

The Messenger

Messiah Lutheran Church

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

The Rev. Courtney Smith Westerlund, Pastor

Church phone: 201-337-4900

Email: messiahoaklandnj@verizon.net

NUMBER 3

SUNDAY WORSHIP

Worship Service: 10:00am

In-person, live Streamed and on YouTube

May and June 2025

From the Pastor

Intention & Action

Stranger & Neighbor

Faith & Works

Rest & Growth

Lost & Found

Righteousness & Mercy

Shouting & Silence

Power & Humility

Acceptance & Resistance

Grief & Hope

Doubt & Belief

These are some of the many opposites and binaries we navigate in our faith lives that our Lenten theme: "Everything [in] Between" invited us to ponder. I found the invitation to navigate these ideas with more faith, intention, and openness to be transformed enlightening, freeing, and insightful while helping me deepen my own relationship with God and scripture. Rather than focusing so heavily on one binary or the other, we are invited to see how God is in and between these ideas, allowing us to expand our understanding of who God is and how God works in the world.

When we free ourselves from binaries that seek to divide us, we begin to see how God creates in spectrums and invites us to live in between as our authentic selves. We begin to recognize the ways we can hold both rest and growth, shouting and silence, grief and hope, doubt and belief in tension with each other and with the grace to navigate between at different stages of life.

As human beings, we so often want easy answers rather than sit in the difficult, often uncomfortable questions. When we sit with the ways God is working between everything and not just in the opposites and binaries, we start to become more comfortable with the unknown. I've found that in those spaces of unknown, it can be hard to sit in the silence and listen to God, and yet that is exactly where God is inviting us to be. How can we see everyone around us as both a stranger and a neighbor – treating them fairly and justly with kindness and mercy? How is God calling us to embrace righteousness and mercy for the benefit of all of God's creation? Where are we invited to challenge the binaries of acceptance and resistance in favor of a way forward together?

When we sit in the discomfort, the silence, and the in-betweens, we can start to acknowledge God's presence all around us – not just in the binaries, but through everything in between. I hope this theme and these ideas continue to influence and impact your faith and relationship with our beautiful, inclusive, and diverse God.

Peace,
Pastor Courtney

What's Happening at Messiah

May 3rd: Car Wash Fundraiser at 10am, see page # 4
Property Workday

May 4th: Game Time, see page #3

May 5th: Community Table at Ponds, see page #4

May 8th: Executive Committee Meeting

May 19th: Book Club - Remarkably Bright Creatures
by Shelby Van Pelt, see page #3

May 20th: Church Council Meeting on Zoom

May 25th: Herb Curb, see page #3

June 2nd: Community Table at Ponds, see page #4

June 5th: Executive Committee Meeting

June 7th: Property Workday

June 8th: Coffee Hour Discussion Perzin Funds, see
page #4

June 16th: Book Club - The Color Purple by Alice
Walker, see page #3

June 17th: Church Council Meeting on Zoom

June 22nd: Sundaes on Sunday, see page #3

Church Council Highlights

- On March 23, at a special congregational meeting, the congregation unanimously approved the motion to pay off the mortgage on the parsonage with money from the Perzin funds.
- Pastor Courtney has a very well-planned Family Leave Plan that she has shared with the Council, which leaves us very well covered and feeling confident in our knowledge of worship and general church operations. It is a Google Doc that is available to all Council Members and Ashley in the office. Please reach out if you have any questions.
- \$1,000 in Thrivent Choice Dollars will be moved into the Youth account.
- The Impact Award to be presented by Messiah Lutheran Church is a \$500 award, open to all Indian Hills graduating seniors, regardless of GPA, seeking further education beyond high school, such as colleges or trade schools. The applicant's essay should describe a way they have a positive impact following their passion, describe a service project, or describe something they are passionate about and why.
- Messiah in Action: 56 Thrivent water and solar light kits were put together in the last month.
- The mortgage was paid off on April 7th! The final payoff was \$73,938.39. We moved 50K from Vanguard to pay it off; the rest was in our Columbia account. Every quarter, we will review the money at Colombia Bank to decide if any of it should be moved to Vanguard.
- Keep an eye out for more information about a special Mother's Day and Father's Day way to honor our loved ones. Please see page #4.

