

# **Our Spire**

**Volume 43 Number 6**

**July-August 2023**

**Reaching Up  
to God,  
Reaching out  
to People**



Pastor's Page:

*And you will feel secure, because there is hope; you will look around and take your rest in security.*

Job 11:18



### **Hope, even when skies get smokey**

A conversation I have heard from those in and around our congregation. This conversation has been coming around more and more frequently these days. “Will, they say, I think the world is coming to an end and I think it’s coming to an end soon.”

It is true that the sky has not fallen as Henny Penny feared it would. However, our region experienced a considerable amount of smoke from Canadian wildfires at the start of the week of June 5th. Our usually blue skies became not just dangerous but ominous. Some described the oddly pink and eerie-looking sun coupled with the smokey fog as something similar to Armageddon.

Is this recent natural disaster from the wildfires in Canada another sign that the end times are coming? The answer depends on who you ask among us and the community immediately around Harford. I wonder if this is true for you, but I don’t hear apocalyptic conversation from anyone under 40. That’s not to say the chatter isn’t happening. I just have not experienced it.

Another age group with far more trips around what has been the yellowy orange sun speaks about this more and more. An increasing number of baby boomers share with me that they think the end is near.

I’ve never conducted an unofficial poll or survey on this, yet I have come to the place in my 15-years at the pulpit here where what has been quieter now gains more air space. More and more people are saying the world will come to an end and soon.

Are these voices right? I don’t know.

What I do know in the face of woes and sorrow is that there is hope. Christian hope is a confident expectation. This confident expectation is more than a desire for something good to happen in the future. Christians can be secure in this hope because even when our vision is cloudy because of smoke or other sad, bad, or heartbreaking news, we have a consistent, ever-present God who consistently provides and prevails.

Our hope is not in ourselves. Our hope is in our God, and our God comes through.

Puritan preacher Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) knew of this hope. He wrote *The Soul’s Conflict with Itself*, a 175-page book on a single verse, Psalm 42:5. “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation (ESV).”

Even without neighboring wildfires, Sibbes knew hope could dim, darken or be clouded over for a time. I believe this is why he wrote that he didn’t praise God continuously. He wrote that he praised God again.

## **Pastor's Page Continued:**

Perhaps he stopped praising God for a time (or could have stopped praising God for a time). Maybe he stopped his praise for a moment. With hopelessness familiar to each of us, he may have stopped his praise for much, much longer than a moment.

But the Puritan always came back. He always praised God again—and again.

Sibbes was known as “the sweet dropper” because confidence and joy dropped into his sermons. Even when situations were dark or dour, the person at the pulpit didn’t pull a Henny Penny. Instead, he secured hope not in himself or the situation at hand but in God.

During bleak or burdensome times, we can do what the sweet dropper did as both a congregation and as individuals. What is it? We can praise God again. Our souls do not need to be cast down—or stay cast down.

Skies may darken again. Smoke from Canada or elsewhere may arrive at any time. Other news can also reach us and make end times feel even closer.

If so, maybe together as a congregation we can coauthor a 175-page book on Psalm 47:1. That verse reads, “God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.”

I close this month’s pastor’s page with these affirming words from Psalm 46.

- 1 God is our refuge and strength,  
always ready to help in times of trouble.
- 2 So we will not fear when earthquakes come  
and the mountains crumble into the sea.
- 3 Let the oceans roar and foam.  
Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge!

## **Your gifts open you: A recap of the June sermon series**

We are used to opening gifts. We’ve been doing this our whole lives. Days before this 4-part June sermon series began, God introduced a new thought to me when the word order for the series changed from “Open Your Gifts” to “Your Gifts Open You.”

Our gifts (our blessings) do open us to not only who God is but also how God is. Throughout the month of June, we have looked deeply into three central characters in the Book of Genesis: Noah, Abram (and then Abraham) and Joseph, Jacob’s son. Together, we found that their gifts from God opened them. These gifts changed them. We realized our gifts from God do, in fact, change us, too.

With Noah, I realized just how much time he had on the arc. While indeed he had his immediate family with him, he was also alone. There was no vet to call. No neighbor to check in with. No friend to talk with about the greatest challenge in his entire life. It’s true that the entire world was sinful. We have no information on Noah’s social life, but to imagine that everyone he knew—*everyone*—had died recently in the world’s most terrible flood had to weigh on him.

Most of us agree that forty hours would make a long trip. Forty days? And this journey wasn’t just that duration. Noah spent months and months on the God-designed craft.

