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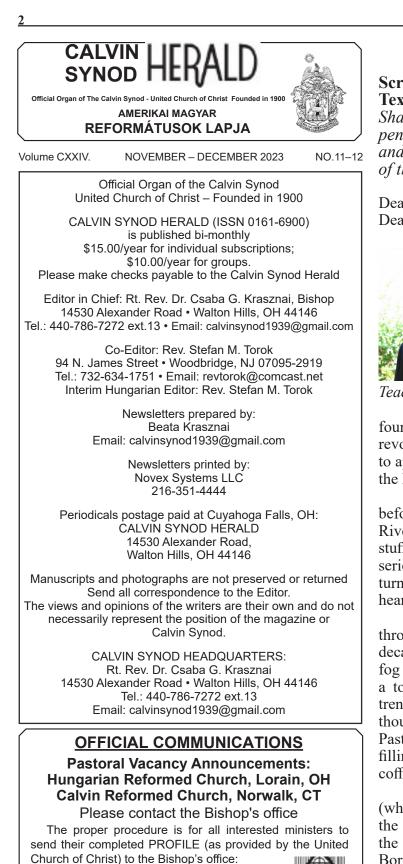
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May Peace be your gift at Christmas and your Blessing all year through!



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The Living Word of God

Scripture reading: John 1:1-14

Text: "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12 NIV).

Dear Calvin Synod Congregations, Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,



On Monday, August 21st an interesting article was published on the BabylonBee.com website. Whether the story is true or not, it can still be thought provoking and may inspire us. The title of the article was: *"Local Church Tries Bold New Tactic Of Just*

Teaching The Bible." Let me share this article now.

A local church in [Gastonia, North Carolina] found a new surge in popularity after making the revolutionary decision to forego its normal attempts to appeal to the masses and instead just start teaching the Bible.

"I don't know why we didn't think of this before," said Steve Borden, lead pastor at Abundant River of Faith and Life. "We've done all the other stuff for years — carnivals, classic car shows, sermon series built around clips from popular movies — but it turns out what people actually need in their lives is to hear God's Word. Who would've thought?"

The church had struggled to bring people through the doors on Sunday mornings for the last decade, resorting to revamping its presentation with fog machines, theatrical staging, lighting worthy of a touring rock band, gourmet espresso drinks, and trendy, topical, life-improvement messages. "We thought that would really help us draw new people," Pastor Borden said. "All that ended up happening was filling the building with a bunch of people who loved coffee and free daycare for their kids."

Things changed when one humble congregant (who requested to remain anonymous) suggested the pastoral staff begin just teaching lessons from the Bible itself. "It was a night and day difference," Borden said. "We actually started seeing people's lives change, as if preaching from the Bible has some kind of divine power to really reach a person's heart. They didn't teach me this in seminary. Wild stuff!"

At publishing time, the church was reportedly considering doing away with its rock concert-style

worship presentation and singing hymns, with the idea that people may actually praise God better when the songs they sing are theologically sound.¹

<u>The Word of God has great power in our lives.</u> Our text reinforces this truth: "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

The Bible is often referred to as the living Word of God. Why? It is because it brings life to those who read and obey it.

Why is it so important to have the Bible, the living Word of God, in your life to read it daily?

On August 23rd of this year Tom, one of the lay leaders of our congregation, asked this question right at the beginning of the Zoom Bible study: "How do we grow in faith?" One of the participating members, at the Bible study, immediately responded: "By reading the Bible." Amen! Yes, that is the answer.

The Bible, the living Word of God, is a greatgreat blessing in our lives.

1. Have you ever felt weary, spiritually, physically, mentally exhausted? Then you began to read your Bible and you felt something different, you experienced something extraordinary... because the Word nourished your thirsty soul, strengthened your weary heart, your spirit was renewed, and the Word refreshed your body. It filled your heart with thanksgiving and praise.

2. Have you ever been in a humanly impossible situation, in a difficulty in which you did not find the way out? Then you began to read your Bible and you found peace, the Word filled you with hope, it encouraged and assured you that there is **Someone** on your side who helps you and leads your life.

3. Have you ever faced a situation in which you had to make important decisions? Then you began to read your Bible and you miraculously received wisdom, the Word redirected your steps, and helped you to see the obvious way.

4. Have you ever lost someone, someone special, whom you dearly loved? Then you began to read your Bible and you experienced reassurance and comfort during pain, doubt, and sorrow.

5. Have you ever struggled with temptation and sin? Then you began to read your Bible and you experienced the encouraging words to keep you from falling into temptation. The Word pointed out your wrong beliefs and actions and directed you back to your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

6. Have you ever struggled with the assurance

of your salvation and eternal life? Then you began to read your Bible and you were assured of your eternal inheritance and that you are a beloved child of God, the heavenly Father.

7. Do you remember when you lived without your Savior and Lord? Then you received a Bible from someone, or you had one at home, and you began to read the Holy Scriptures and it led you to the Word of Life, Jesus Christ, your Savior.

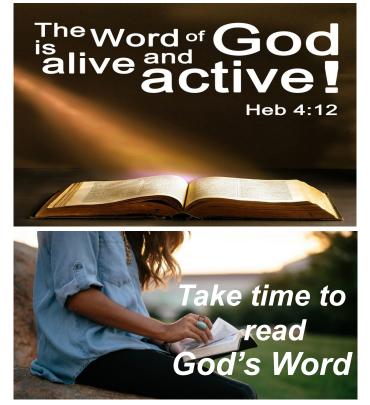
If you have never turned to the Bible in these situations of life, if you have not read God's Holy Word then I encourage you to begin to read the Holy Scriptures.

