God in nature, in worship, and in relationships during youth camp. Faith formation is strengthened through camp activities, songs, and worship while creating opportunities for lasting friendships and connections.

Cross Roads was voted as one of America's Best Summer Camps 2023 by Newsweek! You don't want to miss out on the amazing opportunities camp provides. For more information about camp, check out the flyer on page 8.

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Results of the March and April Benevolences of the Month

The March BOM was very successful as we doubled last years efforts. ELCA Good Gifts was the recipient of at least \$1,262 that came directly through the offerings. Our piggy banks and barns were blessed on Easter Sunday with family's offerings ranging from change to checks. We are the little church that can!!

First Response Pregnancy Resource Center was the recipient of a tremendous blessing. So many congregational and community members purchased and donated lightly used clothing. In addition to 50 diaper cakes from St. Albans' volunteer night, donations received were clothes, baby carriers, rattles, toys, hand crocheted and knitted blankets and hats. God is good. We give thanks to everyone who donated items and time to making this collection a success.

Reconciling in Christ (RIC)
Info meeting May 5th after worship

Since 1983, the Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Program has been a public way for faith communities to see, name, celebrate, and advocate for people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions in the Lutheran church. The RIC Program is made up of congregations, synods, colleges, seminaries, outdoor ministries, and other Lutheran organizations. Every ministry setting begins this journey from its own unique context.

Over the next few months we will begin our own journey to learn about God’s expansive love and discern how God is inviting us to erase the lines that divide us to instead be open, affirming, and welcoming of all of God’s creation. If you have questions, comments, concerns, or want more time to talk about this process or God’s creation, please talk to Pastor Courtney.

For more information on the process or Reconciling Works: Lutherans for Full Participation, visit: <https://www.reconcilingworks.org/ric/becomeric/> or join us for an informational meeting on May 5th after worship.

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Budget Report

Below is a recap of church expenses as of March 31, 2024.

Regards,
Karen Bell
Treasurer

Year-to-Date
March 2024

OPERATING INCOME & EXPENSES						
	Monthly			YTD		
	Budget	Actual	Variance	Budget	Actual	Variance
INCOME (+)						
Ministry at Messiah	16,633.71	12,880.22	3,753.49	49,901.13	49,013.01	888.12
Mission	<u>758.34</u>	<u>1,298.00</u>	(539.66)	<u>2,275.02</u>	<u>3,468.85</u>	(1,193.83)
Total	17,392.05	14,178.22	3,213.83	52,176.15	52,481.86	(305.71)
EXPENSES (-)						
Ministry at Messiah	16,231.88	15,749.76	482.12	47,754.68	45,799.16	1,955.52
Mission	<u>1,970.84</u>	<u>1,223.85</u>	746.99	<u>6,312.52</u>	<u>5,285.51</u>	<u>1,027.01</u>
Total	18,202.72	16,973.61	1,229.11	54,067.20	51,084.67	2,982.53
TOTAL	(810.67)	(2,795.39)	1,984.72	(1,891.05)	1,397.19	(3,288.24)

Mary



2	12:00 pm Lunchtime Bible Study 7:30 pm Band practice
4	9:00 am Property Work Day
5	9:00 am Messiah Singers practice 10:00 am Worship 11:15 am Reconciling in Christ Meeting 6:00 – 8:00 pm Oakland Cares Concert
6	6:00 pm Community Table at Ponds Church 7:30 pm Finance Committee Meeting
9	10:30 am Executive Committee Meeting 12:00 pm Coffee and Conversation 6:30 and 8:00 pm NJ Synod Assembly Workshops 7:30 pm Band practice
11	NJ Synod Assembly
12	9:00 am Messiah Singers practice 10:00 am Worship 11:15 am Confirmation Class
14	7:30 pm Church Council Meeting
15	7:30 pm Outreach Meeting
16	12:00 pm Lunchtime Bible Study 7:30 pm Band practice
19	Day of Pentecost 9:00 am Messiah Singers practice 10:00 am Worship
23	12:00 pm Coffee and Conversation 7:30 pm Band practice
26	Holy Trinity Sunday 10:00 am Worship Anniversary Committee Meeting following worship
27	Memorial Day Church Office Closed
30	12:00 pm Coffee and Conversation 7:30 pm Band practice

June



1	9:00 am Property Work Day
2	9:00 am Messiah Singers practice 10:00 am Worship
3	6:00 pm Community Table at Ponds Church
6	12:00 pm Lunchtime Bible Study 7:30 pm Band practice
9	9:00 am Messiah Singers practice 10:00 am Worship 11:15 am Confirmation Class
13	10:30 am Executive Committee Meeting 12:00 pm Coffee and Conversation 7:30 pm Band practice
16	9:00 am Messiah Singers practice 10:00 am Worship
18	7:30 pm Church Council Meeting
20	12:00 pm Lunchtime Bible Study 7:30 pm Band practice
23	10:00 am Worship 11:15 am Anniversary Committee Meeting
27	1:00-5:00 pm Oakland Pride Festival 12:00 pm Coffee and Conversation 7:30 pm Band practice
30	10:00 am Worship

SUMMER 2024

Created to Be

CROSS  ROADS
CAMP AND RETREAT CENTER

YOUTH CAMP 1	JULY 7-12
ADVENTURE CAMP	JULY 7-12
HIGH SCHOOL WEEK	JULY 7-12
YOUTH CAMP 2	JULY 14-19
YOUTH CAMP 3 (CURTAINS UP)	JULY 21-26
LEADERS IN TRAINING	JULY 21 - AUGUST 9
YOUTH CAMP 4	JULY 28 - AUGUST 2
SEEK (2 WEEK PROGRAM)	JULY 28 - AUGUST 9
YOUTH CAMP 5 (ARTIST IN RESIDENCE)	AUGUST 4-9
FAMILY CAMP	AUGUST 11-16
FAMILY CAMP WEEKEND	AUGUST 16-18



REGISTER ONLINE
www.crossroadsretreat.com

SAVE THE DATE

OAKLAND PRIDE FESTIVAL

June 23, 2024 1-5pm

**A day to celebrate joy and community with
music, art, local organizations and more.**

All ages

Reprinted from the NEWSLETTER Newsletter

OPEN HANDS

Liturgical scholar Balthasar Fischer (1912-2001) shared an “a-ha” realization about the significance of praying with open, outstretched hands, an ancient practice. The opposite gesture, a closed fist, is used to threaten others or even inflict violence. We also grasp things in closed fists, refusing to let go, to share, to hold gently or loosely.

When we pray with open hands, Fischer explained, we’re saying before God that we renounce “all highhandedness, all pride in [our] own sufficiency, all violence.” We hold up our empty hands to God, saying, “I have nothing that I have not received from you, nothing that you have not placed in my empty hands. Therefore I do not keep a frantic hold on anything you have given me; therefore, too, I desire not to strike and hurt but only to give and to spread happiness and joy.”

MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH

A faithful, serving community

joyfully sharing Christ’s love.

228 Ramapo Valley Road

Oakland, New Jersey 07436

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

SUNDAY WORSHIP
10:00 am Worship Service

In-person, live-streamed and
posted on YouTube

