



THE BELL TOWER

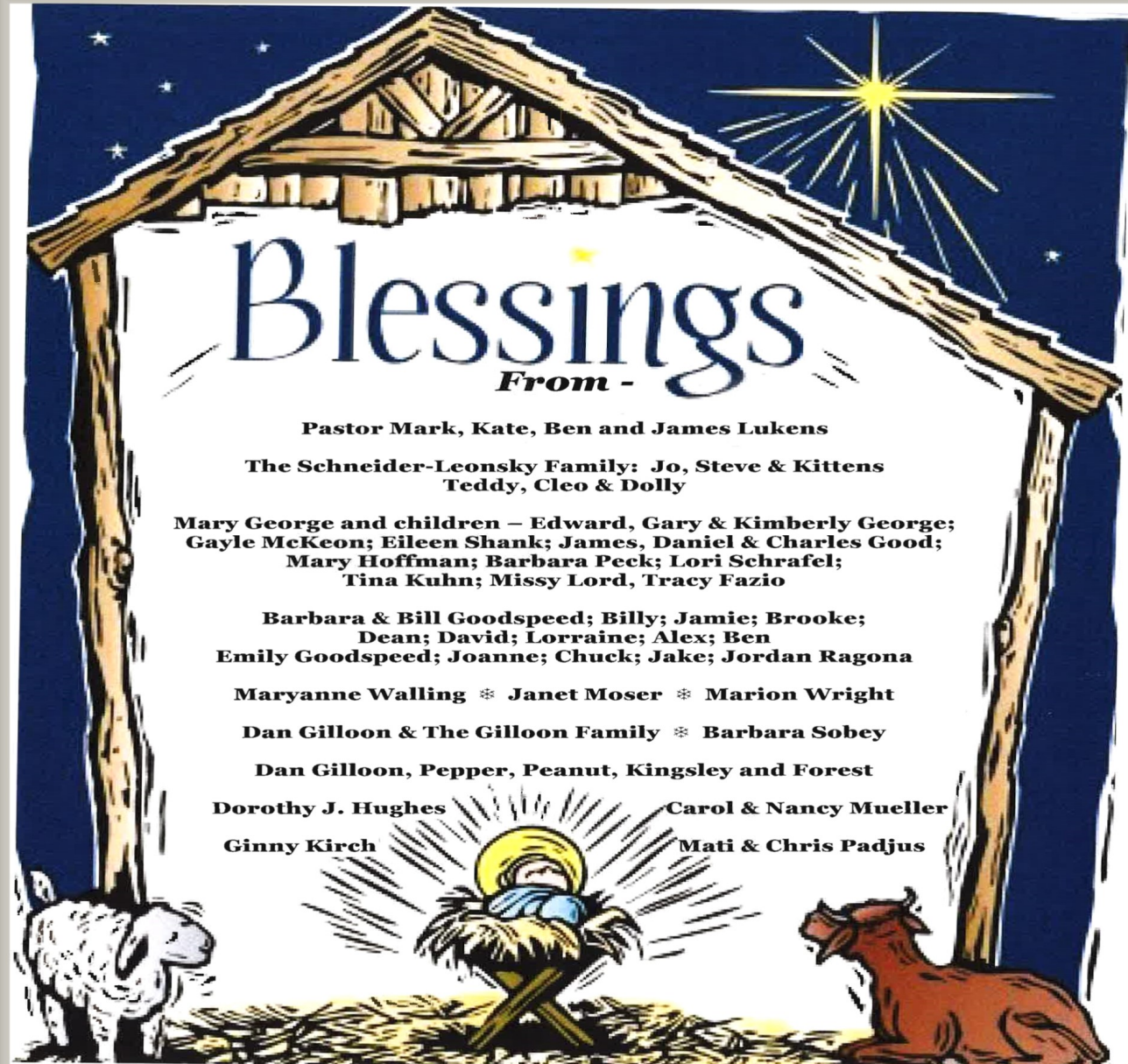


"PROCLAIM GOOD NEWS TO THE WORLD
JESUS LIVES OUR GOD REIGNS"

Vol. 60 No. 11

East Rockaway, N.Y.

