MISSION STATEMENT
“As followers of Jesus Christ, we rejoice in God’s plan for a just, loving, and peaceful world, and we commit ourselves to making it a reality for all people everywhere.”

Rutgers Presbyterian Church
RENEWAL

Mark your calendars for these upcoming Advent Activities & Worship Opportunities!

On Wednesdays, December 4th, 11th & 18th we will have Advent Evening Devotions and Study at 6:30 p.m. in the Sanctuary. Join us for a time of reflection on and study of the Gospel of James.

Rutgers Community Programs staff is hosting their Second Annual Holiday Art Party on Sunday, December 8th from 1-3 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall. All ages are invited to join us as we celebrate our community and the holiday season by creating fun art projects for a good cause!

On Friday, December 13th at 5 p.m., you are invited to our Annual Tree Trimming Party in the Daniel Russell Room. Participants will create Christmas ornaments to decorate the tree! Refreshments will be provided.

Sunday, December 15th will be an extra special, fun-filled day!
- Join us for worship at 11 a.m. as the children perform their Sunday School Christmas Program!
- Following worship in the Fellowship Hall, we will have our All Church Christmas Party! A light lunch will be provided as well as entertainment from the ever-popular Clown Magic! We invite you to bring Christmas cookies, dessert, juice or soda.
- Finally at 4 p.m. in the Sanctuary, we will have our Annual Christmas Concert featuring the Rutgers Church Choir, Soloists and an orchestra! This year’s program is “Gloria” by Antonio Vivaldi!

Christmas Eve Service will be held on Tuesday, December 24th at 7 p.m. in the Sanctuary. Join us for a time of Lessons and Carols followed by a reception hosted by the Board of Deacons.
When this boy Jesus, was five years old, and there came a storm, so he was playing at the wade of a brook collecting the streams of water into small ponds. And then he made that the water was instantly pristine. And understand that he did this with a single word.

He also made himself soft clay out of mud and shaped it into twelve sparrows. And it was on the Sabbath day, when he did this. And many other boys were there who were playing with him. But then a Jew saw what Jesus was doing on the Sabbath day, as he was playing. So he immediately ran off and tells Joseph, his father: “See here, that your boy is at the wade and has taken mud and fashioned twelve birds with it, and so has violated the Sabbath.” So Joseph went there, and as soon as he spotted him he shouted: “Why are you doing this what’s not permitted on the Sabbath?” But Jesus simply clapped his hands and shouted to the sparrows: “Be off!” And those sparrows really took off and flew away chirping. And those Jews seeing it they were amazed, they ran and reported to their elders, what they had seen what Jesus did.

(Text collated from several ancient and modern translations and attempts to capture rather peculiar and folksy Greek original.)

This legendary story about little Jesus is obviously not from the Bible. It is a famous quotation from The Infancy Gospel of Thomas. This non-biblical gospel is rife with primitive anti-Judaism and wild interest in sensational miracles. Throughout it Jesus is portrayed as a “wonder-child” a miraculous prodigy with a petulant and subversive streak. These are all signs of late composition and the influences of the popular piety of the late Hellenistic centuries. Infancy stories hardly tell us anything substantial about the historical Jesus and his childhood. On the other hand, they are loaded with important theological themes and they tackle them in their own particular, legendary, fashion.

Their most formative feature is an awe of incarnation, utter amazement at the fact that God became human. How could it be? How would it work? What would it look like? In the gospel of Luke we have an account of a 12-year old divine child in the Temple. Infancy gospels take it even further back. How would this divine child look and behave at his school age, and even before? Their answer is highly entertaining and full of self-serving miracles. But their true answer is hidden in plain sight of their legendary narratives; the fact of incarnation, the theme of Advent and Christmas, that God became human, is beyond means of our intellect, beyond the limited powers of our imagination. The story which we celebrate on Christmas has always been and remains an utter approximation and true miracle of divine love.

And while those early Christians wondered at a divine child, they unknowingly started something very new. For the first time in human history a child became a main character in a work of literature. Childhood was lifted up from oblivion. Childhood, its playfulness, its struggle, its creativity, its bursts of energy were given a central stage. Our culture is what it is, our education and our respect and concern and care for children taken for granted, because people realized that divine incarnation (God becoming human) included 5-year-old Jesus.

