

THE KERK

St. John's Reformed Church, 126 Old Post Road North, Upper Red Hook, New York 12571

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Pastoral Installation of the Rev. Alisha Riepma St. John's Reformed Church, Red Hook, NY December 12, 2021

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ. Deep gratitude to the Reverend Classis of Mid-Hudson, Rev. Alisha Riepma and the St. John's Reformed Church Consistory and Congregation. What a joy and privilege to be with you on this sacred, joy-filled occasion.

I am Rev. Liz Testa, denominational leader for Women's Transformation and Leadership and Equity-Based Hospitality in the RCA, formerly on the pastoral staff of Marble Collegiate Church in NYC. I bring you warm greetings from the RCA and the Classis of NY.

I met Pastor Alisha years ago, when I was just starting in my role as ministry executive for this newly launched ministry for women - to encourage, equip and empower us all to live into our gifts and callings, and to help equip congregations to create healthy ministry environments where people of all ages and stages can serve freely and fully together. It was in these early days of living into my own calling, when Alisha and I served on the RCA staff together, that I glimpsed a bit of what God had in store for her. Through a trip to the Holy Land, as roommates, our good and gracious God revealed to us both – Mary and Elizabeth style – new things that the Holy Spirit was calling forth in us. This bonded us together for a journey of mutual encouragement and support that has encompassed joys and challenges, humble learnings and amazing discoveries.

And then several months ago, a member of your pastoral search team called me, and God started revealing that you just might have found your next pastor. Speaking with Terry about the ministry happening here, the rich history of this place, of the recent challenges that you have so faithfully journeyed through, the care for one another – and the beautiful service opportunities you are dreaming of expanding or creating afresh. It was so clear as I listened that the Spirit was on the move, a new thing was preparing to spring forth. Now, here it is - a new season of ministry, full of hope and expectation, just in time for Advent, thanks be to God.

And so it is most appropriate that today, the 3rd Sunday in Advent – celebrating **JOY** – I have this honor to share a word of encouragement with you!



Please pray with me, Oh Creating God of Awe and Wonder, Hope and Joy ~ thank you for the gift of your Word, for your Spirit moving among us, illumining and inspiring our hearts and minds. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you, Oh God, our Rock and our Redeemer. In Jesus' Name.

Advent Joy, beloveds. This season when we wait, with expectation and longing, for the birth of the baby. For God to enter our world in human form, Emmanuel, God with us. A season of wonder, a sense that all things are possible (for nothing is impossible with God – as the angel told Mary). It is a season when a sense of change hangs in the air.

And in this season and throughout scripture God urges us to **not be afraid, to fear not – thank you Lord!** Our good God knows it hard, especially if we are being asked to believe, to do, to embrace something new!

Both Zachariah and Mary had their “fear not” encounter about a new thing, right? One accepted it better than the other, of course. ☺ And then there are the shepherds out in the fields, looking up at the night sky, and naturally they are terrified when Gabriel appears! *And what does he say? “**Do not be afraid**; for see—I am bringing you good news of **great joy** for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who **is the Messiah**, the Lord.*

And we know how this story goes, they embrace joy and fearlessness, even in their shock – and they go see this baby – in a manger, not a fancy palace – experiencing a transformation and must go and tell what they have learned, glorifying and praising God every step of the way.
But it's not always that easy, right? The prophet keeps it real for us.

From Isaiah 43:

But now thus says the LORD, the Holy One who created you, O Jacob,
the One who formed you, O Israel: **Do not fear**, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, **I will be with you**; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you...

And then...

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert....
for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.

The people Israel are in exile in Babylon. They are used to a God who shows up in times of heightened challenge – opening up seas for them to travel through and closing them over the heads of their pursuers. That already has been a huge exercise in **fearless faith**, and now God is saying release that, it's time for something new.

The Israelites needed assurance and encouragement about how God was going to deliver them and bless them, **and** a glimpse about how they needed to be ready to co-labor with God to bring this to fruition, to **declare God's praise.**

A way in the desert instead of through the sea, a savior coming in the form of a baby born in a stable instead of a powerful place of privilege! Old things making way for new things to spring forth, old foundations serving as the springboard for new life and possibility.

