



September 2021 Newsletter

Transitional General Presbyter's Corner

Thou Shalt Wear a Mask! (Says who???)

"Masks". . . ugh! Nobody likes wearing masks, except maybe on Halloween. I was so relieved earlier this summer when we got the "all clear" signal from "above" that after being vaccinated, it was safe to resume worship and church activities without masks and distancing. We could once again see smiles as well as frowns. We could communicate with our faces and expressions as well as with our eyes. And yes, even greet each other with a genuine handshake or hug. What a relief!

Then, emerging from a swamp of viral strains like primeval monster, the "D" variant appeared. This creature spews infectious materials at a rate 200x greater than the virus for which most of us received vaccines. Even more egregious is the fact that while those of us who have been vaccinated may get a *little* sick from "D", we can spread it to others even if we have no symptoms. And the primary victims of our unconscious actions – children under 12 who can't get vaccinated and those younger than 50 who have not been vaccinated.

So why should we, the vaccinated, be the ones sacrificing a breath of fresh air just because the Interim General Presbyter (Moi) is asking all Presbyterians to once again don masks during worship and indoor group activities? Where in scripture does it say that we should wear masks? Frankly, I've looked. And outside of the unlikely chance that Jesus wore the mask of a gardener when he appeared to Mary Magdalene outside of the tomb (John 20:15), I can find no possible reference to masks in the Bible. (If you can find one, please let me know.)

The rationale given by most who refuse to wear a mask during worship usually goes like this: "I am exercising my freedom as an individual. I've been vaccinated, so it's not my problem if someone else hasn't." This is usually expressed as though it were a Constitutional right.

The Apostle Paul would disagree. While scripture does not speak to the issue of mask wearing, it does say something about "Christians and Freedom." Paul summarizes this truth in his letter to the Galatians:

"You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, only don't let this freedom be an opportunity to indulge your selfish impulses, but serve each other through love. All the Law has been fulfilled in a single statement: Love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour each other, be careful that you don't get eaten up by each other!" (Galatians 5:13-15 CEB)

Our freedom as a Christian has nothing to do with our freedom under the Constitution of the United States, but it has everything to do with our freedom of choice to sacrifice our own comfort out of concern for the well-being of our neighbor. Even if we deem our neighbor to be "ill informed," we are called to love him/her as we do ourselves. (And yes, I know that "ill informed" is ambiguous given the many changes in the recommendations from the CDC and

virologists).

Bottom line: *Thou shalt wear a mask* because we have been called by Christ to exercise our freedom in such a way as to show Christ's love to others. After all, Paul says it's the Law! (That is, the Law that encourages you to love your neighbor as yourself).

Peace, Gratitude & Blessings

Alan Baroody

Transitional General Presbyter

P.S. I still hate wearing a mask, unless of course, it's Halloween.

From the Desk of the Stated Clerk

- I want to encourage Clerks of Session to examine their session minutes and have them examined by their partner for approval! I have heard from about six of our thirty-four churches. The deadline is October 1, so it is coming quickly!
- At this writing the Council of Presbytery will be developing details for the October meeting of presbytery. This to be another *virtual meeting* as the COVID seems to be reforming quicker than the Church!
- Please notify me or Deanie Strength when there is a change in Clerk of Session. We will make the needed changes in our records when we receive the information.
- If you have not already, check out the NEW WEBPAGE for Savannah Presbytery! Our Communication Coordinator Jaelyn Beeler has done a wonderful job of redesign. You will soon be offered a chance to be led through the new resource which includes an updated directory.
- Alan, Liz and I have begun to prepare records to be sent to the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia. We have prepared to mail presbytery minutes up through 1999 and old minister member files. Alan and I will be thinning out current minister member files for stewardship of space! We will continue to consider other older materials we have in the office for disposal or boxed storage in Philadelphia.

Proctor Chambless

Stated Clerk

SAVE THE DATE



Fall Presbytery Meeting via ZOOM

October 26, 2021 at 10:00 AM

See you there!

Code Blue - ICU Room 12

Code blue—ICU room 12

That's our covid ICU. A third code blue in two hours. I quicken my step as the medical residents jog past me. I know there is no family at bedside because they aren't allowed to visit the covid patients at all. But I will need to contact the family and let them know what is happening.



I arrive to a crowd outside the room, all donning the proper PPE as fast as they can. There are several people already in the room, performing chest compressions. The nurses tell me these chest compressions on covid patients are so different than chest compressions on non-covid patients; the lungs are harder, and pushing through them to get to the heart is very difficult.