December 2020



The D'Agostino Family: Jen, Charlie and John-Paul

Joann Wright * Rich & Andrea Eaves * Diana and Mark Harrison * Kate Whitney

Becca, Harold, Christine and Jacqueline Webb * Peter & Carol Henck

Jessica, Tracy, Taryn & Dylan McConnach-Henck

A Different Kind of Christmas

“I was going to go to the dining room for Thanksgiving this year, but I didn’t want to put on clothes, so I skipped it.” (anonymous)

Thanksgiving seemed kind of like a bust to many of us this year. So many of us look forward to the annual ritual of going “home” wherever “home” happens to be, for Thanksgiving. We pile into the car, carefully place the dishes in the back and off we go to see people we may not have seen since last year, stuff ourselves with wonderful food and hopefully, take a little bit of time for gratitude, to thank God for all of our blessings, whatever they may be. But, of course, the pandemic put a stop to those plans. Because of the spiking infection rate, this year we had to do what we’ve had to do for everything else since March, accept reality and change our behavior accordingly. Nobody likes it, but when the alternative is a possibly deadly and highly contagious disease, well, what can you do? This is a virus, a form of life so primitive that it can barely be called “life,” and yet it has affected us unlike anything else, at least in my lifetime. There was no sitting around the big table this year, not even the joy of our great Bethany Thanksgiving feast this year, because this nasty little germ wouldn’t go away.

It won’t be going away for Christmas either, no matter how much Christmas means to us. Once again, as much as it may disorient and infuriate us, COVID-19 will be with us and probably still on the rise as the winter sets in. We’ll have to choose, as we are doing every day, what is most important to us, as we decide how we are going to live with that reality. With the election season over, perhaps we can begin to recognize that this is not a red or a blue disease or a hoax but a public health crises that cannot ultimately be addressed and resolved unless we do what we have traditionally done in the face of crises, pull together and do what we need to do to restore God’s people to health.

As the Body of Christ, we aren’t immune to these trials, but we do have a vital role to play in what is happening. Like the shepherds in the

fields on the first Christmas Eve, we have heard the songs of the angels heralding the coming of the Prince of Peace. We have seen the hope of the world wrapped in rags and laying in a manger, the Lord of the Universe made manifest as a helpless infant whose incredible power is found not in his ability to conquer and destroy, but rather in evoking the best of those around him, in eliciting and inspiring grace. His claim on our spirits is found not in his ability to bring down the wrath of the heavens but rather in lifting blind eyes to the light, and bringing forth from the valley of the bones new lives for a new day and a new way of being, for the promise of lives made abundant as we learn to see the things that make it so.

We’re not used to having so little control of the things in our world. Our society is in thrall to myths of technological invincibility worthy of the Tower of Babel. Myths that can lead us to believe we can answer every one of life’s challenges with a vaccine or a code or the right machine. That personal sacrifice, faith, and the willingness to persevere are not needed. Our society’s embrace of individualism has been twisted by the narcissism of our age into a “me before we” nihilism that blinds us to the fact that we are all sisters and brothers, our fates inextricably intertwined. It makes even the simple wearing of a cloth mask to safeguard one another an attack on our rights instead of an act of solidarity for the benefit of all. In a time in which we need to stick together and take care of each other more than ever, a time when our only true weapon in this fight is that solidarity, the teachings of the Gospel are a port in the storm. They are our best and only defense against this pandemic and the only hope that we will emerge from this crisis having created something redemptive from all the suffering it has caused.

That might seem obvious, but these are unusual times. We have become so splintered, so bal-

The Thrift Shop is OPEN!! Fridays and Saturdays 10:00 AM-2:00 PM

kanized by the brutality and incivility of our discourse these days, even in the church of Jesus Christ, that we all seem to need to see each other's credentials before we decide whether we will treat each other with common courtesy, let alone the respect due to all of God's children. That means we have to be intentional, more than ever before in holding up the light of Christ in this darkness; with our care for the vulnerable and the marginalized, Christ's own, with our willingness to break down walls and build bridges, to stand for love, for compassion, for justice and peace and to stand with those considered the least, the last and the lost, yes, because that is the basis of God's law of love. But just as importantly, we are called to sow seeds of reconciliation and community. We are tasked to remember the words of God spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, and build houses of welcome and grace and live in them, to plant gardens of reconciliation as well as of justice that they may grow into a blessed community and prepare us for the kin-dom of God.

