



Vestry Voices

The Church Family Newsletter

First Congregational
Church of Clinton

September 2026

Editor
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Knowing God

eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God,
and Jesus Christ whom you have sent

John 17:3 (NJB)



Rev. Gary Kiontke

Having eternal life depends on this: knowing God and Jesus Christ.

The prophets God sent to the Jewish exiles in Babylon, especially Jeremiah and Ezekiel, emphasized the need to know the covenant God Yahweh. Jeremiah wrote: "But let anyone who wants to boast, boast of this: of understanding and knowing me. For I am Yahweh, who acts with faithful love, justice, and uprightness on earth; yes, these are what please me," Yahweh declares (Jeremiah 9:23, NJB, verse 24 KJV). The apostle Paul quoted this verse in his letter to the churches in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). The only reason for which anyone should boast is that he or she has an intimate knowledge of the covenant God.

Ezekiel warned the people of Mount Seir in Edom of what God would do to them for their hatred to the exiles of Judah: "very well, as I live – declares the Lord Yahweh – I shall act with the same anger and jealousy as you acted in your hatred for them. I shall make myself known for their sake, when I punish you" (Ezekiel 35:11, NJB). In this statement, Ezekiel hints that people know God because He reveals Himself to them. (Hold on to this thought.)

Jeremiah was given an insight into what Messiah Jesus would do in a passage quoted twice by the author of Hebrews (8:8-12; 10:16): "this is the covenant I shall make with the House of Israel when those days have come, Yahweh declares. Within them I shall plant my Law, writing it on their hearts. Then I shall be their God and they will be my people. There will be no further need for everyone to teach neighbor or brother, saying, 'Learn to know Yahweh!' No, they will all know me, from the least to the greatest, Yahweh declares, since I shall forgive their guilt and never more call their sin to mind" (Jeremiah 31:33-34, NJB). Again, God will do the "heavy lifting" so we can know Him.

The apostle Paul said that knowing Messiah Jesus involves His people sharing in His sufferings and identifying with His death in order to experience the power of His resurrection life, someday, somehow (see Philipians 3:7-11). He also prayed that the knowledge of God's people in Jesus would increase (see Colossians 1:10 and following). The apostle Peter exhorted those who had received faith to increase in Christ-like character qualities to become fruitful in their knowledge of their Lord Jesus Christ (see 2 Peter 1:1-11, and John 15:16).

So, how do we get to know God? Two ways:

First, we know God by the Holy Spirit of truth. In the Upper Room, just before He was crucified, Jesus said: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak" (John 16:13, RSV). The apostle Paul wrote to his young protégé Timothy that the Holy Spirit inspired all Scripture (the Bible, both "Old" and "New" Testaments) so anyone may be taught, corrected of wrong thoughts and actions, and instructed in what is right in order to be qualified to accomplish every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17, see Ephesians 2:8-10). Paul also wrote to the churches in Asia Minor that the mystery of Jesus Christ, not made known previously, has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:2-6).

Second, we need to know every word the Holy Spirit inspired. So, all nations must search and read Yahweh's book (Isaiah 34, especially verse 16) because Jesus said the scriptures testify of Him unto eternal life (John 5:39-40). God's Word also purifies and cleanses people (Psalm 119:9; Ephesians 5:25-27). The apostle John declared the purpose of the inspired writings of the prophets and apostles is to know we have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

The practical application is that, in light of the above, every Christian should "read" the Bible from beginning to end every year.

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Knowing God (... continued from page #1)

I discovered this the day God saved me forty-seven years ago. If I read the Bible twenty minutes a day, I could read from Genesis to Revelation in less than a year. As a result, I have prayerfully read every word of the English Bible over fifty times to increase my intimate knowledge of God. Also, to become aware of my sins to confess them to God and receive forgiveness in Jesus. Finally, so I may know God's will for me. I realize everyone is different, and for good reasons some people cannot read the Bible. However, there are two alternatives. One is Bible apps and websites. There is not an excellent Bible app that allows someone to start in Genesis 1:1 and continuously read to Revelation 22:21 by remembering where the listener left off reading. But a good one is: "YouVersion."

The best audio Bible is on a website I have accessed and listened to on both my PC and my Samsung android smart phone. The address is: www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio. It has nineteen English versions. I previewed NIV – dramatized. It is possible to pick any of the sixty-six books of the Bible, and any chapter as a starting point. I started at Genesis 1. Start the audio and it will play continuously across both chapters and books for the whole Old Testament. After Malachi 4:4 there is a short announcement. I also chose

Matthew 5 to hear the Sermon on the Mount. Finally, I went to Revelation 22 and the same short announcement came at the end. I also closed the web page and found that when I re-opened it, it began at the beginning of the chapter from which I started the previous session. This is only a small inconvenience.