Particularly in our highly commercialized times the legendary little Jesus of our story can teach us even something more. Children as well as grownups do not need expensive gadgets and toys to trigger their playfulness. Making ponds at a brook, forming birds from clay. Those are almost proverbial simple joys of childhood which verge on true miracles of sheer imagination and unbounded playfulness - inviting us to the simple yet blessed joys of Advent and Christmas time.

This Advent and Christmas we will be following a different non-canonical infancy gospel, the one ascribed to James. It is perhaps a little less entertaining than the Infancy gospel of Thomas, but no less Mysterious, Miraculous, Mythical and certainly no less Meaningful.
Interim Director of Education Introduction by Margaret Schulze

Hello families and friends of Rutgers Presbyterian Church, my name is Margaret Schulze and I’ve recently come on as Interim Director of Education. As most of you know, Ivy Beckwith has relocated to Cleveland where she is the Faith Formation Team Leader at the National Headquarters of the United Church of Christ.

It’s very exciting for me to be here at Rutgers Church...in Manhattan...in New York City. This must be God’s plan for me, as my plan was simply to be in Brooklyn for an extended play date with my new grandson. I left my home and the rest of my family, along with my job at Pine United Methodist Church, in San Francisco in September intending to stay with my daughter and her family through the holidays. The position here now allows me to stay through Easter and my grandson’s first birthday! As always, I am blessed and humbled by God’s vision for me.

From the beginning, I’ve found the staff and community at Rutgers Church to be very welcoming. During my first week I was invited to join SKATE to see one of their own, Emmet Smith, as Rude Element/Peasblossom in The Inaugural Production of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” at The Theater for A New Audience. This beautiful production runs through January and I encourage everyone to catch Emmet (and the rest of the wonderful cast) at the Polonsky Shakespeare Center.

I’ve learned that talent is in abundance at Rutgers as Ian Gale has been working as Head Designer and Craftsman on LaGuardia High School’s upcoming performance of Grease! To get tickets for this amazing performance which runs on selected dates between December 5th – 15th, visit www.laguardiais.org.

I’m grateful to Ivy for setting up many of the upcoming events and activities to allow for a hopefully smooth transition while a permanent full time director is sought. I look forward to celebrating this festive season of the church with plans for the SKATE ice skating outing on Friday, December 6th, the Tree Trimming Party on Friday, December 13th and the All-Church Christmas Party on Sunday, December 15th!

As God wills, I hope to be of service to the children, youth, families and community at Rutgers in my short time here. Please feel free to call on me at any time if I can be of any assistance. (Also please feel free to call and offer me your assistance.) As we prepare for the coming of the Christ child, I too feel like a child, in a new city, a new church, a new community. I look forward to celebrating the wonder and awe of the Advent season (and beyond) with you all!

Farewell to Ivy Beckwith by Kim Hodges

One of the favorite songs that ends each S.K.A.T.E. meeting is a song called, "Our God is an Awesome God". During our last official S.K.A.T.E. meeting with Ivy one of the kids said, "Our Ivy is an awesome Ivy". That couldn't be more true.

Rutgers Church has been so fortunate to have Ivy Beckwith leading our Christian Education for the past 3 years. With her long commute and adorable dog Lola, Ivy blessed us with her incredible skillset of organization, leadership, innovation and execution.

We want to say THANK YOU IVY for so many new and wonderful experiences like: The annual S.K.A.T.E. retreat at Stoneypoint, extending V.B.S. to 2 weeks which served over 100 upper west side kids each year, bridging community programs into the church by offering activities sponsored by Rutgers, leading the confirmation classes, supporting fundraising for S.K.A.T.E. and various community programs, leading Sunday School and your inspirational Children's Sermons. It has been a pleasure and true joy and we wish you all the best in your new endeavor as a Faith Formation Leader for the national office of the UCC.
After more than two and a half years of efforts, we are delighted to report that we have succeeded in having our Church House excluded from the West End – Collegiate Historic District! Just a reminder that this has been worth fighting for because if the Church House were included, as proposed by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, the size and value of the property we would have available for any future redevelopment project would be decreased and our options to grow in the future would have been limited. Our exclusion from the historic district preserves for the congregation’s future use all of the development rights associated with the Church House – which are part of our endowment and a legacy from church leaders almost one hundred years ago.