2000 years ago, on that very first Christmas, the heavenly Father sent His Son, the Living Word of God into this world. At the beginning of the gospel of John we find this: *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14).* Jesus Christ was born into this world to die for you, for your sins, on the cross but on the third day He rose from the dead so He would offer life, eternal life to those who accept Him as Lord and Savior. The source, the living proof of all these happenings is the Holy Scriptures, the Living Word of God. Read it and live it out, every day, by the power and help of the Holy Spirit! AMEN!

Rt. Rev. Dr. Csaba Krasznai

Source:

¹https://babylonbee.com/news/local-church-tries-boldnew-tactic-of-just-teaching-the-bible?fbclid=IwAR3rhJ8c U2EAKtfwJdfhSF2uDOCC8a6xoUUz6Trz8qI4sZdWFfG aw7XUB5Q



Gifts and Fruit of the Spirit

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one." 1 Corinthians 12: 4-6

It is essential for us to be aware of the difference between the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. Although both are expressions of the Holy Spirit, they are in different categories of the spiritual blessing that is given to believers. The spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to every believer for the purpose of ministerial assignments while the fruit of the Holy Spirit, in contrast, displays the development of a Christian's character.

We are all aware of the natural gifts or talents that people are endowed with from birth. Just as we do not choose our natural talents such as being artistic, musical, mathematical, athletic, logical, creative, or imaginative, we also do not select the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit are given to each individual based on God's divine choosing and the ministerial needs of each individual situation and calling. The gifts of the Spirit were explained to the members of the Church of Corinth in a letter by Paul and are found in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verses 4-11. These gifts include the word of knowledge, the word of wisdom, the gift of prophecy, the gift of faith, the gift of healing, the working of miracles, the discerning of spirits, the speaking in tongues, and the interpretations of tongues. Although there are varieties of gifts, varieties of service, and varieties of working, all were given by the same God, the same Lord, and the same Holy Spirit for the common good. These gifts of the Spirt have to do with a person's spiritual capabilities for the service of the Lord. The gifts of the Spirit are given instantly for the purpose of ministry.

In contrast of the Gifts of the Spirit, there is the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit has to do with a person's spiritual character. The fruit is developed gradually as believers abide in Christ and yield to the working of the Holy Spirit.

The "Fruit of the Spirit" is a term found in the Book of Galatians which we heard this morning (Galatians 5:22-26), which is where the Apostle Paul is writing another one of his letters, this time, to the members of the churches of Galatia who have been led astray from the Gospel of Jesus Christ and had reverted back to the Law of Moses. Paul explains that those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Messiah are justified by faith in Him and as redeemed children of God, it is only through the Fruit of the Spirit that they are able to follow Jesus' way on how to love.

Before we get to the details, it's essential to remember that the "fruit of the Spirit" is not simply a group of moral commands. It's not nine different ways to live a better life, although they certainly do result in a better life when they're present. It is not just a call to live an upright, good, moral life. It is so much more than this.

One of the most interesting, and often misunderstood, aspects of the fruit of the Spirit is that the Bible teaches that it is one fruit with many characteristics. It is "one fruit with nine flavors." The presence of all of these characteristics (or flavors) provides evidence that a person is being assisted by the Holy Spirit.

To put it in the most obvious terms, the fruit of the Spirit is the result of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. When we come to Jesus, the Holy Spirit fills us and the Holy Spirit begins to produce good fruit in us. The Holy Spirit begins to work in us, sanctifying us and making us more like Jesus. As we pursue God and follow after Him with our whole hearts, the Holy Spirit continues to produce more and more good fruit in us.

This means we can't produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives through our strength. Yes, we are called to run hard after Jesus, to say, "No," to sin, and to seek to put on love, joy, peace, patience, etc. But if we try to do this with our strength, we will fail miserably.

In John 15:5, Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

Apart from Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do nothing. We can't truly be loving or patient. We can't have real joy or peace in our lives.

So, as we think about growing in the fruit of the Spirit, we must remain dependent upon God to help us grow. Ultimately, God is the one who produces fruit in us. As we lean on God and depend totally on God, fruit grows in our lives.

Since it is summer and we are enjoying the bountiful, ripe, juicy fruit of the season, I thought it would be interesting to make a fruit salad using all of the flavors of the spirit.

This morning we heard the Apostle Paul saying that the fruits of the Holy Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, generosity, gentleness, and self-control. The first fruit which Paul writes about is love. I have designated the tomato as the fruit of love. Not only is the tomato red, but it has four chambers. The heart also has four chambers. And tomatoes are pure heart food. We generally associate the heart with love. Moreover, tomatoes are the most popular fruit in the world and so too is the fruit of love because love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

The second fruit of the spirit is joy. I have chosen the strawberry to represent the fruit of joy. While joy begins on the inside, it spills over to the outside. Joy radiates from the inside-out with smiles on our faces, a leap in our step, a confidence about our lives. Strawberries are the only fruit with seeds on the outside rather than on the inside and so because of the outer joy that we see in one another, I call strawberries the fruit of joy.

The third fruit of the Holy Spirit is peace. I believe the banana represents the fruit of peace. The fruit of the banana is found on the inside- just like peace. Though things may get rough on the outside and though the skin is tough, softness lies within. Bananas are full of potassium and potassium keeps blood pressure at a healthy level – so too when we live with inner peace, we may just find our blood pressure at a healthy level, as well. Some horticulturists suspect that the banana was the earth's first fruit and I imagine the world was at peace when that first banana made its appearance on planet Earth.