Another option is to listen to MP3-CDs. Regular CDs are impractical because sixty to sixty-five CDs are needed to record the whole Bible. MP3-CDs are available at christinbook.com for a reasonable price. I will attempt to try one soon. I will put a short follow-up article on this in the October *Vestry Voices*. There is enough money in the FCC Ministry Fund to purchase at least nine MP3-CDs and players on a first come, first filled basis for anyone who contacts me.

It is my fervent prayer that everyone who reads this article will determine to immediately start reading or listening to the Bible from start to finish. I can testify that whatever I am in Jesus, and have accomplished in serving Him, is because I started this spiritual discipline-habit on April 22, 1979. May God richly bless you if you commit to practice this essential spiritual discipline! ~v~

Sundays in September

We will have Communion on September 6 and 20.



We will resume the extended sermon series on the life of David, starting with 2 Samuel chapter 1.

In the past year we saw that David's life was a mixture of good and bad acts. In fact, in 1 Samuel, we saw him take some actions that showed a lack of faith similar to Saul who died at the end of 1 Samuel. The difference is that David repented and learned from his unfaithful actions, at least so far.

We will see David at his best and absolute worst in 2 Samuel, between now and the end of June.

Here are the details on the sermon texts and themes / titles for September:

Sunday	Readings	Theme / Title
September 6	2 Samuel 1:1-16; Psalm 5:4-8	Woe to any man who strikes Yahweh's anointed God destroys those who tell lies
September 13	2 Samuel 1:17-27; Psalm 77:7-15	The deaths of those who fight for God's people are lamented In great grief, remember Yahweh's past redeeming wonders
September 20	2 Samuel 2:1-17; Psalm 120	Sometimes invitations to peace are met with warfare Peace is rare and fragile
September 27	2 Samuel 2:18-32; Psalm 25:4-12	Warfare brings out folly, especially in the young Humble and God-fearing people will be instructed in love





Missions Report

By Sally Camara

Several years ago, I took a Christian course called “Perspectives.” It was geared towards missions; and the gist of it was to get on board with what the Lord is doing in the world – not to make our own plan and ask God to get behind it and bless it, but to seek what God is doing and team up with His plan.

WARM (“Welcoming Alliance for Refugee Ministry”) was born out of Perspectives. Several attenders of the course were led to pray and seek God’s direction. They were highly motivated by what they learned. Since Scripture clearly teaches that the Lord includes all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues in His kingdom, they connected with a government-run refugee agency in Worcester and began welcoming newly arriving refugees.

It should be noted that people born in virtually every country in the world, 190 to 195+ sovereign nations, reside in the US! That is astounding to me! We are the only country in the world with this unique opportunity to carry out the great commission right within our own country ... think about that for a minute.

Refugees are described as people forced to flee their home country due to war, violence, conflict, or persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or social group. They cross international borders seeking safety and cannot return home. WARM prepares apartments for them, teaches English, takes them to appointments, provides driving lessons, tutors young students, and puts on social activities such as soccer games, cookouts, and Christmas parties.

Imagine arriving in a country where you don’t speak the language, have only a few clothes in your possession, don’t know the culture; the weather and environment are nothing like your home, and you are a stranger with no friends and only the few family members you came with. So, WARM welcomes them and comes alongside them in the ultimate hope of sharing the gospel and bringing them to Jesus. Several who have come as refugees are already believers, which is a blessing to do good to our brothers and sisters in Christ and immediately share in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

I’d like to share some statistics and information you all may find eye-opening and interesting:

Presently, according to UNHCR (“United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees”) there are 41.6 million refugees in the world. There are 117.8 million displaced people (those who have lost their home due to conflict, natural disaster, etc., but remain in their country in the hopes they can return to their home). Surprisingly, Lebanon, Iran, and Türkiye host the highest rate of refugees per capita. From the years 1980 to 2025, the average yearly number of refugees admitted to the US was 92,000. In recent years, the greatest amounts came from Venezuela, Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan, and Sudan. Since January of 2025, sadly, when the need is the greatest, the door has been shut. The only exception has been

for white South Africans (Afrikaners), of which 6,600 have been admitted. Three Afghans have been admitted. You can draw your own conclusions on that one.

I would also like to address the current situation of those who have come to our country and are labeled “illegals,” when, in fact, they came into our country under a legal status.

This is only a short list, as there are MANY different legal programs under which people enter the US.

