



THE BELL TOWER



"PROCLAIM GOOD NEWS TO THE WORLD"

JESUS LIVES OUR GOD REIGNS"

Vol. 66 No.5

East Rockaway, NY 11518

September-October 2026

Great News!

Thanks to the wonderful response to our first *Song & Story Cafe*, we are doing it again!

Based on past feedback, this will be a wonderful way to spend an afternoon. The relaxed atmosphere filled with great music and conversation will have you wonder where the time went! Folkestra with their guest performer will be amazing.

Our own Jae Carelli will be sharing her story through song and music. You appreciate her talents during church - wait until you hear her here! You will also recognize Alia as she often plays the violin for us.

Dates to Remember:

September 21...Yom Kippur
September 22...First Day of Autumn
October 4...Song and Story Cafe
October 12...Columbus Day
October 18...Corporate Meet (tentative)
October 31...Halloween
November 1...Turn Clocks Back
November 3...ELECTION DAY
November 11...Veterans' Day
November 26...Thanksgiving Day

JOIN US FOR A SUNDAY AFTERNOON

Song and Story Cafe

ALL FAITHS AND CULTURES ARE WELCOME

Listen to songs and share stories with each other about our roots, home, and where we belong.

Featuring: Folkestra and jae.ci with special guest Kevin Jackson. Alia Gribbon, MC



Sunday
October 4th

2-4:30 PM

Bethany Congregational
Church

100 Main St, East Rockaway, NY

Tickets \$5 payable at door

to RSVP scan the QR
code or call and
leave a message at
516 615 2795



Light refreshments (coffee, tea, water, cookies...) will be served at midpoint. Please RSVP so we can plan for seating and refreshments.

(516) 615-2795

“Changing Seasons, Unchanging Strength”

As summer gently gives way to fall, God's creation invites us to pay attention. The air turns crisp, the days grow shorter, and the leaves exchange their summer green for brilliant shades of red, orange, and gold. Each season carries its own purpose, and autumn reminds us that transition need not be feared. In God's hands, every season can prepare us for deeper faith, fresh growth, and renewed ministry.

The church also moves through seasons of renewal. New opportunities arise, fresh challenges stretch us, and creative pathways open for service. Bethany Congregational Church is called to witness to the steadfast God in every shifting season, carrying the ministry of Christ into the community with faith, wisdom, and courage.

At times, it can be difficult to stay focused while adjusting to new circumstances. We may be tempted to hold so tightly to familiar traditions, history, and customs that our minds become closed and our vision grows narrow. Yet creation teaches us that adaptation is part of life's flourishing. The question before us is not whether the world around us will shift, but whether the church will respond faithfully, prayerfully, and boldly.

Consider the birds that sense the turning season before we do. As the days shorten and the air grows cooler, many begin their long migration, guided by an instinct placed within them by the Creator. They do not resist the rhythm of the year; they respond with wisdom, movement, and trust. Likewise, some animals prepare for winter by storing food, growing thicker coats, or finding shelter. Creation reminds us that adjustment is not weakness—it is faithfulness to the order God has established. In the same way, the church is called to discern the times, move with courage, and remain rooted in the strength of the One who never fails. Our methods may be renewed, our ministries may take fresh shape, and our outreach may travel new roads; yet our foundation remains firm in

Christ, who is “the same yesterday and today and forever.”

This summer has truly been a blessing. We have witnessed many activities, ministries, and shared ideas begin to take shape. The path ahead may not always be straight, smooth, or easy as we seek to embody Jesus Christ in our life together. Still, we move forward relying on the promise of Scripture:

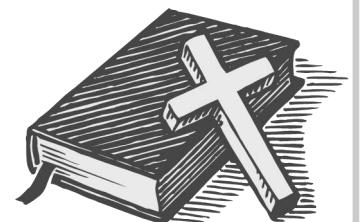
“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13 [NRSV]

That promise can strengthen Bethany Congregational Church to welcome renewal, respond with holy imagination, and look ahead to ministries that touch the lives of our congregation and our neighbors. Not with fear, hesitation, or resistance, but with confidence in Jesus Christ, we can serve faithfully and give glory to God in all we do.