In the June 4 sermon, I made a significant point. Noah didn’t have knowledge of God’s timeline. I prove this by mentioning that Noah first sent a raven to see if land was available. The raven never returned. I said at the pulpit that I imagine Noah was an animal lover. Perhaps the bird was just a bird to Noah. But I don’t think so. That bird must have had a mate, unless Noah took three ravens with him. I didn’t read of a third raven.

Noah also sent out the dove not once but twice. Clearly, he didn’t know the duration of his journey. We don’t either, yet in our time—and on our journey—we can do what Noah did, and that is, trust God.

## Your gifts open you: A recap of the June sermon series Continued.

In the June 11 sermon, we read that Abram was led by God into a clearing where the vast multitude of stars were dazzling over him. What joy and shock Abram must have experienced when he heard his descendants would outnumber the stars when he himself, a well-aged senior, did not even have one child of his own.

It took twenty-five years for Isaac to arrive. In that time, both Abram and Sarai weren't perfect models in faith and in patience. Both husband and wife show us that we, too, have the promise of God. We, too, have taken control (or have made decisions) that have not aligned with the goodness and love God said He would provide. Yet in time, we do have (or we can have) what Abram and Sarai experienced, which are blessings we can name and share.

These blessings took time. When we realize our blessings can also take time, then we, too, realize that our God-given gifts do, in fact, change us.

In the Father's Day, June 18 sermon, we now meet the father whose name changed from Abram to Abraham. Our text invites us into the story of how Abraham goes about choosing a wife for his son, Isaac. This is no simple matter. In fact, his future daughter-in-law must come from Abraham's original point of origin, not a woman from Canaan. This match was not to be happenstance. This union was to align us in the ancestral line of Jesus Himself. The point of this sermon is that each of us can celebrate Abraham, the father of a whole nation. He sends his best, longstanding servant on a mission for love. Together, we can be equipped and empowered with how our Father's love sets us out on missions, too.

Finally, in the June 25 sermon, we have the story of Joseph as it leads up to the point where the Dreamer is thrown into an empty cistern. We realize we, too, have had our dreams tossed aside. Our future has tanked. We are (or have been) in dark places.

We also understand family dynamics. Some of us can really relate to Joseph and his family.

Yet as Joseph's life continues, we find a man of hope, love, and forgiveness. I believe he gains these gifts—or these gifts actually open him. These gifts open him to the mercies of God, to the gentleness of God, and to the giving (and the forgiving) that comes from God that we can share with others.

To me, it's unquestionable that Joseph's gifts opened who he was. Joseph's gifts, like Noah's gifts and Abraham's gifts, help us see that we have gifts from God. These gifts can and do open us. They open us not to ourselves. Like Abraham's best, longstanding servant on a mission, our gifts open us to what we are called to do, and that is share what we have.

Noah, Abraham and Joseph tell us is that what we have—and who we have—is a God who loves and blesses.



2023



Gavin Bewley plans to attend Penn State Main Campus and study Animal Science

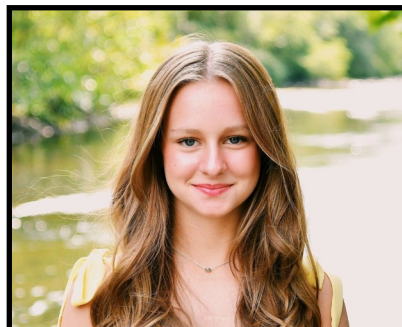
Jonathon Symulesky will be attending Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg VA studying Pre-Med, Biology and competing in Track and Field



Ryan Drake will be attending Penn State Scranton studying Mechanical Engineering and playing basketball

Briana Boswell will be attending Penn State main campus studying Pre-Med

Ethan Komora plans to work in real estate and management



Tanner Stout will be attending Penn State in Mechanical Engineering Scranton and playing basketball

Bailey Reuss will be attending Penn State main campus studying Pre-Med

Alex Empet will be attending SUNY-Cobleskill to study Dairy Production & Management



Reilly will be attending Cornell University to major in Electrical and Computer Engineering.



Cali Petts plans to attend Lackawanna College and major in Business Marketing



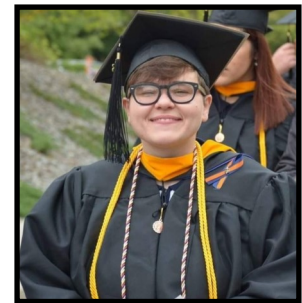
Clara Allen has her cosmetology license and will work in a salon while she takes online classes at Clark Summitt University in Business and Bible theology.