- Humanitarian Parole – given to people from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. People had to have a sponsor who would be financially responsible for them. They had to pass background checks. They were allowed work permits.
- Asylum Seekers – those seeking safety due to persecution. They are allowed entry and were given court dates to present their case. They then have to prove an inability to receive protection from their home government.
- TPS or Temporary Protective Status – People from many countries, over the years, have been granted this status due to unsafe conditions in their home countries, such as violence or natural disaster. It allows for a work permit. The status of each country is revisited every 6, 12 or 18 months. If the country is deemed safe to return to, the status is lifted.

The most recent termination of TPS came in July for Haitians and Syrians. This means their work permits have been revoked, and they are no longer protected and can be deported at any time. The situation in Haiti is not safe, and in fact, has only worsened. Here is an excerpt from the Haitian Times newspaper from last week:

“At least 47 people were killed and more than 50 kidnapped in a major gang attack on Kenscoff, according to the United Nations. The assault raises new questions about Haiti’s security gains and the ability of the Haitian National Police and international forces to protect communities as the country prepares for general elections in December.”

There have been two flights in the last two weeks that have flown into the airport in Cap Haitian, Haiti, with people deported from the US. The airport in Port Au Prince, the capitol city, is closed due to planes being shot at by gangs. Most of the people being deported are not from Cap Haitian and know no one in the area. They are targets for kidnapping and being held for ransom simply for the fact that they have come from the US. They are deported with no possessions. Just imagine being in that situation.

I write all this so you, the readers, can have accurate info on the current situation. Many of those being deported are our precious brothers and sisters in (continued on page 4 ...)

Missions Report (... continued from page #3)

Christ. This is an unacceptable and cruel decision made by Homeland Security. Please pray for this whole situation, and ask the Lord what He may want you to do – maybe you are in a position to hire someone who has lost their job? Maybe you can provide housing? Maybe finances? Encouragement? Prayers? Food? Protest through letters or physically in person? May the Lord intervene for these people and so many others facing similar devastating possibilities.

“Who is on my side against these sinful men? Who will stand up for me against these evildoers? If the Lord had not been my helper, I should soon have slept in the silent grave. When I felt that my foot was slipping, thy love, O Lord, held me up.” (*Psalms 94:16-18.*) ~vv~

It Just Happens*... “Choose God’s World to Live In ...”

By Petros

It Just Happens...* The last two articles were about the world we live in, and it is the same for this article. Life in America is changing. Bad enough the weather is more violent; after every news release on natural disasters, most causes point to global warming. Decisions made are alienating countries on our borders who have been close allies as good neighbors. Beyond our borders, our image of proud and great Americans has changed. Even within our borders, unfairness and hardships are being imposed on the land of the free and plenty.

As I summed up earlier, our world is being shaped by uncontrollable events that make comprehension and life challenging. Pastor Gary’s sermons on Jeremiah presented that world events we face are a result of the Love of God and His condemnation for our sins. Jeremiah was given words from God: As a bride, early in life, we loved Him (God). As time and the generations grew older, God who was revered as holy, sees His people straying, following worthless idols and becoming worthless themselves. We have forsaken Him to chase after idols of power, money, alliances with foreign powers, and other gods. Our sin nature has us lusting for material comforts before God. We can’t accuse one person for our position in life. The Book of Jeremiah is more upsetting and clearly details God’s wrath on His Chosen who fall to sin. God allows the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. Could the God who showed His Love and Mercy for the Jewish Nation, whose forefathers were enslaved by Egypt and freed by the parting of the sea, be calling “us to repent and turn from our manmade idols?” God had spoken to Jeremiah, to tell His People to turn from sin and have faith, for He is merciful. Or, the people will suffer and their land and life would be taken over by a foreign nation. Jeremiah is told by God to tell His People that they will be punished by having to submit to another country. We live in a world where God’s people do not repent and turn from their sin. I find myself indulging in my desires and not having enough time in the day to get “all my work done.”

There are news reports that our Patriot missile reserves are depleted and it would take years to replenish our ability to defend against a missile attack. Imagine being attacked and starved (like Jerusalem) for a few years by foreigners controlling what could pass through the Gulf of America or

Lake America. And, eventually surrounding our cities and setting fire to our homes. We see reports of countries that oppress their people and slaughter thousands of protesters. God has allowed slavery, of varying severities; even gladiators who had to fight for their lives for the entertainment of Rome. He even allowed the pillaging of His Holy Temple, then burned to the ground, before the people were carried off to a foreign country. It is imaginable a power-hungry leader imposing extreme conditions, including uprooting our lives and our churches being burned. These things had been allowed already, by God in the past; and could be allowed in the future, for our sin, and not turning to Him in repentance.