I am about to do a NEW THING says the Lord - get ready St John's! For a new season of ministry that will be full of life-giving opportunities with a new pastor who is quite different from previous ones!

Here are some thoughts to encourage you as you make your way and help you to be active participants in perceiving the new thing(s) that God is doing in and through you. These are, in fact, helpful for all of us to consider:

- Engage a **posture of curiosity and wonder**, of Patient Trust –What will this new season in your church life be? What will this new relationship with Pastor Alisha be? How will the HS move among you, renewing and transforming?
- Create **intentional space to pray** – communally and individually, to discern, be open to the Holy Spirit's leading and guiding. Trust in the Lord and lean not on your own understanding.
- **Listen well, be hospitable** – this is important for all of you, it is an act of loving kindness and care as well as visioning for the future – Consistory, Pastor, ministry committees, outreach teams, the whole congregation – all generations. **Draw the circle wide to welcome** in those from the margins, those whom God is calling forth in this season to share their ideas and perspectives – make space for new voices to find their place of belonging. **Give your new Pastor time** to get to know you, to get the lay of the land. Gather together to share what you are hearing, from each other, from God, and allow this process to guide you forward.
- **Do not rush things**, be patient, humble, loving. Slow down, don't busy yourselves too much – it takes *space* to perceive the new things God is doing. Taking a pause, stepping back helps shift your perspective and see things from different or new angles.
- **Be present to anxiety and fear** as they naturally will bubble up. There is a reason that "be not afraid" shows up hundreds of times in scripture! Change, loss, new things – are hard, scary and even terrifying. **Be attentive to places of resistance**, to the desire to hold on to what was; give room and time to gently celebrate the past and release what no longer serves the greater good. Love one another in extra measure. Honor the stories.
- Finally, **embrace hope, possibility and joy** - hold fast to the divine truth that God is with you – Emmanuel, God with us – and is ordering your steps, inviting you to actively participate and making a way for you to do so.

St. John's Consistory and Congregation - **You have stayed the course**, worked hard to get to this point: Caring for your former pastors and their families, caring for each other through a very difficult season of pandemic and other challenges, seeking and finding **a pastor who matches the desires of your hearts** to build and strengthen this body of Christ for mission in the world - **to be the hands and feet and light of Jesus** in the community and to declare God's praise – hallelujah! **Enjoy this moment – embrace the hope and wonder!**

May the Holy Spirit continue to inspire and guide you every step of the way, may you love each other well as you feel **God's extravagant love** holding you and abiding in you. May you experience Emmanuel, God with us, in **peace, hope and joy-filled ways**.

In the name of God the Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit we pray and all say together: Amen and Amen.

Minister's Musings

On the heels of a whirlwind Christmas season and into the expectant, hope-filled new year and season of Epiphany we fly. This last season has been packed full for us as a church. We have officially entered into our third month of ministry together - and a new year! Welcome 2022. We have turned over a leaf in the church calendar together, experienced the joy of an installation service - and Gian's delicious food, gathered for the season of Advent, waiting expectantly. We sat solemnly together and held one another in our hearts and minds through a blue Christmas service. And finally, we celebrated Christmas Eve together.

We have accomplished a lot in our short time together.
Not to mention our meetings, plans, gatherings and personal celebrations that have continued to take place in the midst of this season.

I invite all of us to take a collective breath.

And another one.

Do it again and for how many times you need.
It has been a big start - and we praise God for it.
In this new year, I invite us to enter this season gently. Sometimes it can feel like we need to come up with goals or ways to start this year in a grand way that looks remarkably better than years past. While that is a beautiful and good thing, it's okay to not do that too. To ask ourselves what we need at the start of this year.

To be still and listen to the Lord.

To pray and rest after the busy season of Advent and Christmas, and to step lightly into this new year.

As we begin this new year together, I pray that we will be able to breathe deeply. That we are able to find time to seek God's will for us personally and collectively. That we are able to sink into the rhythms of our life together and enter this new year with ginger hope, expectant joy, and peace-filled hearts.

This is my prayer for us this month and year.