The team gets a pulse back. I call the husband of this patient to let him know what is going on. At first, he's a bit stoic but then I hear the catch in his voice. It's so difficult to have these conversations over the phone. I didn't know this family or patient previously so I was unsure of their faith background, if any at all. After a moment of silence on the phone, I hear a whispered, *Oh Jesus...oh Jesus help her...don't take her from me...* and then a bit louder, *Lord Jesus, don't take her from me!* I close my eyes and imagine this couple. The patient is in her mid-fifties. I imagine their lives together, how they might've met, what they like to do together.

"Is she going to die?" he asks me.

I'm quiet for a minute. I finally respond quietly and slowly: "I really don't know; I do know the team is doing everything they can for her. And as I said her pulse is back..." My voice trailed off because in that moment, she lost her pulse again. The team, at the ready, began CPR again. After several rounds of this, it was deemed futile and Mrs. S died.

"Sir, the physician is here, I'm going to let you speak to her ok?"

"Ok." I could hear it in his voice. He already knew.

I passed the phone to the doctor who very gently explained all that had transpired, ending with, "And I'm so sorry to tell you that she died."

I heard the sob escape Mr. S through the phone even though I sat two chairs away from the doctor. She put her head down, still holding the phone to her ear. "I'm so sorry," I hear her say. I look at her. I know she's sorry. She has tears forming in her eyes and she ran the first two codes of the day as well. She's tired. I look around—we all are.

A few minutes later, the doctor hands the phone back to me and I express my deepest condolences to Mr. S. He's a bit more composed and then he asks me if I can tell his daughter what happened. I agreed, thinking he would put her on the phone and I could recap the situation or even ask the doctor to since she was still right next to me.

"She's in room 1410," he says.

"Oh," is all I can say. That's another covid floor—the non-ICU floor. His wife just died from covid and he wants me to go tell his daughter who also has covid what happened. "Ok...are you sure you don't want to call her yourself?" I'm not trying to get out of it, but I imagine I'd rather hear such news from a relative.

"She's trached and can't speak so she's only texting and I can't send this in a text message; just please go tell her." His voice broke. "And tell her to please get well. Tell her I can't lose her too. Tell her I'm ok, but I need her to come home."

My heart broke all over again as I walked to the other floor, preparing to tell this young woman that her mother just died from the very virus she is fighting herself. It went about as well as you might imagine. She cried a soundless cry as a tube is in between her vocal chords. This crying made her breathing even more difficult and alarms began sounding and the nurse came in. We tried to soothe her. I sat and held her hand for almost an hour. I said very little. There's nothing to say.

Before this day was over, I sat with two more families who could actually come and say

goodbye in person to their loved ones because they were outside of the 21-day window—after 21 days, you're no longer considered contagious and you can have visitors. Both of these patients died on day 22, like they waited, knowing they would get an in-person visit instead of the electronic visit via the iPad that we do for all the active covid patients. They still only get 5 people for a one time, 30-minute bedside visit. It's not ideal, but it's better than the iPad.

People ask me often if we should “close down” again. I don't think we would need to if everyone would do two things—get vaccinated and wear a mask. Wear it for you, wear it for me, but most of all, wear it for your neighbor: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law? Jesus told him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt 22:36-39). Wear it for them. Get vaccinated. Save yourself and your family the possibility of these tragic deaths and miserable grief. And yes, wear the mask after you're vaccinated. Mr. S's family story is all too familiar anymore. If you'd like to read more vignettes about some families I've journeyed with during this pandemic, you can [click here](#) to read an article I wrote which was published in March.

Rev. Rachel M B Greiner

Director of Pastoral Care and

Clinical Pastoral Education

Memorial University Medical Center

GROUND ZERO: A Ministry of Being There

As Americans, we have a need to remember and recognize significant dates in our history. July 4th, for example is one of those dates. We also have some dates in our lifetime, that are dates of tragic events: December 7 (Pearl Harbor), November 22 (JFK), April 4 (MLK), June 6 (RFK), January 6 (domestic insurrection attack of the US Capitol.) It is September 11 that seems to have the greatest grip on our minds and hearts.

Six days after the 9/11 attacks, I arrived at the sixteen-acre World Trade Center complex, now known as “Ground Zero.” The scene was one of indescribable destruction with a paralyzing assault on the senses of sight, noise, and smell. I was summarily introduced to three NY Fire Department Chiefs and a cadre of NYPD command officers. After a rushed orientation by the FEMA staff onsite, I was issued a hard hat, gloves, knee pads, respirator, goggles, 2-way radio, and an official blue jacket to be worn at all times with CHAPLAIN emblazoned in large yellow capital letters on the backside.