It Just Happens...* at that period of time, unless you loved God above all things, you have just witnessed your whole life destroyed and the future looks even worse, being carried off as a slave to a foreign country. *It Just Happens*...* God created all things, and all things work for His Glory, Will, and Purpose. He is also a loving God, such that His Word proclaims not one life shall be lost by those having faith alone: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16.) What it means is Jesus is given as the path to salvation. Belief in Jesus, God-Himself come to earth as a man, to pay the price of our sins. His blood washes away all our sins. And we will be eternally with God because the belief in the sacrifice by Jesus is the Truth that will set us free from the penalties of our sin nature.

It Just Happens...* I was inside the cupola of the BGB – Bluegrass Gospel Barn. It has four large windows with a view that looks down on the countryside. To my right, a rainbow appeared with striking colors that made me think of the beauty and peace of heaven. To my left, the storm clouds looked like a raging sea; a reminder of the times we face. And when I looked to my right again, the rainbow became a double rainbow! “What can wash away my sin ... Nothing but the blood of Jesus.” God allowed the Holy Temple to be destroyed because his Holy Spirit will abide within us and not an earthly temple. He will not abandon His followers, and He will send the Counselor, His Holy Spirit to have the Heaven on earth Jesus brought to us. Peace. A Peace that goes beyond our human understanding.

(continued on page 5 ...)



It Just Happens*... (... continued from page #4)

"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." (John 14:18, KJV.)

And just before and after that, Jesus explains the role of the Counselor / Comforter / Advocate:

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost ... shall teach you all things." (John 14:26, KJV.)

What God is saying as the man of Jesus: He will not abandon His people. Even when He is no longer physically present, His Spirit remains with them. The Counselor (Holy Spirit) guides, strengthens, teaches, and reminds believers of truth. It's a promise of ongoing presence, not just past reassurance. God's active presence with His people, giving guidance, courage, and clarity, so that we may live in God's presence despite the physical world around us.

Amen and Amen.

Just an update: The Bluegrass Gospel Barn has railing around the 12'x12' opening and stairwell on the second floor. Work continues next with siding. PTL!!!

PTL!!! ***"Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor uselessly." Psalm 127:1***

Author's note: This article's title "It Just Happens*..." counters the cliché ... things just don't happen. "It" will stand for the world view one chooses to abide in. Firstly, "Just" reveals that God is behind what most people see as "just circumstances;" and secondly, "Just" is the character of the God who wants to be our God. He has made us in His image – righteous; by faith in God. "Happens" will be the events and experiences God uses to grow our faith. All things work for the glory of God. When we turn from our ways and we look to God and live His Word – His plan for us unfolds. ~v~

Special Members Meeting Sunday, September 13 at 11:45 AM

The notice has already been posted for this meeting. There are two items on the agenda. Only the first requires a vote. The first is a vote to approve the transfer of the balance of the First Congregational Church Restoration fund into the new account opened for the new non-profit: "34 Walnut Street Church Restoration Fund." The Board of Directors of the non-profit consist of three members of FCC and we will answer any questions at the meeting. The second item is a discussion on the status of the project to replace the shingles and the covering for all the flat roofs (pitched and non-pitched) on the FCC building. It is possible the work will begin around the time of the meeting. Again, three of us will answer any questions at the meeting.



SEPTEMBER 2026

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
30	31	1	2 (††)	3 (**)	4	5
6 Communion Sunday (Note #1)	7 LABOR DAY	8	9 (††)	10 (**)	11	12
13 FCC Worship; Special Members Meeting; Coffee Hour after the Meeting (Note #2)	14	15	16 (††)	17 (**)	18	19
20 Communion Sunday (Note #3)	21	22	23 (††) First Day of Autumn	24 (**)	25	26
27 FCC Worship; Coffee Hour after Worship (Note #4)	28 October "Vestry Voices" Articles Due (Note #5)	29	30 (††)	1 (**)	2	3

Calendar Notes:

#1) 9/6 — Communion Sunday Worship: **10:27 AM.**

#2) 9/13 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM.**

ALSO: Special Members Meeting: **11:45 AM.**

ALSO: Coffee Hour/Fellowship after the Meeting.

#3) 9/20 — Communion Sunday Worship: **10:27 AM.**

#4) 9/27 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM.** **ALSO:** Coffee Hour/Fellowship after Worship.

#5) 9/28 — Articles are due for the October issue of "Vestry Voices" (for assembly/mail-out on September 29).

(††) Wednesday Bible Study: **11:00 AM** (in FCC Parlor).

(**) Thursday Prayer: **3:00 PM** (in FCC Parlor).