Therefore, as we enter this new season, let us not cling to yesterday in fear or race toward tomorrow in anxiety. Let us walk forward with prayerful confidence, trusting that the God who guided His people through wilderness, exile, harvest, and promise is still guiding His church today. Seasons may shift, circumstances may stretch us, and ministry may call for fresh vision; but our strength is not found in comfort, custom, or familiarity. Our strength is in the Lord. May we be a church willing to listen, ready to serve, courageous to adjust, and faithful to Christ in every season. Rooted in grace, renewed in pace; steady in prayer, strengthened to care; moving in love, guided from above. Amen.

Peace & blessings

The Rev. Prabhu Sigamani



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

Donations may be left anytime in the sheds next to the garage!

FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES:

The Trustees have been quietly busy over the summer. In no particular order, we installed various cameras around Bethany, especially the outer perimeters, for safety and security.

We took care of leaky faucets and clogged sinks. We also upgraded various electrical issues.

We hired a painting crew to paint the outside of Bethany. We started along the Rhame Avenue side (facing CVS). We plan to have the back and opposite side painted very shortly. Hopefully, we can finish the front in the Spring.

We are hoping for volunteers to weed all along the front on Main Street. If you are interested, please contact the office at 516-615-2795. Please leave a message if no one answers.

**Donations
are Greatly
Appreciated!**

We are hoping to buy another 10 or 12 tables for the gymnasium. Donations would be greatly appreciated. The tables cost about \$50. each.

**We accept Venmo...
@Bethany-East-rock**



Yours in Christ, Rich Eaves,
Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

Bethany Bell Tower ...is a bi-monthly publication of **BETHANY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**

Pastor: Reverend Prabhu Sigamani; Music Minister: Jae Carelli; Moderator: Janet Moser

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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 express their views in letters to the editor.***

Are you less than perfect? Welcome! We are a community of 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

“All alone am I ever since your goodbye...just the lonely beating of my heart”

That Brenda Lee hit came out in 1963. While that song spoke of a broken love relationship, it rings true today in our current culture of isolation, loneliness, and lack of meaningful relationships.

Social media has replaced the depth and richness of face-to-face interactions with its superficial and often artificial connections. No matter how many “likes” you get, it is still just you, alone, behind your device.

Another factor is the decreasing number of places with opportunities to casually interact with other people. The loss of low-cost locations like cafes, parks, and community centers has made it that much more difficult for face-to-face contact. Even shopping of all types (clothes, groceries...) have shifted to online ordering. No need to speak to a living person at all. Sad.

Then there is the crazy work schedule, the school schedules, the chauffeuring kids to scheduled activities, and the many other demands on our time and energy. There is increasingly less time for relaxing with family or friends. Isolation and loneliness are now a major public health crisis in our country. This has a horrific impact on health and mental well-being. We are witnessing a rise in depression and anxiety. Isolation weakens memory, focus and brain health. Loneliness exacerbates heart disease, strokes, and is a factor in early deaths.

Here is a sad fact. The age group most identifying as lonely is the 30 – 44-year-old cohort followed by those age 18 - 29. So what can we do to help change this?

SMILE!



A smile, has superpowers! Think about it. When someone smiles at you, you almost can't help but smile back – and it feels good! You also have the means to help others with their day. Just smile. That smile, even if the person is a total stranger, will make you both feel better. That brief connection is powerful stuff in this age of loneliness and isolation and it's so easy to do! This isn't just “happy, happy, joy, joy” silliness. There are physical reasons for this mood booster. Smiles, (even forced ones) tell your body to turn off the cortisol and let loose the feel-good chemicals. Come on endorphins! Smiles physically enhance immunity and lower blood pressure and heart rate. Wow! The social benefits are rich as well. Smiling people are seen as friendlier, more trustworthy and more approachable.

