

Fall 2022



Dear Friends:

As you might remember, I spent my elementary school years in Allentown. When I was in fourth grade, I brought home a tiny tree sapling from a school activity, and we planted it in my backyard. For two years, I loved watching it slowly grow, and when I moved away to Atlanta, one of the last things I did as I left the house was to say goodbye to my tree.

2344 Center Street
Bethlehem, PA 18017
610-867-5865

Naturally, when I moved back to the Lehigh Valley almost five years ago, I drove to Allentown to see how my tree was doing; who knows what might have happened in the intervening time? But as I rounded the corner to see the house for the first time, there was one tree that was clearly taller than the others around it: the tiny sapling that I had planted long ago had not only survived, it had thrived to the point of being the largest of the trees in that backyard!

For the last five years, we have been planting all kinds of seeds and saplings in the life of First Presbyterian Church and watching them grow. We launched a contemporary worship service; we created a whole range of educational offerings; we found new partners in the community with whom to share ministries of service. We adapted creatively to the COVID epidemic with digital worship, caring for those who were most at risk, and hosting a community program to create masks when they were in short supply. Since then, we have not just begun to worship and learn and serve together again, but have taken bold steps forward, such as sponsoring an Afghan refugee family who have settled here in the Lehigh Valley.

I am almost sinfully proud of all that we have accomplished together as a congregation in the past five years, often in very challenging circumstances. And yet I am convinced that all of this, all of this, is still the prelude to who and what God is calling us to be: the seeds of an extraordinary future that will continue to grow and bear fruit. That is why our Stewardship theme for 2023 is "Fruit That Will Last." In 2023, we will be planting new seeds and harvesting ripe fruits, living into a vibrant future in which we will be both firmly rooted and reaching into the sky.

Your generous pledge, and gifts towards that pledge, are crucial seeds for the seedbed from which our ministry together will grow and flourish and bear fruit. I ask you to consider what a bold step forward in your own giving might be for 2023, and to make your pledge accordingly, so that we may sow and reap a bountiful harvest of fruit that will last.

Grace and Peace,

J.C. Austin
Senior Pastor