Fellowship

Game Time

Sunday, May 4th

Join us for an afternoon of games and fun starting at noon on Sunday May 4th. Come play one of our games, play some cards or bring your own game. Light snacks will be provided, or you can bring a sandwich. Bring a friend and all ages are welcome.

Youth Going Forward

If you are able to set up a bowling day following church or something our Sunday School might like to do, it would be appreciated so we can have 2-4 parents or so set up things going forward. Some funds are available to assist with cost. Let's help our kids develop relationships and hang out. Many hands make light work.

Book Club Updates

We had a lively discussion about Beloved by Toni Morrison on Monday, April 21st; however, as some of us were unable to finish reading the book, we thought we might like to revisit this book in the fall. Eleanore had mentioned that she used CliffsNotes to aid her in her reading this time; and we all decided that was the way to go. Let's all read the book for September or October's club date along with the CliffsNotes and/or SparkNotes to help us comprehend this book a little better. Michelle has thankfully agreed to present the book and lead the discussion, actual date T/B/D. We all thought it was a beautiful book, but it was very difficult to get through.

We are moving forward with plans for Book Club for the following months. We will be meeting via Zoom on the 3rd Monday of each month. The following list includes the books we have scheduled to read for May and June:

- May 19 Remarkably Bright Creatures by Shelby Van Pelt
- June 16 The Color Purple by Alice Walker

Please contact Valerie Nicolosi with any questions and/or suggestions for books to read! Our discussions are always fun and interesting.

Sundaes on Sunday

Sundae Sunday will be June 22nd marking the end of Sunday School and another school year for our children (and parents too!) Look for a sign-up sheet in the narthex with a listing of all the goodies you might like to bring. This event was a real hit last year for both young and old (or getting older) congregants.

Movie Nights

Keep an eye out for an evening movie over the summer. No date has been set but details will be available once we have them.

Garden Updates

Herb Curb

On Sunday, May 25th, during Sunday School we will redo the area near the entrance, some of which was torn up from the new garden fence. We hope to have it all deer resistant to mulch it to make maintenance easier. It'll be nice flowers for pollinators that will come for the lavender blossoms and stay for the zucchini flowers to make the garden more productive. It isn't something that needs to be done the following year since I hope to plant mostly perennials or plants that will reseed. Any questions please contact Linda Axtell.

Outreach

May 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. We are accredited by the American Camp Association. 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.

June Benevolence of the Month:

Strengthen Our Sisters

Strengthen Our Sisters is a shelter and supportive service program for women and their dependent children who are experiencing homelessness due to domestic violence. They are the largest shelter organization dedicated to serving the most underserved and vulnerable population in northern New Jersey. Strengthen Our Sisters services include a 24-hour hotline, emergency shelter, individual and group counseling, legal, housing, and social service advocacy, bilingual services, childcare, transportation, employment training and advocacy, parenting classes, support groups, stress management groups, community education, and information & referrals.

Wash Away Hunger Car Wash Fundraiser

On Saturday, May 3rd, from 10am - 2pm, we will be partnering with Ponds and St Alban's to host a car wash. All proceeds will be split between our various ministries to fight hunger. We need volunteers beyond washing cars so if you think manning the snack table is your speed, we can use your special talent. Look for the sign-up at church.

It is also the day of the Oakland town-wide garage sale and we've been added to the map. If you have some items you would like to donate to the cause, bring them to church on Sunday April 27th or the day of and we'll mark it for sale. Any items left will be donated to various charities.

Special Coffee Hour Discussion

The June 8th coffee hour will be devoted to hearing your ideas for the distribution of funds acquired from the sale of the Perzin property. As good stewards of the bounty we have received, we will be tithing, giving 10% of what we have received, to organizations and projects that need our support. The Council's plan is to donate \$5,000 per year for the next ten years to a variety of projects both large and small. Eleanore Orman and Valerie Nicolosi have met as members of this committee and are seeking the congregation's input. We want to be able to explore ways Messiah can be helpful in our community and the world beyond. If you have any questions, please speak to Valerie or Eleanore. Please think about your priorities for these funds and join us on June 8th after worship.