Smiles are also contagious! Share those smiles generously as you go through your day and watch those smile ripples spread.

P.S. Another great way to combat isolation and loneliness – come to church and bring a friend!

Janet Moser

Bethany Moderator

Sources: <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ideas/usable-knowledge/24/10/what-causing-our-epidemic-loneliness-and-how-can-we-fix-it>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/common-sense-science/202501/the-extraordinary-power-of-a-smile>

SUNDAY SCHOOL

RALLY Day: September 27th. This is the annual kick off for the new Sunday School instruction. Please donate jars of Peanut Butter and Jelly after service that Sunday. The children will donate them to the local food pantry. Thank you for you continued support!



Bethany Sunday school takes place at 9:45 am with Sunday service directly following @10:30am. If you know anyone who would like to join our classes please reach out to Marie Farrell - 516-528-4984 or Tina Lewald at 917-270-6509.



Bethany held its annual Beach Party on August 6th at the Bay Park Civic Association's Beach House at the end of East Boulevard. Many thanks to all who contributed the food and time for arranging a fun day. A wonderful time was had by all!



SCHOOL SUPPLY COLLECTION - 2026

The Outreach Committee would like to thank our Bethany family and friends for their generous contributions of needed school supplies for this school year. The donations were graciously and gratefully received by Lutheran Social Services located in Franklin Square and will be distributed to schoolchildren in the area.

With Thanks, Carol Henck & Barbara Merna



VENTURE CREW 121

The Crew meets every Thursday at 7:30 in the Gym.

They accept young men and women between the ages of 17 and 21. If you know any one who may be interested, come on down!



VENTURE CREW 518

This is another Crew that meets on Tuesdays in Room 301.

Come on down for more information on what they do and how 17-20 year olds may join.



FROM THE EDITOR:

We would like to take a moment to extend our deepest thanks to everyone who contributed to our collection for First Congregational Church in Michigan following the devastating tornado that struck their community. Your generosity was a beautiful expression of what it means to be a church family. In a time when Michigan was facing tremendous loss and uncertainty, you responded with compassion, kindness, and a willingness to help. Every donation, no matter the size, helped demonstrate that they were not facing this difficult time alone. We are also very grateful to share that First Congregational Church sent Bethany a thank-you card expressing their appreciation for your support. **Through your generosity, Bethany raised \$840 for First Congregational Church in Michigan.** That is an incredible reflection of the compassion and generosity of our congregation, and we wanted to make sure everyone knew just how meaningful your support was. Thank you all!



This past September 11th was the 25th anniversary of 9/11 and it was a very busy day, especially for Pastor Prabhu Sigamani. First, there was an Interfaith Memorial Service commemorating September 11th and honoring the lives of those who lost their lives on that tragic day at 9:00 AM at Trinity St. John's, 1138 Broadway, Woodmere, NY 11598.

Next, at 11:00 AM at Bethany Congregational Church, there was a memorial service in honor of Raymond Sumperl (Barbara Sobey's Brother).

Finally, at 7:00 PM for a community 9/11 Memorial Ceremony at Memorial Park in East Rockaway.



...to our very own Dot Cozine!!! Many more!



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Donations may be left anytime in the shed next to the garage!

CHES\$, YAHTZEE\$, RUMMIKUB\$, GAME of LIFE...

The Many Benefits of Playing Board Games

Board games have made a massive comeback in the past decade, and researchers are discovering that board games are not only fun, they may also benefit our brains as well as our quality of life!

Since antiquity — (board games were played by the Egyptians, dating back to 3100 B.C.) — players have revelled in the shared experience, healthy competition and sheer entertainment value of board games.

Playing board games has been associated with higher cognition, improved quality of life and lower risk of developing dementia. Some research suggests that face-to-face play may have an additional benefit above playing them alone. Stimulating leisure activities such as board games are thought to enhance cognitive reserve, the brain's ability to function despite aging, injury or disease.