Pastor Alisha

FATIH AND EDUCATION BIBLE STUDY

Thank you to Preaching Elder John Roberts for continuing to lead the Tuesday morning Bible study. It will follow Year C of the Revised Common Lectionary in 2022. Copies of the weekly scriptures for 2022 will be available in John Roberts' mailbox. You need not attend Bible Study to read along in preparation for Sunday morning's sermon.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES



COVID has reappeared in the new variant of Omicron, and Delta was just making its mark. In December we went from having weekly classes for the younger children to canceling all classes until at least January 9, 2022. We will re-evaluate at that time and may send out packets of curriculum if things are looking glum then.

Pastor Alisha will be setting up instruction for Children at the Lord's Table early in the new year.

Confirmation Class for students 9th grade or older will be announced later in the new year.

BOOK CLUB

Book Club will meet in February to discuss Clint Hill's Five Presidents. The date TBA.

RE-OPENING COMMITTEE UPDATE

The Re-Opening Committee met Wednesday, December 1 to discuss the COVID situation at the time and the Christmas Eve service.

Gian Stagnaro agreed to take reservations for the Christmas Eve service. Unfortunately this means we still have a limit of 80 people to allow social distancing for the service.

Contact tracing continues for every service and meeting within the church. We also ask that everyone **please** use the hand sanitizer provided **upon entering** the building from your cars and as needed. Masks will continue to be required indoors, covering the mouth and nose, and we all need to do our best to maintain social distance.

Church windows will remain slightly open, so dress appropriately as the temperatures decrease. Sweaters and jackets may be needed for your comfort and warmth.

The Committee worked with the Installation Committee to make that a safe event as well. All guests needed to RSVP to maintain the 80 person limit.

From past experience, the committee members knew it was not likely that we would reach the limit for the Blue Christmas service. We were pleased to see the 25 people who attended on December 15.

Scudder Circle will begin soup sales in January. Coffee Hour will continue to be on hold for the time being.

Pete Fenaroli is the Chair of this Committee. You may direct questions to him at [<petefen26@gmail.com>](mailto:petefen26@gmail.com).

CONSISTORY NOTES

December 16, 2021

Pastor Alisha opened the meeting with prayer.

New members Gian Stagnaro, Deacon of fellowship, Wendy Walrath, Elder of Mission and Outreach, Glenn Countryman, Elder of Property and Eileen Wambach, Deacon of education were welcomed.

A thank you was given to departing members Serena Winchell, Susan Vitolo and Jim Bard.

The Elders reported from their meeting before Consistory. They are getting many prayer requests and the difference between the prayer chain, which is more confidential, and the prayer list, which goes in the bulletin, was explained. A Confirmation Class will be planned for the spring and also a new member class.

James Walrath will do communion at the January 2nd service.

Financial review: the monthly review, balance sheet and profit and loss were reviewed. It was noted that an eye would need to be kept on income vs. expenses.

Faith and Education: in addition to the written report it was noted that Sunday School would be postponed.

Finance minutes no questions

Property: the kitchen stove fire suppression systems was mentioned. It was noted that at the November Consistory meeting a subcommittee was set up to explore the options.

Reopening committee: reports that nothing has changed.

Technology: it was noted that recognition needs to be made to Matthew Finch and Jason Swart for their work every Sunday.

All reports were accepted.

An instructional card will go out with the new 2022 tithing and offering envelopes explaining what the envelopes are used for.

The leftover \$3,873 from the 2021 Endowment Fund Distribution allotment be put towards the organ fund.

Respectfully submitted,
Shari Kilgour Juranic,
Clerk of Consistory

SCUDDER CIRCLE NEWS

The Scudder Circle will take its usual January break, and then meet Thursday, February 3 at 1 p.m. in the fellowship hall.

Scudder Circle supports missions via members' dues and donations. The group supports each Mission of the Month and our Church missionaries at Christmastime.

Offering or donations can be dropped off or mailed into the Church Office or made via Givelify online at any time. Please label them for Scudder Circle.

Scudder Circle is open to all the women associated with St. John's Reformed Church.



to the family and friends of **David Dewitt** who died December 10.



Hop Michael, Glenn Countryman and James Walrath for their work on the parsonage garage floor.

Ulster Savings Bank for doing a food drive in December for the Deacons' Food pantry and **Melissa** for delivering!

