
Branches

Alexandria First Presbyterian Church

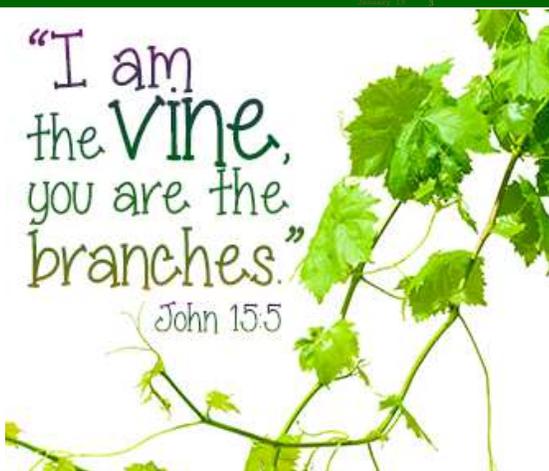
“I am the vine, you are the branches.”

September 2020

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Facebook: Alexandria First Presbyterian Church of Mount Pleasant
908-996-4333 churchoffice@alexpres.org www.alexpres.org

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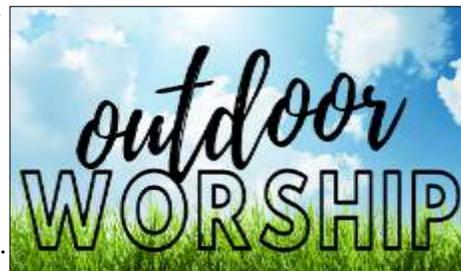
John 15:5



Dear friends,

A Note from Nick

In June I couldn't believe that summer had begun, and now as it is the end of August, I can't believe that summer is almost over! Where did the summer go? Is it really time for the kids to head back to school, and if so, what does that look like? Schools throughout the country have different approaches . . . some in-person, some virtual and some a mix of the two. I know many college age students have been heading back to campus, and local students will be heading back to school in the coming weeks . . . both in-person and virtually. My kids go back next week (Holland Township starts on the 31st), and will be attending class in-person for a full day, five days a week. Returning to school is a positive step in the right direction, although the school experience will certainly be very different. Students at Holland will be wearing masks, they will have their desks spaced out



6 feet and there is a whole slew of precautions and restrictions geared at keeping both the students and the staff safe. How will this work? Well, no one knows for sure. But we will find out in the coming weeks. I know my kids are mixed with a sense of both excitement and worry. Excited to see their friends again, and excited to be back with teachers and in the school that they know. But worried about wearing a mask, and worried about a virus that is unseen and scary.

As we deal with the mixed emotions of returning to school . . . we share many of these same conflicted emotions in other areas of our lives. Shopping or being out and about still carries risks and the need to wear masks and social distance remains. Quite simply, nothing is as it was back in February, and that includes church.

I know that many are enjoying the virtual worship services online. And yet, no matter how much you may enjoy it . . . it is still not the same as being in church with our church family! We all want to be back together again and our Session continues to take very seriously the issues surrounding our return to the sanctuary. Until it is completely safe to do so, our Session has decided that we will keep meeting virtually. However, we want to continue to take steps towards our return while trying some new ways of gathering. In July we met for a prayer gathering on a Sunday evening, and we will try the same thing this Sunday, August 30 at 4 p.m. This is simply an opportunity to gather and lift up joys and concerns—the way we normally do on a Sunday morning during worship. Because school is starting for many, we will also be doing a “Blessing of the Backpacks.” At this gathering we will pray for our students, teachers, parents and the school year ahead. Students (of all ages!) are encouraged to bring their backpacks for a time of prayer!

Next month, we are planning an outdoor worship service for September 13th at 10 a.m. We will gather in the parking lot . . . so bring chairs and remember to wear your mask! This will serve as our Rally Day and even though it won't be a traditional worship service, or a regular Rally Day . . . it will be *soooo* great to be together again as we worship God!

Please plan to join us for both of these opportunities and remember to worship online each week. Yes, church may look and feel different right now, but God is still at work and the Spirit is alive and active at AFPC!

Your friend,

Pastor Nick

TOGETHER

again

Outdoor Worship
Sunday, September 13
10 a.m.

It's been a long time since we were together to
WORSHIP IN PERSON!

Session has authorized having an outdoor worship

It will be outdoors in the church parking lot

Bring chairs

Wear masks

And stay tuned for more exciting details!