Ponds Community Table

May 5th and June 2nd from 6:00 – 8:00 pm

Join the Ponds Food Pantry for a community dinner on the first Monday every month. This is a great opportunity to gather with our local community and share a free meal together. If you haven't seen the food pantry, be sure to check it out and bring your donations to share!

Thank you to the members of Messiah who gave generous donations of hams, money, and food during Lent. We were able to share 65 Easter Dinner Kits with our pantry guests in the two weeks prior to Easter! In addition, over 50 Easter baskets were assembled by parents and grandparents who are in need. Your support of the pantry is allowing us to have more food on our shelves while serving over 25 families each week. We are seeing new people come to the pantry for food each week. We are looking for new volunteers to work at the pantry. Please contact Michele Weintraub, Director of Food Security Services, at pantrydirector@pondsnj.org for more information.

We are hosting a Spring Cleaning Campaign in May and June to collect cleaning supplies for our pantry guests, knowing a cleaner home is a healthier home. You may drop cleaning supplies in the grocery cart at church, and they will be delivered to the pantry.

Currently the Most Needed Items at the pantry are toilet paper, paper towels, tissues, bar soap, body wash, shampoo, deodorant, ketchup, mayonnaise, canned chicken, canned ravioli, canned chili, and snacks for children.

All are welcome, all are fed! Come out and join us.

To stay up to date on these events, follow
[@ponds_pantrycommunity](https://twitter.com/ponds_pantrycommunity)

Summer Hymn Madness

This summer we are using Hymn Lotto to fundraise for our Benevolences of the Month: Strengthen Our Sisters and ELCA Global Mission. Each week, favorite hymns from the congregation that have been submitted over the last 3 summers will be lined up against each other in competition. Each week, you have the ability to decide which hymn will be the closing hymn for the day by dropping donations into a bucket for each hymn. The collection will run from the close of worship one week to the beginning of worship the next week. After voting has closed, the hymn that raised the most money will be sung as the sending hymn!

Voting begins Sunday, June 15th with the first match up on June 22nd

- June 22nd: Pass it On vs. Shout to the Lord
- June 29th: When Peace Like a River vs. Just as I Am Without One Plea

Don't worry, the hymns that don't win will be used for Summer Songs and Scripture in August! We hope this Summer Hymn Madness is a fun way to raise money for some of our favorite charities while giving you the chance to sing some of your favorite hymns.

Special Program for Mother's Day

As a way to honor your mother, grandmother, godmother, aunt or other special woman in your life, we'd like to have a special bulletin insert on Mother's Day with a list of your loved ones who are either a presence in your life now or someone you hold dear in your heart and memory. If you would like, you may make a donation of \$1.00 per name (or whatever amount you wish) which will go to Pastor Courtney's Discretionary Fund. Please mark your check or envelope with a notation of "Mother's Day" to assist our counters. Forms for names to include will be in the bulletins. The deadline for the inclusion of your chosen names will be May 4th. We will also do the same special bulletin for Father's Day for all the special men in your lives.

Thrivent Members Action Teams

We are well into 2025 and using lots of Thrivent Action Teams to help make ministry happen. Thank you to the Boyce, Ludke, Angermueller, Axtell, Orman, and Rubner families for applying for action teams already. The \$250 seed money is invaluable to our ministry and work here at Messiah. The application is easy, and we can help you out. These Thrivent Action Teams are essential to helping making ministry at Messiah thrive! If you have an idea for a ministry project, please let Pastor or Eleanore know. 2025 Action Teams are Supporting our ministry through:

- Outreach: Souper Bowl Collection, Ponds Food Pantry – Souls to Souls, Garden Seedling Project, Game Night(s)
- Faith Formation: Bible Study Materials, Lent Programming, Council Retreat, Game Night(s)
- That's an extra \$2,000 helping the community and our congregation!

2025 Congregation Star Word: Justice

We continue to learn about our Star Word "Justice" and the ways it guides our ministry and mission as people of Christ. Justice is defined as maintenance or administration of what is just and right.