The fourth fruit of the Holy Spirit is patience. I think the avocado is the fruit of patience. Interestingly, the female womb looks like an avocado. Today's research shows that when a woman eats one avocado a week, I t balances hormones and prevents certain female cancers. And how profound is this: It takes exactly 9 months to grow an avocado from blossom to ripened fruit. Now that is totally fascinating to me. So, I think the avocado represents the fruit of patience because the avocado blossom needs great patience to become a ripened fruit.

The fifth fruit of the spirit is kindness. The pomegranate represents kindness. Pomegranates are certainly kind to the body- they have been dubbed the "miracle fruit" because they are said to help prevent cancer and lower blood pressure. Lower blood pressure reduces the risk of heart attacks, strokes, and kidney disease. Moreover, there is a tradition of eating pomegranates on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. The pomegranate is believed to have 613 seeds, representing the 613 laws of the Torah. As the pomegranates are eaten on the second night of Rosh Hashanah, a blessing is said which is "May it be Your Will, God, that our merits increase like the seeds of a pomegranate." Therefore, the pomegranate represents a person who is filled with kindness and good deeds. But interestingly, the seeds of the pomegranate aren't

apparent from the outside. They are clustered together on the inside between folds of the fruit's flesh, out of view from any observer. And so, too, there are persons who strive to be full of kindness even behind the scenes.

The sixth fruit of the Holy Spirit is generosity. God is so very generous that God did not just create one kind of apple- no God created 7000 different types of apples. Yes, God is extravagantly generous, especially when it comes to apples. Apples are a member of the rose family. Apples are an excellent remedy for wrinkles, cracked skin, itching, and inflammation. Eating an apple is a more reliable method of staying awake than consuming a cup of coffee because the natural sugar in an apple is more potent than the caffeine in coffee. Apples were given to teachers a century ago because teachers did not make very much money and so families generously supplied apples to teachers to help them out.

The seventh fruit of the Holy Spirit is faithfulness. I have designated the orange as the fruit of faithfulness because of the following story. When a Baptist minister was in Bible College, a tractor trailer load of Tropicana Orange Juice was dropped off at the cafeteria every week. He wondered how a low-cost Bible College could afford so much expensive O.J. One morning in chapel, he found out the answer to his question when an older Italian man in broken English, gave a talk. The elderly immigrant said he had come to the US from Italy in the 1920's as a young teenager, with nothing but the clothes on his back. A Christian couple befriended him and through their love he came to know Christ as his Savior and Lord. One Sunday in church, he prayed: "Lord, if you give me an idea for a business, I will be faithful to give a portion of everything I make back to Your work." That very morning, the idea of "fresh squeezed orange juice" popped into his head - and the rest is history: Anthony Rossi founded the Tropicana Orange Juice Company and was faithful to his promise during his entire life. For 60 years Mr. Rossi gave 50 percent of his income for the Lord's missions. He also gave truckloads of free orange juice to Christian colleges throughout America. So when I think of oranges, I think of the faithfulness not only of this man but also of God's great faithfulness to His children and the importance of our being faithful to God and to one another through the help of the Holy Spirit.

The eighth fruit of the Holy Spirit is gentleness. I believe the peach represents gentleness because the skin of the peach is very soft and gentle to the touch. To the ancient Chinese, the peach was considered to *Continued on Page 6*

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be a symbol of long life and immortality. If we want to live a long life, it is best that we respond gently to people gentle as a peach. That means, for example, when we encounter someone with road rage, it is best to just let them drive by without a response from us... that will ensure a much longer life for us.

Finally, the ninth fruit of the Spirit is self-control. I chose the grapefruit for the spirit of self-control. Of course, there are many areas in which we are called to exhibit self-control-but the one area that we often find the most difficult to control is our eating choices. We are surrounded by fast food restaurants. There are potato chips, fries, ice cream, and cakes everywhere. Several decades ago, a dieting fad involved eating one half of a grapefruit at every meal. Rumor stated that one could burn 10 pounds in 12 days. It was believed that the enzymes in grapefruit literally burned fat away. Later food experts discovered that there was no scientific evidence of this statement. But I guarantee that if we eat more grapefruit than potato chips, we will be on our way to a healthier life style. Yes, eating grapefruit instead of sweets does take self-control.

I hope you have enjoyed making this fruit salad with me and the Holy Spirit. I challenge all of us to make every effort on a daily basis to serve Jesus and others by living by the Fruit of the Spirit and allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us in our daily walk with Jesus by our side. Amen

Claudia Margitay-Balogh

The teaching was delivered on August 13, 2023 at the United Church of Christ of Bridgeport, CT



Rt. Rev. Dr. Csaba Krasznai Bishop of the Calvin Synod visits the Passaic, NJ Congregation



On Saturday, June 24th of this year the Rt. Rev. Dr. Csaba Krasznai visited the congregation in Passaic, New Jersey. The visit came after the congregation has sadly dealt with the issue of its existence.

