



ARC Lite

129 Lincoln Ave.

Altamont, NY 12009

Pastor: Rev. Matthew J. vanMaastricht

March 2023

Dear Friends,

As of late I have been immersing myself, once again, in the sayings of the desert fathers and mothers. These are short sayings and stories that originated with the monks in the deserts of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt in the fourth and fifth centuries. I've engaged these sayings for years, and every so often I immerse myself in them and read the entire collection. This is one of those times.

The fourth century was a time of transition for the history of Christianity. For the first three centuries after Jesus, Christians lived under a shadow of general disapproval and intermittent persecution. Diocletian's persecution began in 303, and was the last and most severe of the intermittent persecutions in the Roman Empire. Thirteen years later, this ended with Constantine and the Edict of Milan. This was the beginning of the seismic shift for Christianity. The Edict of Milan was official toleration of Christianity, and changed the repressive policies initiated by Diocletian. Eventually, just over sixty years later, Christianity was made the official religion of the Roman Empire. In seventy years, Christianity went from actively persecuted to the religion of the empire. I have a lot of thoughts on the Constantinian Shift, if you're interested in them talk to me sometime. But for now, the point is this significant shift in the place of Christians in society.

The Jesus movement began as a minority movement, both within Judaism and within the Roman Empire. These people who followed "The Way" as it was called at first, worshiped Jesus as the incarnation of the Divine who died (at least nearly) naked on a Roman tool of terror. The message of Jesus was not one of domination, but one of service; it was not one of riches, but one of giving; it was not one of self-interest, but of self-giving. The Jesus movement flourished under this cloud of general disapproval and intermittent persecution. This is the natural environment for Christianity. And (in the grand scheme) very quickly went from this natural environment to the official religion and the one enforced by the empire. And it was this decadence that drove thousands of people into monasteries, and some into solitary caves to live as monks to seek to follow Jesus in a context which has become overwhelmed with decadence and excess. Because for them, being faithful to the message of Jesus was the most important thing. This flight to the desert made an indelible mark on the history of Christianity.

I gave that little historic lesson to consider what the shift we are seeing in our context might mean for us. Christianity is moving from hegemony (dominance) to a minority faith. We are seeing, in a way, the reverse of what happened in the fourth century (no persecution of Diocletian on the radar, though). And there are different ways that we can respond to it. One way is to try to wed oneself to power as tightly as possible in order to keep a grasp on the controls. There are certainly those who are taking that path. But that is a perilous path, because one can very easily lose one's soul in trying to maintain control. There is an opposite extreme, that of an extreme insularity from everyone around you, such that folks don't actually come into contact in any meaningful way with anyone who is different.

But there is a third way, and it is this third way that I think is the most faithful. How do we have a distinctly and unashamedly Christian witness to the life and teachings of Jesus in the changing contexts in which we are. That is, how can we exist meaningfully in our contexts—and jobs and schools and things like this— while also having a distinctly Christian witness? This third way is, I think, by far the most difficult. And this is what drove the flight to the desert. They didn't flee because they thought they were too holy; they went into the desert because they did not think they could, personally, exist faithfully in this changed context without getting sucked into all that goes along with being the group "in power." This third way is the hardest, but it is the way that we are called to in this time and in this place.

I think daily of the faith that we are trying to pass on to our son, and how I want to impart that the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus is the single most important thing in the world. And how will his life speak? Will Jesus come through in his life? How does our home speak? If someone who didn't know me came into our home, would they know that we were Christian? How do my priorities speak? By seeing where I put my time, commitment, and resources, would someone be able to see that the most important thing to me is the peace, justice, and wholeness of the Reign of God breaking into our world in the person of Jesus?