Adam Piston (Dave Schulte's nephew) graduated Magna Cum Laude from Misericordia University.



Makenzie Bell graduated from University of Scranton and plans to continue on to get her Masters Degree in Secondary Education.



Madison Hegedty (Granddaughter of Barbara Day and niece of Sharon Frantz) graduated Summa Cum Laude from Keystone College with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice Psychology



Grace Graf plans to attend the University of Misericordia in the fall of 2023 to pursue an education in Health Care Administration.



Aiden Rumola plans to enter the work force doing carpentry



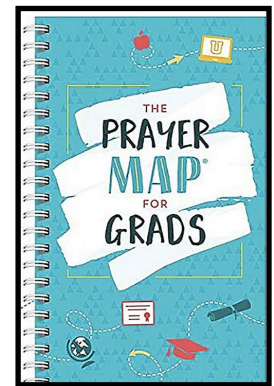
Genevieve Larkin plans to attend Hobart and William Smith College to pursue degrees in Biology and Biochemistry. She will also be running to the cross country team.



Graduates attending the Recognition Service: Tanner Stout, Alex Empet, Gavin Bewley, Cali Petts, Briana Boswell, Grace Graf and Clara Allen

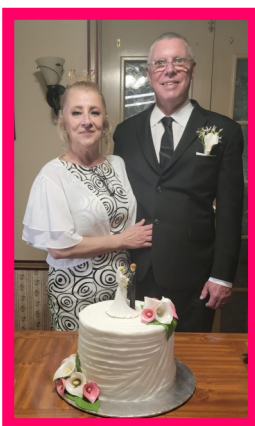
The Deacons presented each Graduate with “The Prayer Map for Graduates”.

Cake by Kandy Wellman



**Wellman Wedding**

**Wayne and Lydia Wellman and family**





**Baptism of Ellis Patrick Doolittle**  
**Parents: Katherine and Eric Doolittle**  
**Godparents: Patty Hill & Don Houck**  
**Deacon: Linda Lindsey**

**Baptism water from the Jordan River placed in the Baptismal Fount by Big Brother, Ben Doolittle**



**Corbin and Jesse Families**

**The Baptism of Jesse Joseph Corbin**

**Parents: Carly and David Corbin**  
**Godparents: John and Courtney Corbin**  
**Deacon: Kay Gow**



**Baptism of Trinity, Jaxon and Ryder Gebo**  
**Parents: Brandy and Dave Gebo**



**Gebo Family and Friends**



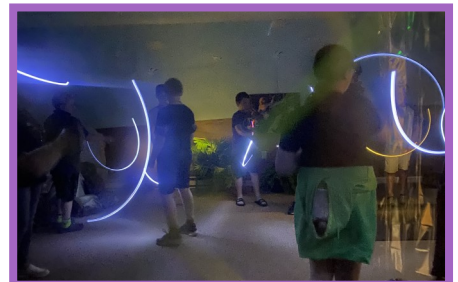
# STELLAR

SHINE JESUS' LIGHT

## STELLAR VBS

A combined effort between Harford First Church, Hop Bottom UMC, Gibson UMC, Great Bend UMC, New Milford UMC, South Gibson UMC and Brooklyn Universalist Church.

Over 40 Volunteers participated over the 4 day VBS. 70 children were presented with the love and salvation of Jesus. Thank you to All!!



Food was collected for the Summer LunchBox Program.





Songs, Lessons, Games, Snacks and Crafts!!!!  
Fun, Fun, Fun!!!

Making new friends and having  
fun with old friends!!



# ANNUAL GOLF TOURNAMENT

## Harford First Congregational Church – UCC

The Golf Tournament Team would like express our sincere thanks for your support of our annual Golf Tournament held at Tall Pines Players Club on June 10, 2023. The day was a huge success, thanks in part to your generosity and participation. Our business sponsors really came through for us. We have given a list of our sponsors. Please keep them in mind when you are looking for goods or services.

Thank you for all that you did as a congregation!

It meant so much to see your support through the signs you requested in Honor or in Memorial of loved ones. Thank you: Gail Batzel, Ken and Betty Lou Bennett, Jean Bonham, Tim and Alan Bucklaw, Bill and Holli Chichester, Katherine and Eric Doolittle (Masters), Kathi and Dale Ferger, Kay Gow, Hagenbuch Family, Ellen Holdredge, Gary Housel, Merle and Betsy Jones, Kingsley Willing Workers, Susan Klenk Rikkola, Dorothy Matthews, Bill McDonald, Missionary Group, Judy Mitchell, Irv and Sue Needham, the Phelans, Wendy and Gary Phillips, Walter Poxon, Willing Worker Big Group and the Winemiller Family.