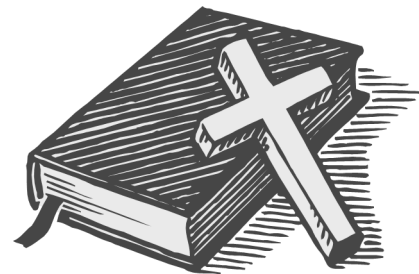
It is a challenging task, this discipleship, but it is also good news as well. It means that we don't have to be afraid or look for scapegoats to blame for our suffering. It means that our course is clear, and that our witness is more needed than ever, and it means that the simple but difficult things that Christ teaches us: to love the Lord our God and trust in the power of her love for us, to love our neighbor as ourselves, to treat each other

with the dignity and respect due to a person made in the image of God and to share, share our gifts and our sorrows, to reach out and hold on to each other with all of our might and, when we're in an appropriate, socially distanced location, to lift up our voice (however terrible) and to make a joyful noise to the Lord!

Yes, that's right! Sing with the shepherds and the angels, shout for joy with the lost and the lonely because Jesus Christ is born. Rejoice because God so loved the world that he became one of us, not to condemn us in our sin and sorrow, but to lift us up into his arms, and let his grace bring our broken spirits, our plague ravaged bodies and our dried up hearts to life, not again, but even better than before, stronger than ever for all we have been through! Whether you are here with us in person, masked up and silent or on YouTube or in spirit alone, rejoice! God loves us and God will bring us home! Merry Christmas!!!

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Mark



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BETHANY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

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***Statements made in editorials, signed articles or letters, do not represent an official position in this church.
Persons with differing opinions are invited to expres their views in letters to the editor.***

Are you less than perfect? Welcome! We are a community or imperfect people (including but not restricted to): squirming children and their harried parents, happy and sad people, people with challenges, seniors, young people, middle aged folks, people of every race, poor people, rich people, in between people, LGBT and straight people, true believers, seekers, agnostics, odd and ordinary people, extraordinary people, un-churched and unsure people, people with disabilities, hypocrites, saints, sinners and everybody else. Because no matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here just as you are!



Greetings from your Bethany Moderator

In peace, Janet Moser, Bethany Moderator

Bethany family and friends,

Christmas is coming!

That is a most glorious and wonderful thing, and not just for me - the lover of all things Christmas. People all over are grasping onto this joyous season like never before. If ever we needed a Christmas – this is the year.

Why? Because Christmas is about **hope**. A baby's birth. The birth of every new life gives us hope – hope and faith in the future. Because Christmas is pure **joy!** The gift of an innocent baby (everyone loves babies) and not just any baby but a child who will save us all.

It's all good news! So much so that people are often a little kinder to each other, a little more generous, a little more caring. Boy, do we need that. The redeemed Ebenezer Scrooge states, "I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year." Maybe we could try that too.

But what about New Year's? That fateful time to assess ourselves and make a resolution or two. Well – you have my permission, in fact, my dictate to NOT do that. It's not that I don't want us to try to improve ourselves in some way. It's the whole resolution thing. Look up the definition of resolution. A firm decision to do or not do something. Resolute - admirably purposeful, determined and unwavering. See what I mean? It's a recipe for disaster! One little slip, one extra dessert, one morning exercise missed... and the whole thing goes in the garbage. You are no longer resolute! Just don't do it!

Instead, how about if we just call our new plan "intentions"? We intend to exercise more and eat less junk food. We intend to go to bed at a more reasonable hour. If we miss the mark a day or two, we are not disgraced failures. Oh no! We intend to try again tomorrow!