Social Justice: The view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities. The term was first introduced in the mid-1800's by Italian Jesuit Luigi Tapparelli d'Azeglio after seeing extreme levels of inequality and distress caused by the social class system in Europe. He coined the term to say that we should not only do the right thing but strive to do what is necessary for the betterment of others.
(<https://onlinedegrees.kent.edu/blog/five-principles-of-social-justice>)

Elements of social justice focus on:

- Access: ensuring all people have access to the same goods and services like education, health care, financial assistance
- Equity: implementing fair and impartial opportunities for all people and making the necessary accommodation to reduce systemic barriers
- Diversity: embracing and uplifting God's beautiful and diverse creation without barriers and divisions
- Participation: allowing and encouraging all people to have opportunities and platforms in making policies that affect their well-being
- Human Rights: fundamental rights all people should have regardless of sex, race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, etc.

What does it mean to be woke? In the recent years the term "woke" has been used to refer to people who are engaged in social justice. While it has been used

in a negative and mean way, I want to take a moment to define it for you. To be "woke" means to be awakened to the needs of others, to be well informed, thoughtful, compassionate, humble, and kind. Someone who is "woke" is eager to make the world a better place for all people. This is nothing new! Using the definition, Jesus was woke – he was eager to make the world around him look more like the Kingdom of God, where all needs are met, all are cared for, and all have what they need!

Many of our outreach projects at Messiah focus on social justice and creating opportunities for others. Advocacy is one of the biggest ways we can take our work from helping folks temporarily to changing their lives for the better. In a recent workshop, I was reminded that stages of discipleship span from helping at the food pantry to serving community meals, but also includes the need to contact our legislators to advocate for funding for food stamps and feeding programs.

Family Leave Update

We pray for Pastor Courtney and Jonathan and give thanks for the birth of Oliver Thomas. During this time of family leave, here are a few things you may be curious about

Pastoral Emergencies: Rev. Kimberly Schmidt Cooper from St. Timothy in Wayne is coordinating pastoral coverage with the help of Lutheran pastors in our area. Her contact information is available from the church office, or you can email or call Pastor Courtney, and the phone number is in the "away message". Should you need pastoral assistance, you can call this number at any time. As a secondary option, you can also reach out Pastor Nathan Busker of Ponds Reformed Church to see if he is available to assist you.

Worship: Worship will happen every Sunday, but each week will look different. We encourage you to come to church every Sunday and support the lay and guest worship leaders of our congregation.

May 4th: Easter Songs and Scripture

May 11th: Lay Preacher Nick DeRoda

May 18th: Rev. Maristela Freiberg, NJ Synod

May 25th: Rev. Fred Lentz

June 1st: Rev. Scott Schatzenbach

June 8th: Rev. Fred Lentz

June 15th: Holy Trinity Songs and Scripture

June 22nd: Rev. Sarah Lilja, NJ Synod

June 29th: Lay Preacher Eleanore Orman

Budget Report

Below is a recap of church expenses as of March 2025. Please prayerfully consider how you can support our ministry with your offerings. Thank you.

Regards,
Alex Boyce
Treasurer

Summary for the Executive Committee Meeting							
Month End: March 2025							
OPERATING INCOME & EXPENSES							
Monthly				YTD			
	Budget	Actual	Variance	Budget	Actual	Variance	
INCOME (+)							
Ministry at Messiah	17,680.59	17,338.84	(341.75)	53,041.76	56,616.21	3,574.45	
Mission Support	708.33	1,002.00	293.67	3,124.99	2,652.48	(472.51)	
Total	18,388.92	18,340.84	(48.08)	56,166.75	59,268.69	3,101.94	
EXPENSES (-)							
Ministry at Messiah	17,500.10	16,077.71	(1,422.39)	50,085.57	50,092.15	6.58	
Mission Support	2,154.17	2,413.33	259.16	7,662.51	7,103.47	(559.04)	
Total	19,654.27	18,491.04	(1,163.23)	57,748.08	57,195.62	(552.46)	
TOTAL	(1,265.35)	(150.20)		(1,581.33)	2,073.07		

Reprinted from the NEWSLETTER Newsletter

During his earthly ministry, Jesus could be physically present in only one place at any given time. "Only those could speak to him who came to where he was," explained Archbishop William Temple. "If he was in Galilee, people could not find him in Jerusalem; if he was in Jerusalem, they could not find him in Galilee" (from *Readings in St. John's Gospel*).