Glen Countryman and Hop Michael for unclogging the bathrooms in the education wing, again, just before Christmas Eve!

Serena, Mike, Heather and any other little elves Serena may know for all their hard work organizing, buying and wrapping presents for Food Pantry clients. Twenty eight families received gifts.

Also to everyone who donated money or bought presents and mittens and scarves for the tree!

Gian Stagnaro and all his helpers who helped with Pastor Alisha's installation reception.

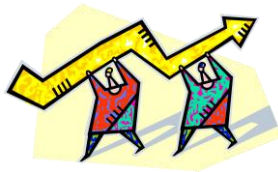
Once again to **Hop Michael and Glenn Countryman** for installing the new post for the mailbox. It stands up straight and tall again.

MISSION OF THE MONTH

The Mission of the Month for January will go to Church World Service, who are helping victims of the devastating tornadoes that hit central and southern states this past December.

Please write CWS, Tornado or Jan. MOM on your check or offering envelope.

St. John's Reformed Church



FINANCIAL REPORT

November 2021

Income	\$ 11,763.29
Expenses	<u>\$ 12,787.68</u>
	\$ -1,024.39

Year To Date

January - November 2021

Income	\$ 169,213.60
Expenses	<u>\$ 147,549.97</u>
	\$ 21,663.63

Thank you to everyone who donated to the **November Mission of the Month**: \$135 was donated to the **Deacons' Fund Food Pantry**.

The Thanksgiving offering of **\$400** was also donated to the Food Pantry.

Did you know?

In 2021, due to remote services and/or social distancing, many people chose to mail in their tithes and offerings or send them in through the Givelify app. The app is free, user-friendly, and gives you the opportunity to schedule weekly or monthly tithes. For organizations like our church, there are no sign-up or monthly fees. Givelify takes 2.9% + \$0.30 per transaction. (Scheduling your tithing once a month instead of weekly might be a better option.) Givelify makes it easy for you to see your entire history of giving to churches and nonprofit organizations.

The envelope system is still in place if you prefer that method. If you have been using envelopes, your 2022 envelopes are available in fellowship hall. If you would like to start using envelopes, contact the church office at 845-758-1184.

The first envelope in the box is the **Initial Offering** envelope. Your contribution of \$5.00 would cover the cost of a box of envelopes.

Use the other white envelopes to contribute to the **General Fund** - the money used for operating expenses like heat, light, salaries, phone and internet. If you pledge a certain amount for the week, month, or year, this is the envelope you will use. The envelope has other options listed so you can add an amount for a specific purpose.

The money you give in the **Benevolent** (pink) envelopes helps offset the budgeted amount that St. John's has committed to support our missions.

The **Denominational Assessment** (green) envelope can be used to help pay what we as a church are required to send to the Reformed Church of America. This year, that Assessment is \$108 per active member. Please give any amount you can to this significant item in our budget.

The seasonal envelopes can be used if you wish to give a special offering during **Lent**, at **Easter**, **Thanksgiving** and **Christmas**.

You can use the Givelify app for any or all these items. Just specify your amount and choice.

We expect some financial challenges in 2022. The people of St. John's have been meeting challenges for more than 200 years, and we are confident that we will continue to do so.

Happy New Year from the Finance Committee!



"A word of gratitude

We would like to offer a very sincere thank you to St. John's for making us the October beneficiaries of your 'Mission of the Month'. We are grateful for your support and awareness of the work we do. If you'd ever like to know more about our programs or have ideas for partnerships or collaborations, please reach out to me at infor@cultureconnectrbk.org.

We are setting an intention to be more engaged in Red Hook this coming year.

Warmly and with gratitude,
Rosie and the board"



Deadline for the **February** Kerk is **January 10**.

Personal ads of no more than 3 lines will be accepted for \$1 per issue. Business ads in the form of a business card to be photocopied will cost \$5 per issue.

If you would like to receive the Kerk by e-mail (a little more reliably on time than the paper version being mailed to your home) e-mail the church and let us know;
office@stjohnsreformed.org.

Church Calendar

Worship Service

Sundays **10 a.m. in person** and you can also join live on Zoom.