Benefits of playing Board Games:

Enhances Memory and Cognitive Skills ~ Board games often require players to remember rules, strategies, and details, which can help improve memory.

Improves Social Interaction ~ Board games are a social activity that encourages interaction and communication with others. Social engagement is crucial for mental health, as it can help reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Playing board games enhances creativity and self-confidence ~ Playing board games also helps to display a creative side of personality in non-intrusive ways and helps players to develop stronger senses of individuality and creativity.

You can play board games anywhere at any time ~ There are no restrictions, no pressure! The possibilities are endless!

How to get started playing board games ~~ Here are some tips to get started:

- **Start simple.** If you haven't played board games in a while, start with a game you played when you were a kid.
- **Play in person rather than virtually.** Research suggests that face-to-face play is associated with a greater brain boost compared with virtual play. The social component is fundamental.
- **Expand your gaming circle.** If you want to venture beyond your existing network, find a board game club, community center, library, store or cafe.
- **Have a Family Game Night** on a regular basis.
- **Have a Bethany Church Family Game Night!** (Let's plan one!)

Wishing you a Wealth of Health ~~ Carol Henck

God Snuck Up on Me

A Reflection on Grace, Mercy, and the Courage to Change

There are seasons in life when God seems to move quietly. There is no dramatic announcement, no obvious sign, and sometimes no immediate understanding of what He is doing. Then, in the middle of an ordinary day, a difficult conversation, an unexpected disappointment, or a moment of stillness, something becomes clear. We recognize that God has been present and working all along. In those moments, I often think, **“God snuck up on me.”**

Perhaps you have experienced this too. You prayed for one thing, but God began working on something entirely different. You asked Him to change a situation, and He began changing your heart. You asked Him to deal with another person, and instead He revealed something within you that needed attention. What initially felt like frustration or even unanswered prayer eventually became an invitation to transformation. This is one of the beautiful expressions of God's grace. Grace does not simply comfort us; it transforms us. Mercy does not merely excuse our mistakes; it gives us another opportunity to grow. David understood the importance of allowing God to examine the heart when he prayed, **“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you and lead me along the path of everlasting life”** (Psalm 139:23–24). This is not an easy prayer because it requires vulnerability. It asks God to reveal not only what is happening around us, but what is happening within us.

We often spend a great deal of energy examining the behavior of others. We recognize what someone else should have done differently, what they should have said, how they should have treated us, or how they need to change. While there are certainly times when others are responsible for their choices and behavior, spiritual maturity also requires us to ask a different question: **“Lord, what are You showing me about me?”**

That question requires intentional self-reflection. Maybe God is revealing an attitude that needs to change, a wound that still influences our reactions, an unhealthy pattern we have normalized, or an area where fear has been making decisions for us. Perhaps He is teaching us to establish healthier boundaries, forgive without returning to dysfunction, speak with greater wisdom, or take responsibility for something we have avoided. Sometimes the greatest work God performs in a difficult season is not changing our circumstances but changing the person we are becoming within them.

Paul writes, **“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”** (Romans 12:2). Transformation is more than recognizing that something needs to change. It requires our participation. God provides the grace, but we must be willing to surrender what He reveals.

This is why we should be thoughtful about the prayers we pray. We may ask God for patience and then find ourselves in situations that require patience. We ask for wisdom and encounter circumstances in which our own understanding is insufficient. We pray for stronger faith and then walk through a season where trusting God becomes necessary. We ask God to help us forgive, only to discover that forgiveness requires surrendering our desire to keep rehearsing the offense. Sometimes the answer to our prayer arrives disguised as an opportunity to grow. James reminds us that trials can produce perseverance and maturity (James 1:2–4). This does not mean that every painful experience is something God caused, nor does it mean that harmful behavior should be accepted or spiritualized. It means that pain does not have to be wasted. Even in circumstances God did not desire for us, He can meet us with grace and produce something redemptive.