The Passaic Hungarian Evangelical Reformed Church

presently has only 19 voting members. The membership has been in decline for some time. Ever since the sudden death of its long time Pastor the Rev. Joseph Vasarhelyi when the congregation was left without a full time pastor. Immediately after his passing his widow Marika Vasarhelyi conducted some of the worship services. Rev. Joseph Vasarhelyi Jr. who completed his ministerial studies took over the spiritual leadership of the congregation. His stay was cut short when another congregation invited him to be their full time pastor. By this time the late Rev. Joseph Vasarhelyi's second son, Istvan got his ministerial credentials, first as a seminary student, after that as a pastor served the congregation. Just about the time his ordination and installation would have taken place he also was called to serve another congregation. Thus, the membership was left without a shepherd, using the expression of Jesus.

In this difficult and almost impossible situation Bishop Krasznai and the members of the Conference Council appointed Rev. Stefan Istvan Torok to be the administrator of the congregation. Rev. Torok faithfully attended every Consistory meeting in the last couple of years and tried to pour words of encouragement and spiritual fervor into the hearts of the members.



Rev. Stefan M. Torok Administrator and church members at the Congregational Meeting

Without a full time or any permanent ministerial leadership, the membership declined to the point that they were unable to keep up with the rising costs of paying the utilities and especially insurance payments which totaled closed to \$40,000. The congregation had some financial savings from the previous decades, but they were slowly eaten up by rising expenses. It has become inevitable that something had to be done.

Congregational life during this time continued with two dedicated individuals leading the Sunday morning worship services. In English Ms. Betty Chase and in Hungarian Ms. Erika (Kun) Bogdanovich brought God's message to the congregation. Erika's message was also available n on the internet. English sermons were provided by the Administrator and the Hungarian sermons by Licensed Lay Minister Lehel Deak, who also conducted all holiday worship services with Holy Communion in both languages. The internal and business part of the congregation was in the very capable hands of Mr. Imre G. von Balinth, assistant Chief Elder and the members of the Consistory.



Mr. Imre G. von Balinth gives a report at the Congregational Meeting

The day has come to bring the hard facts to the greater membership. Special congregational meetings were held to fully inform the membership of the difficult situation. At the regular congregational meeting held in February the major discussion was how to move further. It was decided at that time that a special congregational meeting must be called to decide the future of the church. The first special congregational meeting dealing with the subject was called on April 16th. At this meeting a total of 14 voting members attended. A vote was taken to either continue or dissolve the church. Seven votes to dissolve the church and sell its properties. Four votes favored the selling of Calvin Hall which would have financially given the opportunity to continue, and three votes were disqualified on the grounds of not choosing either option.



A beautiful lectern was donated to the church by Charles and Elizabeth Csigai in 1943. In the picture are: Beverly Obsuth and Betty Chase.

The following decision was communicated to Bishop, Dr. Krasznai who after reading the decisions requested a personal visit to the congregation. Such visit took place on June 24th when a second special congregational meeting was called to finalize the decision. Bishop was greeted warmly by the members. Rev. Torok, Administrator introduced the Bishop Dr. Krasznai to the congregation and also introduced all the members present. After an opening prayer a discussion ensued. Bishop Krasznai tried his best to change the minds of the members to no avail. The members held to their final decision to sell all church properties. During the meeting a special committee was formed to pursue the necessary steps in the sale of the church properties. The congregational leadership listened intently as the Calvin Synod By-Laws as well as the By-Laws of the congregation were presented, and the members promised to abide by all laws dealing with the subject of dissolution. The meeting concluded with a prayer by Bishop Krasznai.



A beautiful stained glass window was donated by Sándor Géczi and his family Continued on Page 8

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After the meeting friendly conversations ensued and Bishop Krasznai extended an invitation to the members to come before the Lord during the Sunday worship service.



Social hour after the worship service



Dr. Krasznai with members of the Passaic, NJ church The next day, on Sunday, June 25th the members of the Hungarian Evangelical Reformed Church of Passaic, NJ gathered for a worship service that was conducted by Rt. Rev. Dr. Csaba Krasznai. Bishop Krasznai shared the message of God based on the story of from the gospel of Luke 18:18-27, and the title of the sermon was, "To Follow or Not to Follow Christ?" After the worship service the congregation had its social hour at the church's hall.

May God bless, help, and lead the Hungarian Evangelical Reformed Church of Passaic, NJ.

Rev. Stefan M. Torok



Betty Chase reads the Word of God



Rt. Rev. Dr. Csaba Krasznai delivers God's message at the Sunday worship service



Participating church members at the worship service



The cornerstone of the church

The 81st Biennial Meeting of the Calvin Synod Conference of the United Church of Christ

The 81st Biennial Meeting of the Calvin Synod Conference of the United Church of Christ was held on Tuesday, August 29th thru Thursday, August 31st at the First Hungarian Reformed Church in Walton Hills, Ohio. The morning began with a Special Worship Service with Holy Communion in the church sanctuary. Rev. Viktor Toth, General Secretary delivered the English sermon, Rt. Rev. Peter Pal Bodor, Auxiliary Bishop delivered the Hungarian sermon and Rev. Gabor Nitsch led the Holy Communion service. Other participants included Rt. Rev. Dr. Csaba Krasznai, Bishop, Mr. James Ballas, Interim Synod Treasurer, Dr. Albert Ladanyi, Synod Presbyter, Dean Rt. Rev. Stefan Torok, and Rev. Tamas Burian.