Our total Business and Memorial Sponsorship was \$10,400. We received \$2016 from golfers and \$1725 from Baskets, mulligans, 50/50, Putting Competition, Pot O'Gold and donations by Team Gallinger and Team Robinson/Butler.

The baskets were awesome. Thank you: Katie and Sal Armetta, Bill and Holli Chichester, Peg and Dale Empet, Kay Gow, Karen and Rick Jones, George Lotter, Jason Miller, Gary and Wendy Phillips, Ron Phillips and family, Ellen Holdredge, Irv and Sue Needham, Dave and Connie Schulte, and Debbi and Bill Strong and Kandy Wellman.

Everyone raved about the goody bags and our awesome cookies and all the extras we put in them thanks to you all!!! Thank you: Grace Allen, Priscilla Allen, Earl Cottrell, Peg Empet, Kay Gow, Karen Jones and Sue Needham. Chips were given by Jason Miller and Wendy and Gary Phillips. Water was donated by PSBank.

Thank you to our workers during the Golf Tournament: Karen Jones, Linda Robinson and Deb Strong. A huge Thank You to Kandy Wellman for making all of our sponsor signs!

We made a grand total of approximately \$13,084.74 after costs.

May God bless you! The First Church Golf Tournament Committee Harford, PA

Holli & Bill Chichester, Ellen Holdredge, Gary Housel, Judy Mitchell, Sue and Irv Needham, Wendy & Gary Phillips



## 2023 Golf Tournament Business Sponsors

### **Gold Sponsors**

Alan Hall Commissioner	Benedict Construction
Bennett Garage & Spring	Chaz Ross
Corporate Communications, Inc.	Custom Machine of Great Bend
Kingsley Willing Workers	Kinney Welding
Lenox Pharmacy	Lenox Propane
Masters RMC	Nicholson Tire
NBT Bank	Frank Payne Excavating
People's Security	Town and Country Veterinary Services
Van Cott's Nursery&Landscaping	

### **Silver Sponsors**

Adams Cable	Armettas
Lisa Baker State Senator	Bartron Myer Funeral Home
Bucklaws	Buzzi Unicem
Coughlin & Gerhart LLP	Drake Well Drilling
Harford Masons	Heller Gas
HNB Honesdale National Bank	J & D Hair Designs
Keystone Propane	NEP
Meuser for Congress	ONVO
Prosperity Eastern Star	PS Bank
Ross Feeds	Sherwood Chevrolet Buick GMC
Susquehanna Beverages	Timz Construction

### **Bronze Sponsors**

Hometown Finds and Friends	Jenny Leigh's Country Cookin'
Lindsey Oil Co.	New Milford Hardware
Shaw's Barbershop	Sentry Alarms, LLC
S and M Lawn Service	State Farm – Tim Carpenter
Stones Garage	

### **Baskets**

Andre's and Sons	Montrose Beverage
Rustic Rooster	Binghams
Stepniak Beef	Armettas
Nicholson Lumber	Tall Pines Fireplace



**It's Free!!**

**ICE CREAM Social**

**You're Invited**

**WHERE:** HARFORD FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

**WHEN:** Friday June 16th, 2023 5:00-6:30pm

Come and gather together while you enjoy some outdoor games and icecream!

Bring your family and invite your friends!



## Outreach to the Community

### Ice Cream Social

Thank you Dairy Ambassadors

## Hymn Dedication



Dedicate the Offertory Hymn of any Sunday Service in Honor or in Memory of someone. There is a sign up sheet in the Hallway next to the Flower sign-up sheet or place a card in the collection plate with the hymn and the name of the individual to whom you wish to honor.

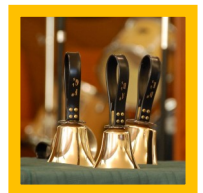
## Beginning Hand Bell Choir

Our beginner hand bell choir has started. Practice will be held right after church every 2nd and 4th Sundays starting up again in September.



No prior experience is necessary and the ability to read music helps but is also not necessary.

Please text or call Earl Cottrell for question or to let him know that you are interested at 701-405-3417.



## Spire Sponsors

We need Sponsors to help us cover the cost of printing and mailing the Spire. Please let us know if you can help. The sponsorship can be in Memory or in Honor of someone or just a donation. Mailing costs approximately \$75/month. Please send to:

Harford First Congregational Church—UCC PO Box 217 Harford, PA 18823