Now, I'm not suggesting that we should all head for the mountains and become hermits, not the case at all. But there is something to leaving everything behind, selling everything you own, giving it to the poor, and devoting one's life to the service of God and others in such a radical fashion. And so I wonder how we might find the way to adapt to the changing context in which we find ourselves, and how we might continue to put the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Christ as central with other things moving around it. I truly believe that the message of Jesus—of humility, of self-giving love, and concern for the poor and the marginalized, and resurrection that follows death—that this is the most beautiful thing in the whole world. Our invitation, then, is to help others see that too. And sometimes it may make us stick out a bit, but perhaps that's okay. After all, being a minority religion is the natural home for Christianity, and it is in this, when the followers of Jesus are able to best embody Jesus' message.



With deep and abiding love,

Pastor Matthew



Community Dinner

Our next "Community Spaghetti Dinner" for the community will be on March 6. Food will be served from 5 to 6:30 and includes spaghetti with sauce (meatballs and sausage), bread, salad and dessert.

We strive to create a safe, happy, atmosphere where neighbors can meet and greet each other. We can not do this without the wonderful 30-35 volunteers. Please consider helping out by signing up on the sheets in Fellowship Hall or by calling (518) 861-8711. Thank you!



Blankets and Tools Campaign

Continues This Month

Thanks to everyone who has purchased hearts so far; as of February 24, \$870 has been received. The campaign concludes on Sunday, March 12, at which time our offerings will be dedicated during the morning worship service. Checks may be made out to "ARC Benevolence Acct." with "blankets" on the memo line. Dozens of hygiene kits have also been assembled. They will be sent to Church World Service and then distributed to refugees and disaster victims as needed.



A Note from your ARC Deacons

The Deacons oversee the physical and material well-being of the church community. Should anyone find themselves in crisis or in need of assistance we are here to help. All interactions are strictly confidential. Contact a Deacon by phone (we are all listed in the Church Directory) or Pastor van Maastricht at 518-861-8711 or by leaving a note in one of our mailboxes in the basement of ARC. The Advent and Christmas offerings help with the diaconal mission.

Pastor Matthew van Maastricht
Jan Davis
Carol Lennebacker

Noreen Novak
Debbie Ritzko
Barb Sargent

3rd Annual Joel Edwards, DVM Memorial Pet Food Drive



In memory of Joel and his dedication to animals as an honored veterinarian, we are holding our third pet food drive to benefit food pantries and pet shelters in our area. The food drive will happen the weekend of **March 10-13**. Dry dog food and either dry or wet cat food would be especially appreciated. Large bags of food are difficult to handle and transport so we ask you keep bag size to 20 lbs or less. Donations may be brought to the church anytime during those four days. A bin will be located in the back parking lot entryway to the church. When the church is open, there will be a bin at the top of the back staircase under the bulletin board. Baskets will also be at the entrances to the sanctuary on Sunday, March 12. Thank you for your support of animals in need.

The Congregational Life Committee is interested in your thoughts!

We are working to plan several activities for the church family and our friends. Your input would be very helpful in determining what kinds of trips in which you would be most likely to participate. There will be a poll conducted in fellowship hall for several weeks in March and April. Watch for our questions—we need to know what you want to do.



The Albany Damien Center is a new addition to the Benevolence budget, Perry Junjulas, their Executive Director, wrote this in his acknowledgement of our gift: "Dear Altamont Reformed Church: I was so excited to hear about your donation of \$200. You just made a huge difference for people living with HIV and AIDS. Your donation will provide crucial services for people in our community, including nutrition education and home cooked meals, housing assistance, behavioral health support, prevention and access to care and medications, and support, socialization and love from our Living Room. Thank you, friends, for your generous love, prayers, and support!"

Easter Flowers



Anyone wishing to place Easter plants on the chancel for Easter Sunday is asked to complete this form and return it to John or Natalie Drazhal, PO Box 174, East Berne, NY 12059, or call 872-9735 on or before March 30. All plants will be \$15.00 and all will be in 6" pots. Please make checks payable to John or Natalie Drazhal.