**How our Church House was excluded**

The Landmarks Preservation Committee voted on June 25, 2013 to approve their designation report defining the properties to be included in the West End – Collegiate Historic District Extension. This included our Church House and our Sanctuary. Before the vote, the LPC Chairman reported that we had asked that Church House be excluded, but he recommended against doing so and indeed no properties were excluded from the district by the Commissioners.

From the Landmarks Preservation Commission the matter moved to the City Council where our Council Member Gale Brewer recommended that two properties be excluded, one of them being our Church House. Her recommendation was accepted and approved by the Council Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses, then the Land Use Committee, and finally by the full City Council at its meeting held on October 30, 2013.

Gale Brewer’s recommendation to exclude our Church House came after many discussions with her culminating in an agreement whereby we pledged that, in the event of a future redevelopment project that includes the Church House, we will include in such a redevelopment project affordable housing in an amount equal to or greater than the development rights that would have been unusable had the property been landmarked. This would add affordable housing units to the Upper West Side, which Gale Brewer has made a consistent priority during her 40 years of public service.

**Practical meaning of having our Church House excluded from the historic district**

As we have said in countless public hearings and meetings with Landmarks staff and elected officials, we have no current plans to redevelop our properties. Indeed, we are in the midst of several projects to repair our existing facilities. We recognize, however, that future leaders of the church may find it necessary to build anew in order to better serve the community.

Because our Church House has now been excluded from the historic district, it could be demolished for a future project which could then use all of tax lots 37, 34 and 42 (as shown in the shaded area on the next page). At present, we are only using about half of the development rights associated with these tax lots, so there is room to grow when we are ready to. We would be allowed to build about 94,000 sq. ft. of residential development above a platform of 9,000 sq. ft. of retail space, and we would not have the engineering challenge of splitting our commercial building (lot 37) and Church House (lot 42) in two.

The difference of having the Church House included in a redevelopment project, and not, is about 17,000 sq. ft. of residential development and 2,000 sq. ft. of retail. We have pledged to Council Member Gale Brewer that we will devote these additional 17,000 sq. ft. of residential development (or more) to affordable housing. This would translate into 21 large one bedroom apartments, or 21 small two bedroom apartments, or 31 good sized studios, or 40 of the new “micro-studios” now being promoted by former Housing Commissioner Jerilyn Perine.
Meanwhile, as we have known for over a year, our Sanctuary building has been included in the extension of the West End – Collegiate Historic District. This means that any work on the exterior of the Sanctuary building must be approved by the Landmarks Preservation Committee, adding some degree of time and expense. Interior work is not affected by the landmarks designation.

**A team effort**

Our success in having the Church House excluded was the result of the efforts of many Church elders and staff. The Trustees and Session took the time to learn about the issues involved and obtained expert advice from land use attorneys and political consultants. Together with other church members and Pastor Andrew, they attended and testified at public hearings and Community Board meetings, and took part in numerous discussions here in the church with Landmarks officials and staff and others. It was a long process, during which we learned the value of knowing our local elected officials and having them know us.

Thanks to all who helped us achieve this goal, which will preserve the value of our properties endowed to us by past Church leaders and keep development options open for the future.
Session Update by Alice Hudson

The Session is composed of the twelve ruling elders and the pastor and is responsible for the mission and government of our congregation. The following are some actions taken by the Session in recent weeks.