After a quick meeting in a command trailer, I ventured out into “the Pit.” I was surrounded by mountains of twisted steel, pulverized concrete, and other unidentifiable debris. Taking it all in, I received a tap on my shoulder from an NYPD first responder who simply handed me a garden trowel and hand rake, motioning me to follow him. On hands and knees, I joined about 20 first responders and started digging at a spot where trained service dogs had detected an apparent trace of human remains. No sooner had I started in, my radio crackled in my earpiece, “Chaplain up! Human remains have been discovered at the South Complex! Need you ASAP! Copy?” I responded, “I copy. Will be there pronto.” I thought, where?! South Complex?! I had an office in the South Tower of the World Trade Center for twelve years, but nothing was identifiable anymore. Everything was gone.

With the help of my pocket compass, I was able to find the location to where I was summoned. The remains were already enclosed in a red plastic bag, placed on a stretcher, with an American flag draped over the top. The tattered remains of a blue NYPD shirt were also placed on the stretcher. There were about 80-100 first responders assembled in formation. All eyes were on me as I removed my hard hat, and all those gathered did the same. I offered a very brief committal prayer, closed with a blessing, and led the procession to one of three morgues that had been established at Ground Zero.

I averaged about a dozen committals per day, with a high of 17. Between committals, I dug for

human remains. I often engaged in what I call “my alley cat ways”, roaming about and visiting the many first responders. No one questioned who I was or wondered why I was there. They knew. Most of those I visited wanted to talk. I listened. I generally asked them what they had seen on any given day and to describe to me how it made them feel. Some asked for a prayer. Others asked for a blessing. As a former US Army Reserve officer and chaplain, I was very familiar with a wide variety of denominational and faith customs.

Ground Zero was a very sacred place. Everyone who was there knew it. You could feel it. You could sense it. The remains of 2,606 people who died were in the debris, yet to be discovered. For me, the ministry at this sacred place was a ministry of being there. It requires being present, alert, and tuned in. Keeping eyes, ears, and heart open, compelled, and ready to act. “Being there” requires reflective listening-reflecting to someone the words, thoughts, and feelings they have shared. There is no use nor any time for ‘preachy-teachy’ stuff. No platitudes, no need to quote scripture or tell Bible stories. No time for psychobabble or diagnostic impressions. Eyeball to eyeball contact is necessary. Just being present and listening. I recall a quote from Paul Tillich, “The greatest responsibility of love is listening.” Personally, I know there are no words spoken to heal a broken spirit, only the silent vigil of one who ultimately brings peace and comfort, to remind you of your humanity and that you do not suffer alone.

Many years ago as a pastor, I invited a newly ordained and installed deacon to accompany me to a viewing at a funeral home for a parishioner who had just died. She called me the day of the viewing and wanted to come see me for a moment. “I don’t know what to do or what to say at the viewing,” she said. I told her that I understood how she felt and assured her that she didn’t have to do or say anything. Just being present was all that really matters.

Back at Ground Zero, I recall a young fire fighter who served as a first responder. After his shift ended, he came to Ground Zero nearly every day. As he was searching in the debris fields, he would seek me out to bring me photographs, jewelry, shoes, or a desk calendar among other items that he had unearthed. I asked him why he felt the need to show me these things. He said, “I want to be sure that God knows what happened here. You represent God’s love in this place.” I smiled and said, “So do you.” It was our namasté moment of the God in him recognizing the God in me, for both of us on this sacred place called Ground Zero. A ministry of being there isn’t easy. We tend to think at times that we need to have all the answers, the right words to speak and the solution to every problem. A ministry of being there makes us instruments of God’s peace and messengers of his love, just by our presence.

Rev. Rick Hays



The Rev. Rick Hays was ordained by the Presbytery of Philadelphia in 1974. He served in parish ministry with churches in Pennsylvania, New York, and Delaware. He completed a four-year residency program in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy and promptly started his own practice offering counseling and executive coaching services with offices in the World Trade Center and Wall Street. Rick was also an officer and chaplain in the US Army Reserves for five years. Many of the soldiers in his unit were fire fighters and police officers, with 20 who perished in the attack on 9/11. He served as a chaplain at Ground Zero for nine months. Presently, he is Honorably Retired, a member of the Savannah Presbytery, and resides in Douglas, GA.

School of the Laity

**Don't miss the
September 1st**

Deadline

J. Richard Bass School
of the Laity
will be held *Hybrid!*



OCTOBER 2-3

Participants can CHOOSE to participate
IN-PERSON OR ONLINE!

In-person classes will be held at St. Simons Presbyterian Church (masks required) and online participants will engage through Zoom.
ALL will experience the best of SOL.

We invite you to join us!

Don't delay! Register NOW!



HEBREW BIBLE: *Judaism in the time of Jesus.*

During this course, we will survey the Hebrew Bible or, as Christians know it, The Old Testament. We will consider how the Hebrews of Jesus' time approached and interpreted scripture in a desire for us to better understand the past to be better equipped for the now.

Rabbi Rachael Bregman is the Berman Family Rabbinic Rabbi in Brunswick, GA where she has been building diverse community since 2013.