So let's face the new year with hearts full of hope, faith, joy, and courage. "Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the little voice at the end of the day that says I'll try again tomorrow." Mary Anne Radmacher

FOOD PANTRY

We are collecting school supplies and food to be given to the children served by our Lond Island Council of Churches' Food Pantry. Bring all donations to church on Sundays or to the church office during regular office hours. If you have any questions, please contact the Freeport Emergency Food Pantry at 516-868-4989.

The Thrift Shop is OPEN!! Fridays and Saturdays 10:00 AM-2:00 PM

FROM THE TRUSTEES:

Boy Scout Troop 121 at Bethany completed project 1: Finn Boyle, with the help of his troop, family and friends, filled in the pot holes in the church's parking lot. It is for his Eagle Scout Project and we are very proud of him and grateful for him willing to help Bethany.

If you would like to attend any Sunday, please call the office during the week so that Maryanne can reserve you a seat or two. If you cannot attend services, please remember to send in your donations to the office. Thank you.

Yours in Christ, Richard Eaves

www.bethanycong.com

BETHANY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH VIRTUAL CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

Due to the difficulties caused by COVID-19 the Church will not be offering poinsettias for purchase this Christmas. We would like to offer the following "virtual" poinsettia option for those who would like to Honor or Memorialize a particular person this Christmas season. A donation to Bethany Congregational Church will be collected to be given to the Freeport Food Pantry and your dedication will be listed in the Christmas/New Year Bulletin as we have done in the past for poinsettias.



All checks should be made out to:

Bethany Congregational Church

The Memo line should read: Poinsettia Donation

Send Form and Check to:

Bethany Church, 100 Main Street, East Rockaway, 11518 by December 22, 2020

Name: _____

Check # _____ Amount of Donation \$ _____ (at your discretion)

In Honor of or In Memory of:

The Thrift Shop is OPEN!! Fridays and Saturdays 10:00 AM-2:00 PM

FROM THE EDITOR:

Unfortunately, Pastor Mark's father, Dr. John Lukens passed away December 4th. According to Pastor Mark: "My dad devoted his life to children and young adults as a psychologist and an educator. He was a bright but very humble man, a brilliant educator, and a kind and fascinating man. For 15 years I commuted to a second job and spent 2 or 3 days a week bunking in with Dad. It was God's way of making sure I really got to know him and I will always be grateful! Now he is back with his beloved Kass! Please pray for him and for his family. His last concern was that his funeral not be a "super spreader event". He was very concerned about that. So we will have an immediate family only service. But we plan a memorial for when this plague ends and ask that you wait until then. Dad spent his entire life devoted to nurturing marginalized lives into bloom, he would not want to put anyone at risk.



Additional Prayer requests: Gerard Cantone, Barbara Merna and Marion Wright.

My Christmas Memories...

Submitted by: Jo Schneider-Leonsky

December 2020

Being that Holiday time is so different this year due to the Pandemic, I have found pleasure in remembering good times shared with my Family in the past. Daddy had installed a commercial kitchen for a candy shop, and each year he would bring home a cardboard box printed with tiny toys that contained a hand molded chocolate Santa from the store...so delicious! The week before Christmas, Mom would take us to the VFW Hall for our yearly visit with Santa (played by our local barber). Twists of crape paper decorated the ceiling and cardboard cut-outs of wooden soldiers, Santa and Christmas trees hung festively on the wall. Each child was given a lollipop and small toy as a treat...what a happy afternoon that always was. We hung our red mesh stockings from the fireplace on Christmas Eve, awaiting Santa's arrival with great excitement.

Christmas Day was always spent with Daddy's family at Aunt Zira and Uncle Bernie's house in Long Beach. Their live, fragrant, unshered Christmas Tree was as tall as would fit into their house and decorated with delicate glass balls, twinkling lights and glittery lead tinsel. Beneath the pine were gaily wrapped packages that the Family would exchange. Playing with First Cousins Pasha and Alina and enjoying the company of our close-knit relatives which included our Parents, Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles and various Cousins, the occasion would be one of true celebration, complete with fine food, easy conversation, lots of laughter and people dancing to Christmas music playing on the old tube radio.