- Our Giving Network, with representatives from across Rutgers Church, has a budget of some $170,000 for us to give to various organizations in NYC, the U.S. and internationally, to support human rights, to end hunger, to support the homeless, to seek peace across the world. If our church’s giving to causes and programs around the city, country and world is of interest to you, please let the office know you would like to participate in this mission of Rutgers Church.
- We voted to donate our Peacemaking offering to New Yorkers Against Gun Violence.
- The prayer flags which help to represent us to the West Side as an open and inclusive church, continue to fly outside Rutgers Church, and we will make new ones in December. The spiritual symbolism is important reflecting our faith inside and outside the church, and our responsibility for our community.
- We passed two overtures supporting Gay Marriage, which will go to the Presbytery of New York City, and then, hopefully, on to the national church meeting, the General Assembly, for a vote this summer. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), while it supports gay rights, does not yet approve gay marriage, defining it as a union of a man and a woman only.

Remembering (Ronald) Wellington Jones by Juliet Pritner

I first met Wellington's son, Gavin, and grandson, Samoa, at a church picnic at Holmes Presbyterian Camp in 2003. Christian and Samoa were just toddlers then, but a friendship was formed between the boys that thrives to this day.

Wellington’s church picnics were a great equalizer — helping to shake up the cliques and habits of friendship that seem inevitable. It was at one of Wellington's picnics that I first connected with the Reverend Kate Dunn, who later became Christian's godmother. It was at another such picnic that I first connected with now dear friends Ethel Knight and Joy Rose.

Wellington and I shared an alma mater (The Juilliard School), and a similarly warped and quirky sense of humor. My family and I will miss him dearly. We are eternally grateful for the friendships that he (and by extension, his special events committee) helped to form and cement. He was a tireless volunteer whose loving attention to our community will long be remembered. With love and gratitude, I give thanks for having known Wellington and for his generosity to this church and the larger community.

A Memorial Service for Wellington is scheduled for Saturday, December 7th at 11:00 a.m.

Suggested Reading by Alice Hudson

Margaret Shafer, 1938-2012, was the wife of Rev. Byron Shafer, Pastor Emeritus here at Rutgers. While Byron was here as pastor, she worked at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, and might not be familiar to some of you because of that. She was born and raised in Punjab, India, the child of missionary parents. She says that in later years she went back and forth between the U.S. and India, and wondered at time about “home.” Which was it? Punjab? New York?

While at Fifth Avenue Church she worked aggressively on programs for befriending and working on behalf of homeless people on the streets of New York City. Her book, Home is the Journey is now available on Amazon.com. Our friend Byron spent months editing and pulling the book together, preparing it for publication. So both of their spirits fill the book, and enhance our lives. A good read!
Community Programs by Jennifer Moore

Community Programs had a wonderful fall season. The semester began with an open house on Saturday, September 7th, where families who are new to us came to meet our instructors, see our wonderful facility, and have fun! We’re so pleased to have welcomed several new families to our community as a result of this wonderful day.

The open house was only one of our successful, community-building events. A parent in our Mandarin program led children, parents, and programs staff in a lively Chinese folk dance, our first ever Chinese dance event, on September 27th. Then we hosted a special interactive performance for babies and toddlers by Theater Arts Japan on October 19th, which entertained the children with songs, sounds, and instruments they could play themselves. Both of these events were free of charge, so they were accessible to all.

But we’re most proud of the way our community came together for our 2nd annual food drive, which ended on November 15th. We collected over 50 bags of non-perishable food from programs families, church members, and staff, which we’ll deliver to the Broadway Food Pantry. Programs staff worked particularly hard to create kits that families used to decorate the bags with art and personalized messages of well-wishes and thanks, which helped increase participation and sparked the imaginations of our children. We’re grateful to have the opportunity to help our neighbors, and thank families, Rutgers church members, and staff for their efforts.

We look forward to more workshops for parents, outreach, and exciting new classes in the winter. A highlight of the winter/spring 2014 schedule is our “Once Upon a Child” series for preschoolers on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday afternoons, a program that engages children in science, dramatic play, storytelling, and international “travel”. Please see www.rutgerschurch.org and the Community Programs Facebook page for programs news and events in the new year and beyond. Thank you!
Advent with the Gospel of James

Wednesdays, December 4th, 11th & 18th.
Evening Devotions at 6:30 p.m. Study at 7 p.m.
Join us for a time of reflection and study.

The Gospel of James will also inspire
our worship on Advent Sundays at 11 a.m.

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236 W 73rd St
just off Broadway
(by 1 2 3 Subway)