Plants	# Ordered
Easter Lily	_____
Tulip	_____
Daffodil	_____
Hyacinth	_____
Chrysanthemum.....	_____
Total:	@ \$15.00 = _____



Name: _____ Phone Number _____

Circle one:

In memory of In honor of:



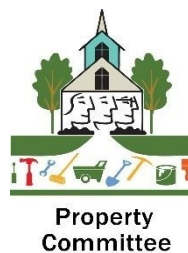
March 30 is the final day to order plants.

CROP Hunger Walk Recruiters Rally-March 19



The John U. Miller Memorial CROP Hunger Walk in Albany will take place on Sunday, May 7, but walkers can register online and walk any time and any where during the month of May. The Altamont Reformed Church team is already registered on the CROP Walk web page. Walkers are invited to join the team and donations may be made to the team or any of the walkers on our page.

Visit www.crophungerwalk.org/albanyny and follow the prompts to enter the name of our team (Altamont Reformed Church). Walkers are also invited to attend the Recruiter Rally on Sunday, March 19, from 3-4:30pm at First Lutheran Church in Albany. There will be a panel presentation on Climate Change featuring Jill Szwed, News 10ABC Morning Meteorologist, Laurie Ten Eyck from Indian Ladder Farms, and Adam Smedberg from Church World Service. Materials for the May 7 Walk will be distributed and the top groups from the 2022 Walk will be recognized. You can register to attend at the Capital Area Council of Churches web site: www.capareacc.org.



The Property Committee is busy gathering estimates to repave the church parking lot and driveway. This major project is planned to be done this summer. Some of the funds for this undertaking are already earmarked in the church budget, and others have expressed an interest in donating in support of the project. More details will be provided in the coming months.



- | | | | |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------------------|----------|
| Ken Percoski..... | March 1 | Jeffrey Trzeciak..... | March 17 |
| Ryan Rodwell-Lawton..... | March 9 | Matthew Percoski..... | March 18 |
| David Fialkoff..... | March 12 | Preston Stewart..... | March 21 |
| Brian Tomasik..... | March 15 | Michelle Stevens..... | March 26 |
| Steve Simmons..... | March 17 | Nancy Twaddell..... | March 29 |
| Emaline Johnson..... | March 17 | Cari Trzeciak..... | March 29 |



☪ Pastor Brad Kautz writes from the Jicarilla Apache Reformed Church in New Mexico: "Spring is coming to the reservation, and as February ends, we are beginning to resume Friday evening roller skating in our gym for the first time since the pandemic began. The need for pastoral care, which markedly increased during 2022, remains high. Please pray that these ways of reaching out into our community would bring people to the hope that is only found in Jesus Christ."

☪ Josh and Alison Perkins have been busy in the Middle East. Josh will be leading a group of Northwestern College students on a service trip to the Al Raja School in Bahrain. Please pray for the logistics to come together and that the students have a fruitful time. The Perkins family has met several of their neighbors and ask for prayers that relationships may deepen. Josh has also been leading intercultural training workshops, with another coming up for the staff at the new RCA hospital in Bahrain. The Muslim holy month of Ramadan begins in March, which will provide new opportunities for Josh and Alison to get to know their neighbors. They are thankful for our prayers and support.

☪ The Community Loan Fund of the Capital Region is pleased to announce the public phase of its capital campaign for our 236 Clinton Avenue expansion project. Partnering with the Albany Center for Economic Success (ACES) and Home Leasing, this project will provide four visible storefronts on Clinton Avenue, co-working space for eight, as well as 36 affordable housing units for local families. For more information about this project and others, visit www.mycommunityloanfund.org.

☪ The Reformed Church in America recently announced that Dr. Elizabeth Pallitto is the new Archivist for the RCA. Based at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Jersey, Dr. Pallitto is responsible for the collection, custody, and care of records for the RCA.

☪ Schenectady Community Ministries invites you to honor Jo-Anne Rafalik, who recently retired from SiCM after serving in various capacities on March 16, 5-7pm, at the First Reformed Church of Schenectady Covenant Hall. Jo-Anne, who served as Interim Director of SiCM after the retirement of the late Phil Grigsby, is being recognized as a "Schenectady Community Champion". Tickets available at www.sicm.salsalabs.org.

