# **MESSENGER JUNE 2025**

**Two BIRDS** (PART 2 OF 3)

#### THE SECOND BIRD

"What do we do about current immigration issues?" This is a question one of you asked me a little over a month ago, and since then, I've been thinking quite a bit about this question, as I'm sure many of you have been, too. Before I get to addressing this question, though, I first

and foremost want to thank that person for asking what is a really important question for all of us to be considering and talking about. However, after looking through news reports about what's going on, talking about this with fellow

pastors, even watching an episode of HBO Max's Last Week Tonight with John Oliver where he covers the topic of Trump's deportation plan, I must confess that this is a very difficult question to answer. Even if I had a doctoral degree in this area (something I hope to pursue as soon as I am allowed), this would still be a very difficult question to answer. However, like I said, this is a very important question, and I want to give you all some of my thoughts on the topic not

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fostering open dialogue about hard topics like this. That being said, before we can deal with a potential solution (a solution that helps to solve the issue of the Church's decline which I addressed in last

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month's newsletter), there are certain things that need to be understood about this question.

First and foremost, there is no totally "solving" this problem. Racism and/or xenophobia (under which immigration issues would fall), sexism, homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia, all of these and more are problems that cannot be "solved" in the fullest sense of that word. For better or worse, humans have always been great at splitting each other up into "us" and "them." (Two Birds continued on page 2)

that they might be definitive answers but

June 25

# (Two Birds continued from page 1)

As such, these various "issues" that have existed, presently exist, and likely will continue to exist throughout time and space are in fact symptoms of a greater problem: our deep-seeded hatred and/or fear of the "other" that arises out of human sinfulness. This separation of "us" and "them" then only finds further acceptance when the suffering of those we label as "them" means prosperity for those who are a part of "us," an argument made by the Rev. Dr. Debra Mumford at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and that makes sense. Who among us, despite Jesus' call to "take up our crosses," doesn't want to avoid suffering, right? However, in thinking about this in regards to "our prosperity resulting from others' suffering," the truth of the matter is that we as God's people can never truly prosper if even a fraction of us are suffering, especially when that suffering is at the hands of another, be it directly or indirectly. Therefore, for us to truly prosper, all of God's Children must prosper, too, which then leads us to the other factor we must understand and consider.

Secondly, to "solve" this issue (and I use this term "solve" loosely), we need to set aside our "side" on this matter. Whether a person identifies as a Republican Capitalist, a Democratic Socialist, a Communist, or something else entirely, these labels actually hold no meaning in this matter, because what we have before us is no longer just a political issue. We are not dealing with simply the legality of someone's status as a US citizen. What we are dealing with, in fact, is a human issue because the issue at hand is the classification of others as "less than"; less than human, less than American, less than

worthy of basic human decency, less than worthy of due process. In the case of Abrego Garcia, what we have is a legal immigrant being deported illegally followed up by a blatant disregard of court orders from our nation's highest court in refusing to bring him back. To be clear, this is no longer an immigration issue; this is a human issue. As such, we as Christians need to realize that if/when we become complacent in the face of such

Tuesday, the
Department of Homeland
Security (DHS) asked a
judge to dismiss a lawsuit
filed by Kilmar Abrego
Garcia, the El Salvadoran
who was deported in
March. The Trump



Administration is arguing that the court has no jurisdiction to force his return to the United States.

Garcia and his family sued after he was removed from the U.S. despite a prior immigration court order granting him withholding of removal to El Salvador due to gang-related threats to his safety.

The Supreme Court previously ruled that the Trump administration must "facilitate" Garcia's return.

President Donald Trump claims that Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele has declined to release him from a detention center.

an egregious disregard for justice, human rights, and basic decency, what we are doing is choosing to ignore, if not deny, the fact that "all persons are made in God's image" and even more so are deciding not to do as Christ commands us (Two Birds continued on page 3)

(Two Birds continued from page 2) to do in "loving others as I have loved you." Therefore, a big step towards "solving" this issue is seeing it for what it truly is and realizing that both what is happening and how we react to it affects everyone.

In closing then, let us return to the

initial question: how do we "solve" these

issues that presently stand before us? The

short answer (or "the stone," which we will expand upon for next month) is we fall back on the Bible. Very truly, these issues of racism, xenophobia, etc. were as much issues for people in the Bible's day as for us because the people who lived out the Biblical narrative, just as much Children of God as we are, also feared and hated the "other." Why else would Jesus have picked a Samaritan when teaching about who our neighbor is? Why else would God have sent Paul and others out to preach to and gather in those outside the Jewish faith? Why else would the promise of "a new Heaven and a new Earth" include no more conflict, pain, suffering? The truth of the matter is that God's love for us knows no bounds, no demographics, no limits, and we are called to "love as we have been loved," which is to say without conditions of any sort. So, how do we solve this issue? We love. We do whatever we can wherever we can and for whomever we can to help both make this world a better place and to meet the needs of those less fortunate/privileged than ourselves. Those who have hate in their hearts, we show them love by praying for them and helping them to see the damage such hatred causes. Mind you, this love will look differently in any given situation, but make no mistake: the answer to this problem (as well as the issue of the Church's longevity) is "love."

I will expand upon that more next month, but for now, I will leave you with this question: What lines exist in your mind the separate "us" and "them," and what can you be doing to love "them," despite their being a "them"?