Dr. Albert Ladanyi Synod Presbyter reads God's Holy Scriptures at the Communion Service of the 81st Calvin Synod Meeting

Mr. James Ballas Interim Synod Treasurer offers prayer at the Communion Service





Rev. Viktor Toth Synod Secretary shares the message of God's Word in English



Participating pastors and lay delegates at the Communion Service of the 81st Synod Meeting



Rev. Stefan M. Torok reads the Word of God

Burian offers prayer at the worship service



Rt. Rev. Peter P. Bodor Auxiliary Bishop shares the message of God's Word in Hungarian

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Rev. Gabor G. Nitsch conducts the service of Holy Communion



Group picture of the 81st Synod Meeting delegates



Members of the Conference Council. Left to right: Mr. James D. Ballas, Synod Treasurer, Rt. Rev. Peter P. Bodor, Auxiliary Bishop; Rt. Rev. Dr. Csaba Krasznai, Bishop; Rev. Viktor Toth, Synod Secretary, and Dr. Albert Ladanvi, Synod Presbyter

Bishop Csaba Krasznai opened the afternoon session with greetings. Rev. Gabor Nitsch led in a prayer of remembrance for our faithful servants who passed away since our last gathering including Rt. Rev. Louis Medgyesi, Bishop Emeritus. Synod Presbyter Albert Ladanyi delivered the opening address. Secretary Toth then called the roll of delegates. Bishop Krasznai reported on the state of the Calvin in his report. "The calling of our Synod's churches, pastors, leaders, presbyters, is to continue to love, encourage, and lead our churches on the way of Jesus Christ." With the resignation of Treasurer Rev. Tibor Kiraly, James D. Ballas was elected as Treasurer to fill the remaining two-year term. The treasurer's report for 2021 and 2022 along with the 2023 budget were presented followed by the Finance Committee report. A By Laws committee was appointed to work on updates and revisions of our current By Laws. On this first day, reports were accepted from the Church and Ministry Committee, Youth Camp, Calvin Synod Herald and website, and Bethlen Museum and Archives. All reports will be printed in the meeting minutes.



Participating pastors and lay delegates at the 81st Calvin Synod Meeting



Mr. Zsolt Demeter Synod Presbyter of the Hungarian Reformed Church in America greets the Synod delegates on behalf of the HRCA





A full day on Wednesday began with a session of Congregational sharing, followed by committee reports. There was a discussion on our affiliation with the United Church of Christ and an open discussion on the future of Calvin Synod. A recommendation was made to form a taskforce to work out a program on how to minister to our ministers and elders. It was also agreed that we explore the possibility of having a retreat next fall to discern these issues. Rev. Thomas Burian will work on organizing the location of this retreat in the Western New York state area.

There was a presentation by Pastor Don Poest, retired Pastor of Brunswick Reformed Church, Brunswick, Ohio and former President of the General Synod and Interim General Secretary of the Reformed Church in America. Pastor Poest said. "We need to realize that this is not our church, but God's church, and God is always up to something new." A questionand-answer period and discussion took place following his message.

The presentation of our honored guest speaker, Pastor Don Poest



Dr. Albert Ladanyi, Synod Presbyter shares the message of God at the morning devotional

The Synod banquet took place Wednesday evening with a festive Hungarian dinner served by the members of the First Hungarian Reformed Church. Many members from the community and local church joined members of the Synod in the celebration. Thanks to those who helped to make this such a great event.

The unfinished business concluded on

Thursday morning as Bishop Krasznai closed the meeting with prayer. The official minutes of the meeting will be distributed by the General Secretary to our congregations and members when completed.

Mr. James D. Ballas



Rt. Rev. Zoltan Lizik Bishop of the Hungarian Reformed Church in America greets the Calvin Synod delegates



Participating ladies at the 81st Synod Meeting



Mrs. Elizabeth Papp Taylor President of the Cleveland Hungarian Developement Panel greets the participants of the Calvin Synod



Ms. Katherine E. Novak Chair of the Board of William Penn

Twelve Lessons God Is Teaching Me

These lessons that God has taught and is still teaching me come in no particular order except that the first is first and the last is last. Let me briefly reflect on each of them.

Gratitude enlarges the heart, obedience strengthens the heart, and humility makes the heart teachable. The opposites are also true. So guard your heart (Proverbs 4:23). Grateful people are big-hearted and generous people, while those who think the world owes them a living tend to be mean and miserly. Choose gratitude. A focus on the love of Jesus without listening to his call to obedience leaves us weak and unprepared when the tough times come. Choose obedience. Pride allows us to think we have all the answers and that we are always right. It also goes before a fall (Provers 16:18). But those who are humble are always open to being taught and led by the One who is always right. Choose humility. It's good for your heart!

People will remember your life far longer than they will remember your words. Occasionally someone will tell me of something I said in a sermon or a conversation. Far more often they will thank me for the time I sat with them in a hospital room by the bedside of someone they loved. Or the time when I delivered some bags of groceries from the church when they were worried about where their next meal was coming from. Or the time I gave them a hug after a worship service when they thought nobody cared. Or the time I went to their daughter's volleyball game and left her feeling that she mattered. Or the time... Living out the faith in the ordinary moments matters far more than saying the right theological statement in a sermon, important as that is.

Never forget whose church it is, and never forget that God is always up to something new. It's not my church or your church, it's His church. Jesus said, "I will build my church." (Matthew 16:18) And he gets to build it His way, pouring His new wine into new wineskins. The message remains the same, but the methods do not. I have great respect for my father, who is now in glory. While he was able he would write me a letter every other week. (He lived some 300 miles away.) He would often write about something new they were trying in the church where I was raised in the faith and he would say, "I don't really like it, but I don't have to. They aren't doing it for me. And if it helps reach someone new for Christ I will support it in every way I can." I pray God allows me to grow old with a similar sprit!