You can continue to visit "**St. John's in Red Hook**" on **YouTube** for the Sunday service also!

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88588306134?pwd=eW92WFgzUXdjSElwOG5KcFVBZGV6dz09>

Meeting ID: 885 8830 6134

Passcode: 126126

To phone in: Dial by your location

+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

The bulletin for each service can be found on the website: www.stjohnsreformed.org. Click on the dropdown box for worship.

Rev. Alisha Riepma

Tues., Wed., Fri. 845-758-1184
pastoralisha@stjohnsreformed.org

Shari Juranic, Administrator

Mon, Wed, Fri. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Thurs. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Michele Zagorski, Financial Consultant

Thurs. 9:30 - 11:30 a.m.
Every other Thursday

Food Pantry Distribution

Mon. 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Wed. 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Bible Study

Tues. 10:15 a.m. in the fellowship hall

Finance Committee meeting

Mon. Jan. 10, 7 p.m. on Zoom

Book Lovers' Club

Mon. Jan. 10, 10 a.m.
Four Winds by Kristin Hannah

Property Committee meeting

Tues. Jan. 11, 7 p.m.

Old Dutch Village Garden Club

Thurs. Jan. 13, 12:30 p.m.

Elders meeting

Thurs. Jan. 20, 7 p.m.

Consistory meeting

Thurs. Jan. 20, 7:30 p.m.

Boy Scouts Leaders meeting

Thurs. Jan. 27, 7 p.m. fellowship hall



Shepherds Page

January 2022

A Weary World Rejoices

We are blessed to be able to come to Him whenever we want, with whatever concerns we have. What better Christmas gift could we ask for than peace?

This has been another difficult year. It's been a year of loss for all of us whether that was a job, loved one, a relationship or our sense of peace and security. As we head into the Christmas season, it can be hard to muster up feelings of holiday joy. These moments of pain make the miracle of Jesus' life and death feel all the more relevant and important.

This stanza comes from the Christmas carol "O Holy Night", "a thrill of hope the weary world rejoices." What a beautiful reminder of the splendor of our Savior's birth. The birth of Christ brought about a "new and glorious" day. There are rumors of who really wrote "O Holy Night". It is said a French soldier in the trenches during WWI began singing this song with other Christmas carols. As it is told, it was the first song sung over the radio. It continues to captivate listeners, reminding them of the sheer wonder of Jesus' birth.

So what do we rejoice in? Everyone rejoices in a different way such as watching the sun rise or set, holding a new baby, or that first cup of coffee in the morning. We are all in such desperate need of joy. Christmas festivities can feel like a welcome relief from boredom and fear. The birth of our Savior surpasses all of these feelings.

A weary world can rejoice as Jesus knows how tired we are this year. We need something to give us true hope. We all experience pain, separation, and loss. This is the reality of this broken world, whether there's a pandemic or not. While small amounts of happiness provide a temporary relief from that, nothing can truly bring us peace, hope, and joy like the gift of God. That gift came to us in the form of His Son, Jesus. He would go to live a perfect, sinless life and die a death that He didn't deserve. He rose three days later so that we could have hope and a future. This world is not our home. No matter how difficult things get, we know He has fought for us. All we have to do is put our faith in Him. Since there is hope and because of that, we can rejoice in any circumstances. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 encourages us to "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." So let us focus on the real reason for the season, change the way we see the holiday, and celebrate Christ who came as the light of the world. When we meditate on Him and His Word, we will not walk in the darkness of this world. Let us all pray for all those we know that are in the dark and not yet have seen the light of Christ. I'm praying that 2022 will bring all of you much love, peace, hope, and joy.

Here is a poem that I would like to share with all of you. "Christmas is a seeking heart. Christmas is a prayer. Christmas is a time of peace and joy for all to share. Christmas is the gift of love God sent for everyone, the miracle of grace and life, He gives us through His Son.

God Bless All of You During this Holiday Season. Remember the shepherds are here for you.

Yours in Christ, Eileen Zeliph

Shepherds serving St. Johns Reformed Church

Desiree Albizu

Kayla Bell

Nancy Finkle

Linda Neilson

Joann Fisher

Denise Gilhooly

Marie Votava