- Pastor Brad



One cold Sunday in January, "M" and her family sat huddled together near a back pew of the Beechmont Presbyterian Church in Louisville. (We will refer to her as M to preserve her anonymity at her request.) The family had walked a mile and a half to church. That was nothing compared to the dangerous passage they endured across six countries on foot, based on the hope of asylum here in the U.S. Cartels threatened M and her children with violence in their native country. M told Rev. Debbie Braaksma, about crossing a jungle without any food or supplies for her frightened family, urging them to keep going while she carried her disabled, teenaged son on her back.

Gifts to the Pentecost Offering help people like *M* and her family through things like Beechmont's after-school program, which provides trauma-informed care, homework help, enrichment activities, ESL assistance and family case management support. The Offering is also used to develop and support the Young Adult Volunteer program and the <u>Presbyterian Youth</u> Triennium.

Forty percent of the Offering stays with each congregation. Mission Committee voted to donate our portion to Harmony House, which provides emergency housing, for 18–24-year-olds, primarily for those transitioning out of foster care.

# **B.Y.O.B.** (BQ)

Fellowship Committee has some exciting events coming your way that we will discuss at our June 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting. Some events we'll discuss are "Bring Your Own BBQ" & Game Night Combo. That event is scheduled for June 20th at 5:00 p.m. Bring whatever you want grilled, then Ken W., Jim, and Katie will handle the heat. Fellowship will provide the buns, drinks, and games for the evening. Speaking of games, Sunday, June 1st is the deadline to pay for tickets to the August 7th ballgame (See Cathy). Food is involved with this event, too. The plan is to eat at the Barley House before the game. Sign up for one or both events.



# **Upcoming Meetings**

Governing Board Monday, June 23 – 6:00 p.m.

Worship Committee June 2 – 4:30 p.m.

Fellowship Committee Tuesday, June 3 – 1:30 p.m.

F.I.T.

Thursday, June 5 - 1:30 p.m.

Finance Committee
Tuesday, June 17 – 11:00 a.m.

Ken and Nancy Williams are hosting our first Book Club meeting on Thursday, June 5<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m. Be ready to eat when you come and have plenty of things to chew on when you leave. The book we'll discuss is Tim Harlow's What Made Jesus Mad?: Rediscover the Blunt, Sarcastic, Passionate Savior of the Bible. (This is available through the Hoopla App for Akron/Summit Library card holders. The audio version is available through the Hoopla App for Cuyahoga Falls Library card holders. Note: You no longer have to live in C. Falls to get a C. Falls Library card.)



F.I.T. will have an information table at this community event. Come hand out cookies, tell people about our church, then enjoy the free concert with Michael Schirch (pronounced – church). Volunteers are needed from 5:00 – 7:00 p.m. The concert starts at 7:00, at Hardesty Park.



#### **GREETINGS**

Instead of an article, here are some photos showing our DC family—Matt, Susan, and kids Theo (6) and Lila (4) at the cabin in MO and in downtown St. Louis. Fun time for everyone. Hope your Memorial Day Weekend was a good one for all of you.

Nancy W.

Governing Board President







### MITZVAH DAY WEEKEND JUNE 7 & 8

Mitzvah Day weekend is approaching! The opportunities for helping and learning are filling up. You can access the 2025 list of projects and sign up at

mitzvahdayakron.com/current-projects/. Nancy and Ken Williams, along with Cathy King, signed up to help box food Saturday morning (9:00-11:30 a.m.) Akron Canton Regional Foodbank Project. All of those spots are filled. But, as of this writing, there are still spots to:

- Play games & Host a picnic at Safe Landing for Boys
- Sew sundresses at St. Paul's Episcopal Church
- Bag lunches and dinners for Haven of Rest.

There are also spots open to learn about:

- Support for Newcomer Neighbors learn how the government has changed things for our new international neighbors and how to support these communities
- Always Climbing Panel Discussion Learn how high school students from are coping with gun violence, then be a part of a small group that will explore actionable ideas for change.

The weekend will end with a dinner comprised of Swenson's burgers, side dishes, salads, and desserts in Temple Israel's social hall at 5:00 PM. All participants are welcome. Donations for "pick up" types of desserts (cookies, brownies, chocolates...) are welcome.

#### SUPPORTS YOUNG STAYS WITH YOUR ADULT VOLUNTEERS CONGREGATION (YAV), serving in communities to support ministries around the world, and with children, youth, growing as leaders and young adults. through transformative Christian service SUPPORTS IS DEVOTED TO MINISTRIES CHILDREN AT-RISK HTUOY HTIN and supports to improve including the education and provide Presbyterian Youth safe havens. Triennium

#### GENNESARET

Please see Betsy
Davis if you can help
with food distribution
at Gennesaret. NCCC
has a long-standing
commitment to serve
those in need on the
second Saturday of
each month from 10:00
a.m.-12:30 p.m.



TICKET
TAKERS/
USHERS
NEEDED



Come support a group of Akron youth who will be performing at the Northwest Family Recreation Center's Dance Recital, which will be Friday, June 6th, at Firestone High School Auditorium. Volunteers are needed from 5:45—7:15 p.m. To volunteer, please text Shelley at 330.603.9233.