☪ The Capital Area Council of Churches reminds you that applications for this year's Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholarships are due by March 31. Area high school seniors who are active in their community and house of worship, demonstrate financial need and academic potential, demonstrate an understanding of and desire to implement the ideals of Dr. King, and are planning to attend college in the fall, are welcome to apply. Applications are available on the CACC website, www.capareacc.org.

☪ The mountains are calling! Camp Fowler registrations are coming in fast, so if your children want to attend, or you want to try out Family Camp, visit the Fowler website and check out the options. www.campfowler.org. Located near Speculator, this camp, owned by Albany Synod, is a special place where youth (and adults) leave their electronic gadgets behind and learn to relate better to nature, God, and each other. ARC's Benevolence budget will cover the registration fee for each ARC-related camper. Adult volunteers are also needed to help in the kitchen, as cabin counselors, or with maintenance. Application forms and other information can be found at the website: www.campfowler.org.



RCA Restructuring Roundtable-March 5

Interested in the future of our denomination, the Reformed Church in America? You are invited to be part of the conversation by attending a Restructuring Roundtable at the Niskayuna Reformed Church, located at 3041 Troy-Schenectady Rd. (Route 7), on Sunday, March 5, from 4-6pm. The Rev. Eddy Aleman, the RCA General Secretary, and members of the Restructuring Team, will give an update on their work and receive comments and input from those in attendance. All are welcome! By the way, Eddy Aleman will be leading worship at ARC that morning, so please give him a warm welcome. Our congregation is well represented in local leadership since Pastor Matthew currently serves as President of Albany Synod and Elder Kitt Jackson as President of Schenectady Classis.



Women's Pot Luck

Blanket Sunday Breakfast



CONSISTORY CONSIDERATIONS



Committee Reports

Benevolence: There were about 40 people at the Blanket Sunday Breakfast. Arrangements have been made for an April 25 dinner at the UAlbany Cornerstone campus.

Congregational Life Committee: 150 people were in attendance at the February community dinner. This resulted in some issues with parking. The outside lights will be adjusted to allow for better lighting and volunteers will be asked to not park in the parking lot.

In other business, the committee is going to put together a list of possible activities and get congregational input to determine where the interest is, and the Annual Joel Edwards Pet Food Drive will be held in March.

Finance: Due to some recent personal hardships for some people on this committee, the review of the Finance Policy and Procedure Manual has not been completed. Laurie will call a meeting in March to get back on track with that.

Book Study: The study group is coming to the end of the current series with consistent attendance. The next book study will be held at Helderberg Reformed Church.

Board of Elders: Approval was given for the baptism of Benjamin Brewer.

Deacons' Report: There is a healthy balance of money in both the Deacon's Fund and the Good Samaritan Fund, and there have been no requests for assistance. The Deacons are going to put an informational message in the Arc Lite stating that the Deacons' mission is to ensure the well-being of the congregation and if anyone has a crisis or urgent need to contact one of the Deacons.

NEW BUSINESS:

In August 2024, Pastor Matthew will have completed seven years of service at ARC and his terms of call allow for consideration of a sabbatical. A sabbatical is a time of active renewal. A sabbatical would be three months during which time he would not be here or available for any pastoral functions. Altamont and Helderberg will work together to plan for a sabbatical in summer of 2025.



ALTAMONT REFORMED
CHURCH
P.O. Box 671, Altamont, NY 12009

The due date for the next edition of the ARC Lite is March 24

Altamont Reformed Church

P.O. Box 671
Altamont, NY 12009

Church office phone: (518) 861-8711

Church email: info@altamontreformed.org

Pastor: Reverend Matthew J. van Mastricht
Office administrator: Nancy McNiven

To be placed on the mailing list, please contact the church office
To contribute articles for the ARC Lite, send to the editor c/o ARC
or email the editor, Theresa Lasselle, at lasselle@aol.com
ARC's website: <http://altamontreformed.org/>