God prefers to work through people who know and admit they are broken. If I had to pick one moment that was a positive turning point in my ministry it would be a time when I was most broken. My wife was going through a crisis due to flashbacks of abuse she had experienced in her childhood. She made the decision, with my full support, that she needed to admit herself for in-patient treatment. When we told her counselor, who was a pastor's wife, that we were going to share this with our congregationshe said to do so would be professional suicide. "Congregations want their pastors to have it all together," she said. But I didn't have it all together. I was broken and didn't want to hide that anymore. So that Sunday I had a friend read a letter for me to my congregation that said in part, "You have always seen me as a fountain of love and support. Right now I am an empty basin with nothing to give." It was one of the best decisions I ever made in ministry because it allowed my church to minister to me and to see me as a fellow struggler on this journey called life.

Religion helps people to conform; grace helps people to be transformed. Choose grace. Ephesians 2:1-10 reminds us that it's all about grace. Jesus had so much conflict with the religious leaders of his day because he kept breaking their religious rules and regulations to which they wanted total conformity. But Jesus came to set us free from this so that, by his grace alone, we could enjoy a personal relationship with God our Father. As the Heidelberg Catechism so wonderfully reminds us, obedience to God is always a response to our salvation, never a means to it.

We were meant to be funnels, not buckets. God's call to Abraham, who was to be the father of God's people, as recorded in Genesis 12:1-4, was that he would be blessed so that he could be a blessing. That call to us remains the same. As we allow God's grace to flow through us to those to whom He directs, we are blessed as well. But if we seek to be buckets full of grace that never gets poured out we will grow stagnate or we will evaporate into nothing of value.

Be faithful with what you have rather than envious of what you don't have. In the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-40) Jesus doesn't condemn the man with only one talent for only having that one, but for not using the one he did have. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 Paul teaches us that we are each a different part of the one Body of Christ, and we all know that some parts have more value than others in a physical sense. But only if they are working well and in conjunction with others! Envy can destroy us and make us ineffective or even useless. Be faithful to who you are and where God has placed you, and trust Him with the eternal rewards. Too often we ask God to change our circumstances when God may want to use those circumstances to change us. This is the lesson of Paul and his thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7). Paul prayed asking God to change his condition, but God was using that condition to change Paul. I've experienced this in my life and in the lives of many others through the years. I suspect you have also. Pray that God always keeps you open to the lessons He wants to teach and the changes He wants to make.

We really do need each other. As mentioned earlier, we are each one of us a part of the Body of Christ. I have dentures and as long as they are in my mouth they function very effectively in aiding my eating. But if my dentures are sitting in a dish on the bathroom sink they are useless. If I try to be of value to God's kingdom by myself, ignoring the presence of the others God has placed in His Body around me, my value will be greatly diminished or even useless. The same result happens if I try to be all the parts by myself. Being a part of a body can be frustrating and difficult, and sometimes the body gets diseased, but none of that changes the reality that to be effective for God we need to do it together.

As I grow older I have fewer answers, but more certainty. Job models this so very well. By the end of the book he doesn't have any answers to his questions, but he sure has certainty that God is God! I came out of seminary with a lot of answers to questions that no one ever asked. And I've certainly questioned God about what he was doing or allowing through the years. I didn't often get answers. But I am more certain than ever that God can be trusted and that His ways are best, whether I understand them or not.

Live like God declares you to be, not like whom others want you to be. Underneath everything you are a beloved child of God. Don't ever forget that! People will place lots of their own expectations on you. They placed a lot of expectations on Jesus as well. But he was grounded to the truth that He was God's beloved Son. You are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, an ambassador for God's kingdom, etc. But underneath it all you are God's beloved. Stay grounded in that.

Be a people of hope. Live like you're read the last chapter. When I was a child I loved to read mystery novels and Zane Gray westerns. Too often it seemed I was just in the really god part of the book when it was time to go to bed. I'd plead with my parents to let me read just one more chapter. And if they did, I'd often read the last chapter so I would know the ending. Then the next day I would go back and read the rest of the book to see how we got to that ending.

Friends, I've read the last chapter. Revelation 22 tells me that God wins and He is coming back to take me to Him some day. This is the anchor for my soul (Hebrews 6:19), and I pray it is the same for you, no matter what you may be facing.

Pastor Don Poest

The teaching was presented by Pastor Don Poest at the 81st Calvin Synod Meeting. Pastor Poest is the retired Pastor of the Brunswick Reformed Church, Brunswick, OH; Former President of the General Synod and Interim General Secretary of the Reformed Church in America.

Supporting America's Veterans

During the summer months, members of the United Church of Christ of Bridgeport collected donations for America's veterans. A donation box was set up for members to place items in. Items donated included various books, wallets, socks, toiletries and personal care items, tennis balls, stuffed animals and toy diecast cars.

The donations were boxed by Clara Barabas, Ann Ballas, Eric Gramse, Jim Ballas, and Sandy Stasko. The local VFW picked up these items to donate the America's veterans and their families. The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) has many programs and services that work to support veterans, service members and their families as well as communities worldwide. "No One Does More for Veterans."

Thanks to all those who donated to this worthy cause. Special thanks to Sandy Stasko for organizing, managing, and volunteering her time and efforts in handling this event.