Though these warm recollections are long ago and far away, and sadly, many of those beloved folks are now gone, I treasure the memories of the joyous times we spent together. Being part of a group that was so warm, loving and accepting was wonderful, and the feeling of being protected and secure as a little girl within such a devoted Family Circle is something I will always cherish with great nostalgia.

I'll be celebrating Christmas this year at home in our cozy "Fireside Cottage"...along with my dear Husband, Steve - and our precious Pussycats -just enjoying being together. We are grateful for remaining healthy so far during this seige of Coronavirus, appreciative of our stable housing and thankful to have enough food to eat. We pray that the Holiday will be a turning point for those who don't have the comforts we do, and with vaccines coming soon, that the virus spread as well as the many hardships caused by it, will come to an eagerly awaited end.

Though the Holidays will be different for all of us this year, however you choose to celebrate, we're wishing everyone a blessed Christmas...one of hope, healing and peace.

With love from the Schneider-Leonsky Family:

Jo, Steve and Kittens
Teddy, Cleo and Dolly



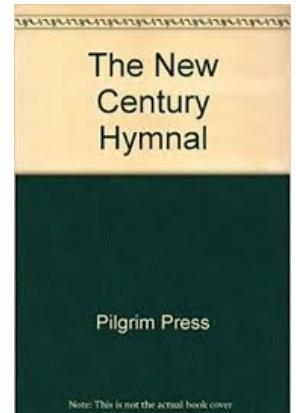
**Bethany Congregational is indeed in the 21st century
and now our hymnal will be too!**

**Join us in this timely upgrade by “purchasing” a hymnal for Bethany.
Although this was inspired as a memorial to our dear friend Wally Merna,
each hymnal may be dedicated to whomever you choose.
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Hymnal Order Form

Your name and phone # _____

Number of hymnals requested _____ x \$20 (includes shipping) = \$ _____

Please submit check payable to Bethany Congregational Church with your order form.

In Memory of _____

In Honor of _____

In Memory of _____

In Honor of _____

In Memory of _____

WOMEN'S LEAGUE:

Thank you to Stephanie Maddalone and Tina Lewald for leading our wreath fundraiser. They sold and delivered 35 wreaths. Great job!

Merry Christmas and Happy and Healthy New Year to all! Here's hoping we are all together again in 2021!!



The Kind of News We Need Right Now....

Eight in 10 Americans in a new poll said they were desperate to hear some positive news in the remainder of 2020—and believed the constant stream of bad news has taken a toll. The survey asked 2,000 Americans nationwide about how they've coped with the stress of this year. Conducted by OnePoll on behalf of [Vitamin Angels](#) for Giving Tuesday, the survey included six in 10 respondents who said the difficulties of 2020 and COVID-19 have led them to give back to their community even more—and 66% were in agreement that their communities are closer than ever. The 'good news' is that 7 in 10 respondents have made it a priority to do something positive every day as the quarantine continues.

TOP THINGS AMERICANS DO TO CHEER THEMSELVES UP IN 2020

Watching their favorite movie – 46%
Eating their favorite snack – 43%
Going for a walk – 43%
Calling a friend – 40%
Cuddling their pet – 38%
Taking a nap – 37%
Hugging a loved one – 37%
Baking cookies – 31%
Singing in the shower – 25%
Having a solo dance party – 19%

TOP POSITIVITY GOALS DURING COVID-19

Try to make someone smile once a day – 43%
Donate money to local charities – 38%
Share positive news with their loved ones – 34%
Try to make someone laugh once a day – 34%
Volunteer in a safe, social distancing compliant fashion – 28%

GOALS FOR 2021

Have a more positive outlook in life – 52%
Try not to focus on the negative things in life as much – 50%
Take better care of their mental health – 48%
Donate more money to charity – 34%
Volunteer in their community more – 32%

Despite the stress of COVID-19, 78% of respondents also said the pandemic has made it more important than ever to give back to their local communities. “Communities in the U.S. and around the world were already vulnerable before COVID-19 and now is the time when they need us most,” said Howard Schiffer, Vitamin Angels Founder & President. “Right now, we have an opportunity to come together and take what has been one of the hardest years in our lives, and turn it into one of our best, positive actions; to help the most vulnerable in our communities.” (from the Good News Network December 2020)

May we all do our best to take positive steps to take care of ourselves, our families and the larger community as we move forward into the New Year!