HISTORY, MISSION & POLITY:

This course will help participants learn to use Presbyterian polity to address specific issues and practices in church life. Attention will be given to mission and ministry in the Presbyterian tradition based on the history and theology of the church and guided by the *Book of Order*.

To prepare for the course, participants are asked to read ***Presbyterian Polity for Church Leaders*** by Joan S. Gray & Joyce C. Tucker [*available at PC(USA) store or Amazon for less than \$15*] and ***the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity*** (pages 1-15) in the ***2019/2021 Book of Order***.

Rev. Joyce Lieberman is the Executive and Stated Clerk of the Synod of South Atlantic of the PC (USA).



Register Now

A Season of Peace

Looking for a mission to kick start the beginning of the fall season?

Consider this PDA-designed pilgrimage for the month of September.

Some of our churches participate in the nationwide PEACE AND GLOBAL WITNESS OFFERING ON WORLD COMMUNION OCTOBER 3.

September 5 – October 3, 2021

This four-week pilgrimage is designed to deepen the pursuit of peace for congregations to individuals. Through daily “Path of Peace” reflections, “Peace Cards” for children and families, Bible and book studies for adults, children’s curriculum, a coloring poster, an intergenerational peace fair, and other downloadable resources, Participants are invited to define and deepen their calling as peacemakers.

While these resources are designed to culminate in the **Peace & Global Witness Offering** on **World Communion Sunday** (Oct. 3), they are appropriate for any time of the year.

Path of Peace Daily Reflections

This year’s reflections are designed to help participants explore various forms of peacemaking through the arts.

- Week 1 September 5-11: Spoken and Written Word
- Week 2 September 12-18: Song and Music
- Week 3 September 19-25: Visual Arts
- Week 4 September 26-October 3: Actions/Advocacy/Service

You have the option of subscribing to these reflections for daily delivery into your inbox or printing the entire collection as a devotional resource. For more info and resources, go to

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/season-peace/>

“May the God of peace grant you peace at all times in all ways.”
(2 Thessalonians 3:16)

Presbytery News

Looking for a phone number or email for a presbytery or church leader?

Our presbytery’s database is now online and accessible on www.savannahpresbytery.org (See “Administrative Resources” dropdown). Request the password to access the directory or email any updates to Rev. Deanie Strength, thestrengthfamily@outlook.com, who is maintaining the database.

Prayers for Pastor Nominating Committees

Butler (Savannah) - *Pastor*
Christ (Pooler) - *Pastor*
First Savannah - *Associate Pastor or DCE*
Henry Memorial (Dublin) - *Pastor*
Skidaway Community Church (Savannah) - *Pastor*



Please seriously consider ways your church can raise funds for the [Presbyterian Disaster Assistance](#) operation. The needs are so great at this time and resources are really stretched.

- Earthquake in Haiti
 - Floods in TN, NC, KY, LA
 - Tropical storm/hurricane damage various locations
 - Wildfires in the West · Other projects listed [here](#)
- Donations can be made directly [here at this link](#).

Making My Church, My Parish, My Presbytery, My Synod, My PCUSA Better

from the Nominating Committee

We hear ourselves asking sometimes, “Why is my church, my parish, my presbytery, my synod, the PCUSA, not working the way my spirit tells me it should?” Listen a little longer and ask God, “Are you calling me to serve?” As scary as that may be, you should know that when God opens your eyes to see a need and wants you to fulfill that need, you are equipped to fulfill it or see and be the one to deliver a message. “God wants you.”



We work better together one body each part doing its part. The Nominating Committee will

occasionally share with you opportunities for you to serve. Here are two:
The Mission Committee has responsibility for Presbytery work in the following areas: International mission; Evangelism; Program and Planning support for churches; Revitalization of congregations; Ecumenical relations; Interpretation of various International Mission causes of the Church; Coordination of partnerships for mutual mission through the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). This is also an opportunity to propose projects to the Presbytery for joint mission with partner Presbyteries; Campus Ministry; and more.

Commissioners and Youth Advisory Delegates to the 225th PC(USA) General Assembly: Proctor Chambless, Stated Clerk sent to your Clerk of Session an application to be used to nominate Commissioners and Youth Advisory Delegates to the 225th meeting of the General Assembly in the summer of 2022. The schedule for the meeting was also sent along. The General Assembly is slated to be a mixture of virtual and in person gatherings beginning as early as June 18 and ending July 9. The Clerks of Session have an outline of a more detailed schedule. Stay tuned for information on the General Assembly gathering.

Contact the Nominating Committee Moderator Jamil el-Shair, elshairj@gmail.com or call him at 404.839.6241 to ask questions or volunteer. Someone from the Nominating Committee will get back with you. Thank you.

Savannah Presbytery