Jim Ballas, Chief Elder



Veterans collection. Left to right: Clara Barabas, Eric Gramse, Jim Ballas, and Sandy Stasko

AMERIKAI MAGYAR **REFORMÁTUSOK LAPJA** A Kálvin Egyházkerület hivatalos lapja Alapítva 1900-ban

124. évfolyam

2023. NOVEMBER – DECEMBER

11–12. szám

Isten élő Igéje

Lekció: János 1:1-14

Textus: "Isten igéje élő és ható, élesebb minden kétélű kardnál, és áthatol, az elme és a lélek, az ízületek és a velők szétválásáig, és megítéli a szív gondolatait és szándékait." (Zsidókhoz írt levél 4:12)

Kedves Kálvin Egyházkerület Gyülekezetei! Kedves Testvéreim az Úr Krisztusban!



2023. augusztus 21én, hétfőn egy érdekes cikk jelent meg a BabylonBee.com weboldalon. Vajon megtörtént-e vagy sem, a történet elgondolkodtató és inspiráló lehet számunkra. A cikk címe: "Egy helyi gyülekezet bátor új *taktikai lépést tett abban, hogy*

csak a Bibliát tanítja." Hadd osszam meg itt ezt a cikket.

North Carolina államban, Gastonia városában egy helyi gyülekezet a népszerűség új hullámára talált, amikor is egy olyan forradalmi döntést hozott, amellyel lemondott az addigi szokásos próbálkozásairól az istentiszteletek kapcsán, és ehelyett elkezdte csak a Bibliát tanítani.

"Nem tudom, miért nem gondoltunk erre hamarabb" –mondta Steve Borden, az Abundant River of Faith and Life vezető lelkipásztora. "Annyi minden mást csináltunk az elmúlt években –karneválok, klasszikus autó show-k, igehirdetés sorozatok, melyeket népszerű filmekből vett bejátszásokra alapoztunk–, de arra jöttünk rá, hogy amire az embereknek ebben az életben igazából szükségük van az az, hogy hallják Isten igéjét. Ki gondolta volna ezt?"

A gyülekezet azon erőlködött az elmúlt évtized során, hogy behozza az embereket a templom ajtóin

keresztül a vasárnapi istentiszteletekre, felhasználva füst gépeket, kiépítve a színpadot, továbbá turnézó zenekarhoz illő megvilágítást, ínyenc eszpresszó italokat és trendi, helyi, életmeggazdagító üzeneteket biztosítson mindenki számára, hogy az előadásmód mind újabbnak és újabbnak hasson. "Azt gondoltuk, hogy mindez valóban segíteni fog abba, hogy bevonzzunk új embereket" –mondta Borden lelkész. "Azonban mindez csak azt eredményezte, hogy az épület olyan emberekkel töltődött meg, akik szeretik a kávét és az ingyenes gyerekvigyázást."

A dolgok akkor kezdtek el megváltozni, amikor az egyik alázatos gyülekezeti tag (aki azt kérte, hogy névtelen maradjon), azt javasolta a lelkipásztori csapatnak, hogy csak kezdjenek magából a Bibliából tanítani. "Ez egy megvilágosodás volt" –mondta Borden. "Voltaképpen elkezdtük meglátni azt, hogy emberi életek változnak meg, és ahogy a Bibliából prédikáltunk, mintha isteni hatalom kezdte volna valóban megérinteni az emberek szívét. Erre engem nem is tanítottak a teológián. Őrület!"

Ahogy a cikk íródott, az egyház állítólag azt fontolgatja, hogy hogyan tudnák elhagyni a rock koncert stílusú dicsőítést és énekeket, azzal az elgondolással, hogy az emberek jobban dicsőíthetnék Istent, ha az énekek, amiket énekelnek teológiailag helyesek.¹

Isten igéjének óriási hatalma van az életünkben. A mai textusunk ezt az igazságot erősíti meg: "Isten igéje élő és ható, élesebb minden kétélű kardnál, és áthatol, az elme és a lélek, az ízületek és a velők szétválásáig, és megítéli a szív gondolatait és szándékait." (Zsidó levél 4:12)

A Bibliára gyakran utalnak úgy, mint az Isten élő igéjére. Miért? Azért mert életet hoz azok számára, akik azt olvassák és engedelmeskednek neki.

Miért olyan fontos, hogy a Biblia –Isten élő igéje– az életünkben legyen azáltal, hogy azt naponta olvassuk? Ez év augusztus 23-án, Tom–gyülekezetünk egyik laikus vezetője– a következő kérdést tette fel

az angol nyelvű Zoom bibliaóra elején: "Hogyan épülhetünk hitben?" Az egyik résztvevő bibliaóra tag rögtön megválaszolta: "Azáltal, ha a Bibliát olvassuk." Ámen! Igen, valóban így van.

A Biblia, Isten élő igéje hatalmas áldás az életünkben.

1. Voltál már valaha elcsigázva, lelkileg, testileg, mentálisan kimerülve? Majd elkezdted olvasni a Bibliát és máshogy kezdted el érezni magad, valami rendkívülit tapasztaltál..., mert az ige táplálni kezdte kiszáradt lelkedet, megerősítette elcsigázott szívedet, a lelked megújult, és az ige felüdítette a testedet. Betöltötte a szívedet hálaadással és dicsérettel.

2. Voltál már valaha emberileg tűnő lehetetlen helyzetben, olyan nehézségben, amiből nem találtad a kiutat? Majd elkezdted olvasni a Bibliát és békességre találtál. Az ige reménységgel töltött el, bátorított, és megbizonyosított arról, hogy van **Valaki** az oldaladon, aki segít és vezeti az életedet.