Joseph's story illustrates this beautifully. After experiencing betrayal, injustice, separation, and years of uncertainty, Joseph was eventually able to say to his brothers, **“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good”** (Genesis 50:20). Joseph did not call the betrayal good. He recognized that God's redemptive power was greater than what had happened to him. That distinction matters. God's grace does not require us to pretend that something did not hurt. Mercy does not ask us to deny betrayal, disappointment, grief, or injustice. Instead, grace reminds us that what happened to us does not have to determine what happens within us. We can be wounded without allowing bitterness to become our identity. We can acknowledge what someone did without allowing their actions to control our future. We can establish boundaries and still forgive. We can recognize our own mistakes without becoming imprisoned by shame. This is where mercy becomes deeply personal.

Scripture tells us, **“Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning”** (Lamentations 3:22–23). What a powerful reminder. God's mercy means that yesterday does not have to dictate today. There is room to repent, learn, heal, and choose differently.

Yet self-reflection must always be rooted in grace rather than condemnation. There is a significant difference between God revealing something that needs to change and living under shame. Romans 8:1 declares, **“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”** Condemnation tells us that because we failed, we are failures. Grace tells us that because God loves us, we do not have to remain where we are.

God may confront us, but He does not abandon us in the confrontation. This is where the phrase *God snuck up on me* takes on deeper meaning. Sometimes we recognize His presence only after we have walked through the experience. Looking backward, we begin connecting the pieces. The conversation we did not want to have taught us something. The door that closed redirected us. The relationship that changed revealed something. The prayer that seemed unanswered caused us to seek God more deeply. The mistake we regretted became the place where we finally understood mercy. We thought God was silent, but He was working. We thought we were waiting for Him to change someone else, while He was quietly transforming us. The question then becomes not simply, **“God, when will You change this?”** but **“God, what are You trying to develop in me through this?”** That question changes our posture. Instead of only asking for relief, we begin asking for

revelation. Instead of constantly looking outward, we become willing to look inward. Instead of asking God merely to remove discomfort, we ask Him to make the experience fruitful.

David prayed, **“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me”** (Psalm 51:10). That is the prayer of someone who understands that meaningful change begins internally.

Perhaps that should become our prayer as well.

Lord, show me what I cannot see about myself. Reveal the patterns I keep repeating. Show me where hurt is influencing my decisions, where pride is preventing an apology, where fear is keeping me from moving forward, and where unforgiveness is occupying space that belongs to You. Give me wisdom to recognize what is mine to change and grace to release what is beyond my control.

There is freedom in becoming intentional about our growth. We do not have to be the same person next year that we are today. We do not have to repeat every pattern we inherited. We do not have to respond to every conflict the way we always have. Through Christ, transformation is possible.

Paul said, **“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect”** (1 Corinthians 15:10). God's grace should have an effect on us. It should become visible in how we speak, how we forgive, how we establish boundaries, how we handle disappointment, how quickly we take responsibility, and how willing we are to allow God to correct us.

One day, we may look back at a season we desperately wanted God to end and realize that it became sacred ground. Not because everything that happened was good, but because God met us there. His mercy covered us, His grace sustained us, and His truth changed us. And perhaps we will smile and say, **“God snuck up on me. I was asking Him to change my circumstances, and all along, He was graciously changing me.”** That is the beauty of walking with God. He loves us exactly where He finds us, yet He loves us too deeply to leave us unchanged. His mercy gives us another morning, His grace gives us strength for the journey, and His Spirit continues the work of transformation. **“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” — Philippians 1:6**

So, instead of only asking, *“God, what are You going to do about this?”* perhaps today we can courageously ask: **“God, what are You doing in me?”** And then have enough faith to listen for the answer.

....submitted by Lilian and Mike Magliaro

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Learn Bible stories and Christian values • Build friendships • Participate in activities and discussions • Grow in faith and understanding
Worship Service 10:30 AM

Everyone Is Welcome Here No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome at Bethany Congregational Church. We celebrate God's love for all people and strive to be a caring, inclusive, and affirming community of faith.

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