For where

TWO OR THREE

GATHER

IN MY NAME

I am with them

Matt 18:20



Tending the Flock

How to Reach Rev. Nick Hatch

- Through the church office Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. 908-996-4333
- By the church's website on the "contact us" link: www.alexpres.org
- Via his email: nhatch@alexpres.org

Join Us in Worship

Join us for an online worship experience each Sunday at 10 a.m. by accessing our website or Facebook. This Sunday's service, and several of the most recent are also available 24/7.

Baptisms

Baptism is the visible sign of an invisible event: the reconciliation of people to God. We rejoice with those who are celebrating their baptism anniversary this month. It was in September that John Leslie McDowall, Tanner Ike McGuire, Matthew Joseph Pardonner, and Jenna Rose Schostkewitz were baptized. Congratulations and blessings upon being a child of God!

You Can Help

Hurricane Isaias

The Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) is keeping a close eye on hurricanes Laura and Marco. They are also monitoring fallout from hurricanes Hanna and Isaias. They are in communication with Presbyterian leadership in Puerto Rico, as well as our partners in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, the Bahamas, and the U.S. presbyteries on the mainland. Please join us in praying for the affected communities. To support our response to the hurricanes, gifts can be designated to DR000194. Visit <https://pma.pcusa.org/donate/make-a-gift/gift-info/DR000194>



Covid-19

PDA pulled 2.7 million dollars from reserves to seed the Covid-19 ongoing response both in the United States and internationally. These are funds that have been given by donors to PDA's general fund, meant to meet the response needs of disasters small or large that are not able to be funded by special appeals. We are incredibly grateful to donors, past and continuing, who trusted PDA enough to designate their funds to the PDA general disaster account. This is where the bulk of our reserve for COVID-19 is being drawn from.

To support this response to the pandemic, visit <https://pma.pcusa.org/donate/make-a-gift/gift-info/DR000148> and donate your gift to DR000148.

September Birthdays

2 Emily Fennell	11 Arianna Scurti	20 Meredith Oliver	25 David Grossmueller
Alice Hansen	13 LuAnn Keefe	23 Holland Fritsche	Grant MacWilliam
Ed Muztafago	14 Chris Vogel	24 Kyle Hedden	26 Nick Hatch
3 Scott Moran	19 Roger Schneider	Barb McLaren	Laura Strangfeld
10 Gillian Cascio	20 Darren Kluesner	Chris Stagg	27 Tyler Bender
			Deb Czerna

Lunch Bunch

We had such a nice time during our most recent gathering of the Lunch Bunch. Clear weather, great friendships, and good Christian love was shared by those in attendance in our socially compliant church parking lot under the shade of the giant elm tree.

Be on the lookout for the next date and plan on joining us!



Songs, Scripture, Coronavirus Conversations

How Group Sessions Help ARCP Soldiers Recover and Overcome

The COVID-19 pandemic has canceled so many activities, but it has also propelled people to take initiative and be resourceful. That's precisely what occurred when two United Service Organization, Inc. (USO) groups were canceled, prompting, to lead the groups virtually so that Soldiers could still participate. The Army Recovery Care Program takes a closer look at this story in the fourth article in the Adapting to COVID-19 Series.

Adaptive Reconditioning Support Specialist Philip Rackham said that Soldiers assigned to the SRU at Fort Belvoir consistently participated in the Bible Study and Spiritual Diversity groups until the COVID-19 pandemic forced the USO to close. In the former, attendees study the Bible. Per Recreational Therapist Joby Lefever, while in the latter they experience their spirituality through a variety of topics and discussions. McDowall explained that they reflect on different aspects of life and offer support.

"Bible Study and Spiritual Diversity have been important elements to the recovery of Spc. McDowall and many other Soldiers," Rackham said.

McDowall worked with Lefever to hold the group sessions virtually via the SRU's adaptive reconditioning program, which helps Soldiers return to active lifestyles. It's a part of ARCP, which supports wounded, ill and injured Soldiers, their families and caregivers as they transition back to the force or to veteran status.

They started the Bible Study group and added the Spiritual Diversity group when Soldiers requested it. Lefever explained that they co-lead weekly sessions that usually welcome three to four participants. McDowall selects the topics, writes lessons and facilitates discussions. "All of the credit goes to Spc. McDowall; I'm just the portal," Lefever said.