Spiritually speaking, Christ's Ascension means he is with us wherever we find ourselves. Christ desires to be present with us everywhere we go. His presence is universal. He is here now. "Believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory" (1 Timothy 3:16, NRSV) — that is what the Ascension affirms.



SUNDAY WORSHIP

10:00 am Worship Service

In-person, live-streamed and
posted on YouTube

May 2025

May 2025							June 2025						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31					29	30					

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<div>Monday</div> <div>28</div>	<div>Tuesday</div> <div>29</div> <div>6:30pm AA Meeting</div>	<div>Wednesday</div> <div>30</div>	<div>Thursday</div> <div>May 1</div> <div>12:00pm Bible Study</div> <div>7:30pm Band Practice</div>	<div>Friday</div> <div>2</div>	<div>Saturday</div> <div>3</div> <div>Property Work Day</div> <div>10:00am Car Wash Fundraiser</div>
<div>Monday</div> <div>5</div> <div>6:00pm Community Table: Ponds Reformed Church, 341 Ramapo Valley Road, Oakland NJ 07436</div>	<div>Tuesday</div> <div>6</div> <div>6:30pm AA Meeting</div>	<div>Wednesday</div> <div>7</div>	<div>Thursday</div> <div>8</div> <div>10:30am Executive Committee</div> <div>7:30pm Band Practice</div>	<div>Friday</div> <div>9</div>	<div>Saturday</div> <div>10</div>
<div>Monday</div> <div>12</div>	<div>Tuesday</div> <div>13</div> <div>6:30pm AA Meeting</div>	<div>Wednesday</div> <div>14</div>	<div>Thursday</div> <div>15</div> <div>12:00pm Bible Study</div> <div>7:30pm Band Practice</div>	<div>Friday</div> <div>16</div>	<div>Saturday</div> <div>17</div> <div>Cross Roads Opening Day</div>
<div>Monday</div> <div>19</div> <div>7:00pm Book Club - "Remarkably Bright Creatures" by Shelby Van Pelt</div>	<div>Tuesday</div> <div>20</div> <div>6:30pm AA Meeting</div> <div>7:30pm Council Meeting on Zoom</div>	<div>Wednesday</div> <div>21</div>	<div>Thursday</div> <div>22</div> <div>7:30pm Band Practice</div>	<div>Friday</div> <div>23</div>	<div>Saturday</div> <div>24</div>
<div>Monday</div> <div>26</div> <div>Memorial Day (USA)</div> <div>Office Closed</div>	<div>Tuesday</div> <div>27</div> <div>John Calvin, renewer of the church, died 1564</div> <div>6:30pm AA Meeting</div>	<div>Wednesday</div> <div>28</div>	<div>Thursday</div> <div>29</div> <div>Ascension of Our Lord</div> <div>7:30pm Band Practice</div>	<div>Friday</div> <div>30</div>	<div>Saturday</div> <div>31</div> <div>Visit of Mary to Elizabeth</div>

June 2025

June 2025							July 2025						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Today of Easter Fellowship	2 6:00pm Community Table Ponds Reformed Church, 341 Ramapo Valley Road, Oakland NJ 07436	3 6:30pm AA Meeting	4	5 6:00pm NJ Synod Assembly, Hilton East Brunswick Hotel & Executive Meeting Center, 3 Tower Center Blvd, East Brunswick, NJ 08816, 1 4:00pm 10:30am Executive Committee Meeting 12:00pm Bible Study 7:30pm Band Practice	6 Independence Day (USA) Church Office Closed	7 Vigil of Pentecost Property Work Day
Pentecost Fellowship Bible Discussion	9 Awards Night for Indian Hills High School 6:30pm AA Meeting	10	11	12 7:30pm Band Practice	13	14
1st Sunday after Pentecost Fellowship	16 7:00pm Book Club - The Color Purple by Alice Walker	17 6:30pm AA Meeting 7:30pm Council Meeting on Zoom	18	19 June 19th (USA) Church Office Closed 7:30pm Band Practice	20	21
2nd Sunday after Pentecost Fellowship	23	24 Last Day of School - Oakland 6:30pm AA Meeting	25	26 7:30pm Band Practice	27	28
3rd Sunday after Pentecost Fellowship	30 Jul 1 6:30pm AA Meeting	2	3	4 Independence Day (USA) Church Office Closed	5	

