

Council Corner

Happy fall to all! At our September Worship and Music Committee meeting, Pastor Woody, Bob Jones, Leanna, and I had a lively discussion about the next three months of our collective ministry here at St. Paul. (Yes, you are all part of that, too.) As committee members we are aware of the tendency to “fast forward” to Advent and Christmas, but that would clearly be a serious mistake, just as it is a “mistake” to focus on Halloween displays in mid-September or Christmas decorations the day after Halloween. *Don't worry—I'm not going to ramble on about the unique aspects of each holiday and our need to preserve that uniqueness.* This month's column will focus more on the understanding of the fall church observances and our need to celebrate and educate ourselves about them at the appropriate time and for the right reasons.

Still, for our committee, it really isn't too early to be discussing Christmas Eve worship and how we will address Christmas Day service (Christmas falls on a Sunday this year). If there are worship supplies to be ordered, it is better to try to get them now before the publishing houses are flooded with requests. We also agreed that the Christmas Eve service would be at 7:00 pm, as it was last year. Because we have many older worshippers who will not drive at night, we will have a Sunday service on Christmas Day; it will be modeled after the King's College Cambridge Festival of Lessons and Carols, which is usually presented on the Sunday after Christmas (or “Letdown Sunday,” as many pastors jokingly call it). New Year's Day will provide the first opportunity for Communion in 2023.

Before we move beyond the planning for Christmas, it's important to address our response to Halloween. As we know, Halloween is “All Hallow's Evening” in preparation for All Saint's Day. With all the costumes, candy, haunted houses, and parties, Halloween is a great opportunity to attract young people and families to our churches. With that as a backdrop, St. Paul will be hosting a “Trunk or Treat” event on Saturday, October 29. Although we don't have many families with young children at this time, Halloween is a natural time to reach out to the community with open hands (and open candy bags). In addition, Pocono Township will be hosting a community Halloween party on Sunday afternoon, October 30.

But let's not "fast forward" through October to get to Halloween. Through our German roots and European heritage, there is a far more significant observance to be recognized—Harvest Home. According to Robert Woods's excellent historical piece on the religious celebration of the harvest season ("Harvest Home," Goschenhoppen Historians, Inc.; Green Lane, PA), 18th century Germanic immigrants brought their celebrations of the harvest to eastern Pennsylvania. Depending upon their individual churches, harvest festivals with pumpkins, cornstalks, and abundant produce were celebrated sometime between early July and mid-October. We trace our roots to such festivals through the 1858 hymn "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come," and, if we want to go farther back in history, the term *Harvest Home* can be traced to the Celtic and Saxon traditions of the end of the grain harvest.

Today, some of that significance has faded for a variety of reasons. We aren't an agrarian society any more, and family farms of substantial size are mostly a feature of the past in this area (replaced by consumer warehouses that blight the countryside!). One of the reasons for the disappearance of traditional Harvest Home festivals is that the minister's family suddenly found itself burdened with the prospect of canning all of the bounty provided to supplement the pastor's salary. *Imagine receiving more than half of your salary in produce and then having to preserve it for use over the winter—all in the span of a week or two.* (As a point of reference, when we were preparing to celebrate the 175th anniversary of St. Paul Tannersville in 2009, we found records from the 1950's showing that some of our congregants lovingly supplemented their offerings to the church by providing produce for the pastor's family—mainly potatoes and apples.)

Next month we'll discuss some of the traditions of Reformation Sunday, Christ the King Sunday, and the Thanksgiving holiday and the important work that the food pantry does in providing a festive, bountiful meal to those in need. To close this month's column, here are the familiar words of Dr. Henry Alford's well-known harvest hymn:

Come, ye thankful people come / Raise the song of harvest home!

All is safely gathered in / Ere the winter storms begin;

God, our Maker, doth provide / For our wants to be supplied;

Come to God's own temple, come / Raise the song of harvest home!

Here are the highlights from the September 15 Council meeting. Council authorized:

1. Pure Water Systems' estimates for permanent repair of our water system
2. a blood drive request from Linda Carrasquillo
3. possible repairs to the men's bathroom near the parlor
4. Life Line Screening rental of Spies Hall on 1/4/23
5. AA District Fall Workshop on 11/19/22
6. Trunk or Treat event on 10/29/22
7. Eagle Court of Honor (Merritt family) on 11/26/22
8. Food Pantry and Harvest Home food drives
9. additional work on the St. Paul Emergency Plan
10. Performance of the Bach and Handel Chorale of Jim Thorpe on 12/10/22
11. GoDaddy email migration to synchronize with our phone system

Any questions or comments? Contact Bill Below or any Council member