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and Blessings in the New Year, and as always, A Wealth of Good Health!

Submitted by Carol Henck

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BOOK REVIEW

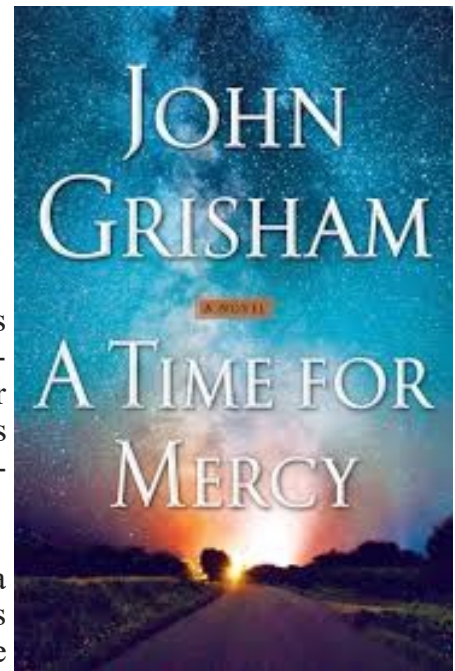
By Lou Gaspari

A Time of Mercy

By John Grisham

This is another fine and enjoyable novel by Grisham. This is his third novel to feature Jake Brigance, a southern lawyer specializing in a seemingly unwinnable case. The other books that feature Brigance are A Time to Kill, which was made into a movie starring Matthew McConaughey and Sandra Bullock. The other novel was Sycamore Row.

In A Time of Mercy, Grisham lays out a story concerning a police officer coming home drunk and violent, who beats his girl friend unconscious while her two teenage children are upstairs. The woman appears to be dead. The 16 year old son then gets the officer's gun and kills him in a fit of rage. He is charged with murdering the officer. The book now turns to the trial of this boy which is a riveting and an absolutely great read.



TROOP 121

On November 21st, Troop 121 went out to Schiff Scout Reservation for our annual Campsgiving Trip. We were not allowed to camp over night, but we adapted and overcame the challenges and had a great time. The boys were able to do archery, rifle and shotgun practice and then had time to hang out in camp. This year, the adults cooked dinner and some of the parents came out to share in the feast. At the end of the night, as we always do, we held our "thorns, roses and buds," (reflections). It was one of the most emotional and inspiring one yet. I am very fortunate to be part of such a great group of scouts and families. I passed the torch and my son Sean got to cook the turkey in the garbage can this year and it came out perfect. Sincerely, **Nick Sincinito, Scoutmaster Troop 121**



(For more information,
please visit the troop's website:
<http://troop121ny.org>)

BOY SCOUT TROOP 121

TODAY'S YOUTH... TOMORROW'S LEADERS

THRIFTique

We are pleased to announce that the Thrift Shop at Bethany Congregational Church located at 100 Main Street, East Rockaway, NY, is open for business once again. Our hours are Friday and Saturday from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. Entry of people will be limited to few at a time, temperatures will be taken, hand sanitizer and masks must be used and social distancing will be put into practice to help keep both customers and staff healthy and safe.

We carry many items in our shop and there's something for everyone!

Looking forward to seeing friends
- old and new - real soon!



Bethany is looking for a **Not-For-Profit** Organization to rent the space that we have downstairs.

We are looking to rent the large room, smaller room and 3 small office size rooms plus two (2) large storage areas.

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Bethany Congregational Church

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East Rockaway, N.Y. 11518

(Non-profit Organization)

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Thank you.



Mural in the Fellowship Hall

Courtesy of Diana Harrison and Anthony Claverie