When writing lessons, McDowall draws inspiration from her church at home. She also incorporates topics from everyday life because she's found that they create the most engaging conversations. Past topics range from song lyrics, to the COVID-19 pandemic, to finding joy in the little things and how materialism interferes with their relationships with God.

Even when the COVID-19 pandemic isn't a discussion topic, it still impacts sessions. The virtual groups are very small, which McDowall enjoys, but she hopes they will grow. She recalled that Soldiers sometimes stayed after in-person sessions to talk or eat, but that isn't possible now.

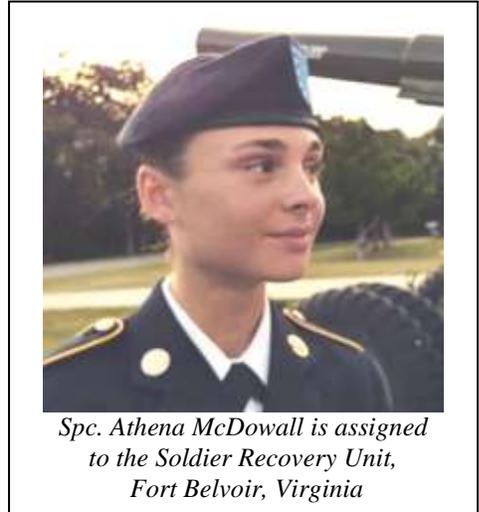
"It's still a wonderful thing to be able to do," McDowall said. The sessions allow Soldiers to vent within a close group and share a sense of community and belonging, she added.

Sgt. 1st Class Berdi Cekic has served for 37 years as a drill instructor, observer and trainer for drivers of mine-resistant, ambush protected, armored vehicles (MRAP). The Bible Study and Spiritual Diversity groups have been part of his recovery since he was assigned to the SRU. He said that when he first arrived at Fort Belvoir, the sessions helped him cope with being away from home because the group cares about each other and studies the Bible. "It was really helpful for me," Cekic said.

He tries to attend as often as he can because the groups have been beneficial during the COVID-19 pandemic. "It's good to join in and to encourage others too," Cekic said.

The groups also have been an important part of McDowall's recovery process. Lefever stated that leading a group has

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Spc. Athena McDowall is assigned to the Soldier Recovery Unit, Fort Belvoir, Virginia

Songs, Scripture, Coronavirus Conversations (cont'd)

such a positive impact on a Soldier's recovery. Moreover, McDowall enjoys leading the sessions and was surprised when so many people thanked her for what she was doing. "I'm just thankful that they are able to come and enjoy the experience as well," she said.

McDowall found that the groups have helped her form friendships and bonds with other Soldiers. They also help her refocus and gain a more positive mindset. "While these groups do not have a direct physical impact on my health, I believe that having a more healthy mental state of mind really helps to make you feel more energized physically, which allows me to feel more focused and have the ability to stay productive throughout the week," McDowall said.

Soldiers have told Lefever that groups like these may not have been high on their priority list before they arrived at the SRU, but that they have strengthened their faith. In fact, some Soldiers who have transitioned and are no longer at the SRU are still connected to and interact with the groups, she said. "I think that in the time of coronavirus or COVID-19, and with everything going on, it was a beacon of hope for the Soldiers, especially those that attended." Lefever said. "It was a little sense of community."

Adaptive reconditioning programs provide activities and sports that help wounded, ill and injured Soldiers to optimize their wellbeing, achieve their goals and return to active lifestyles. Through these virtual programs, Soldiers can continue classes and programs and try new ones. During the COVID-19 pandemic, an average of 350 AR activities are offered at 14 SRUs across the country every week.

Story by Christine Aurigema, Army Recovery Care Program

Labor Day Origin

The first observance of Labor Day is believed to have been a parade of 10,000 workers on Sept. 5, 1882, in New York City, organized by Peter J. McGuire, a Carpenters and Joiners Union secretary. By 1893, more than half the states were observing "Labor Day" on one day or another, and Congress passed a bill to establish a federal holiday in 1894. President Grover Cleveland signed the bill soon afterward, designating the first Monday in September as Labor Day.

Labor Day Prayer

O God, through human labors you continually perfect the immense work of your creation. Listen to the prayers of your people, and grant to everyone employment that calls us to our best and unite us with each other, so that we can serve our brothers and sisters, and your world, through our work. This we ask through your Son Jesus Christ, who lives in unity with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

Amen.