3. Volt már úgy, hogy olyan helyzettel kellett szembe nézned, hogy fontos döntéseket kellett meghoznod? Majd elkezdted olvasni a Bibliát és csodás módon bölcsességet kaptál, az ige irányítani kezdte lépteidet és segítséget adott abban, hogy meglásd az egyértelmű utat.

4. Elvesztettél már valaha olyas valakit, aki nagyon fontos volt számodra? Majd elkezdted olvasni a Bibliát és vigasztalást kaptál a fájdalmak, kétségek és bánat közepette.

5. Harcoltál már valaha kísértésekkel és a bűnnel? Majd elkezdted olvasni a Bibliát és bátorítást kaptál arra, hogy nehogy elbukjál a kísértések között. Az ige rámutatott a helytelen cselekedetekre és rossz elgondolásokra, és visszavezetett téged az Úr Jézus Krisztushoz.

6. Küzdöttél már valaha azzal a gondolattal, hogy valóban meg lettél váltva és örök életed van? Majd elkezdted olvasni a Bibliát és megbizonyosodtál, megerősödtél az örök élet örökségéről, és arról, hogy Istennek, a te mennyei Atyádnak szeretett gyermeke vagy.

7. Emlékszel arra, amikor még Urad és Megváltó Jézusod nélkül élted az életed? Majd valakitől kaptál egy Bibliát vagy volt is neked otthon egy, és elkezdted olvasni a Szentírást és az elvezetett téged az élő igéhez, Jézus Krisztushoz, a te Szabadítódhoz.

Ha nem fordultál még soha a Bibliához életed ilyen helyzeteiben, ha még nem olvastad Isten szent igéjét, akkor arra bátorítalak, hogy kezd el olvasni a Szentírást.

2000 évvel ezelőtt –azon a legelső karácsonyon– a mennyei Atya elküldte egyszülött

Fiát, az Isten élő igéjét ebbe a világba. A János evangéliuma legelején ezt olvashatjuk: "*Az Ige testté lett, közöttünk lakott." (János 1:14).* Jézus Krisztus beleszületett ebbe a világba azért, hogy meghaljon érted –a bűneidért– a kereszten, de a harmadik napon feltámadt a halálból azért, hogy új életet, örök életet ajándékozzon mindazoknak, akik elfogadják Őt Úrnak és Megváltónak. A forrása, az élő bizonyítéka ezeknek az eseményeknek a Szentírás, az Isten élő igéje. Olvassátok és éljétek meg –minden nap– a Szentlélek hatalma és segítsége által! ÁMEN!

Ft. dr. Krasznai Csaba

Forrás:

¹https://babylonbee.com/news/local-church-tries-boldnew-tactic-of-just-teaching-the-bible?fbclid=IwAR3rhJ8c U2EAKtfwJdfhSF2uDOCC8a6xoUUz6Trz8qI4sZdWFfG aw7XUB5Q

A cikket az igehirdetés szerzője fordította angol nyelvből.



Karácsony csodái De mi van a csodákkal? cikksorozat 2. rész

Kedves Olvasóm, ez a "csodákról" szóló gondolatok megígért folytatása, de karácsonyi elmélkedés is... Aztán lesz még egy harmadik rész is, ami a csodák elmaradásának okairól szól.

Karácsony első, kozmikus méretű csodája az, hogy – János evangéliuma első része szerint – "Az IGE testté lett, és lakozott közöttünk..." És mivel Isten az IGE, ezért Jézusban maga Isten lakozik közöttünk. Azért gondoljunk csak bele: Salamon megsejtett valamit, amikor kijelentette, hogy "az egeknek egei be nem fogadhatnak Téged." Ma már tudjuk, hogy a világegyetem valami félelmetesen nagy – majdnem tizenöt milliárd fényév az átmérője. És Istent tényleg nem tudja befogadni, mert Ő a Teremtő, aki ezt az egészet a kezében tartja és irányítja. Ez a Teremtő az, aki belépett Jézus Krisztusban a teremtett világába. A csoda nem a méretekről szól, hanem arról, hogy Isten vállalta az emberré lételt – éhséggel, szomjúsággal, *Folvtatás a 16. oldalon*

Folytatás a 15. oldalról

fájdalmakkal együtt. Javaslom, hogy nagyon adjunk hálát ezért, amikor leülünk majd a gazdagon terített karácsonyi asztalhoz!

Karácsony második, emberi mértékű csodája az, hogy Jézusban Isten – aki maga az Ige – TÉNYLEG emberré lett. Megszületett, tisztába kellett tenni, családjával együtt menekülnie kellett Egyiptomba... Aztán engedelmeskedett a szüleinek, meg a törvény rendeleteinek - egészen a keresztfának haláláig. Sírt a Lázárt gyászolókkal együtt, letörölte a naini gyászoló özvegy könnyeit, és megértette a sok ezer embert, akinek -a szellemi üzenet mellett-kenyérre, meg némi halra is szüksége volt. Mélységesen megértette a bűn mocsarában fetrengő embert, a parázna nőt, a tagadó Pétert. Valami félelmeteset kell itt felfedeznünk: úgy jött el a Tisztaság a mocskos világba, úgy tisztított meg bűnöst és leprást, hogy közben Maga nem vált szennyessé. Mi se' féljünk hát, ha ki akarjuk nyújtani mentő kezünket egy fuldokló, bűnös ember felé.

karácsony harmadik, Végül iszonyatos csodájáról is szólnunk kell. Arról, hogy "Az övéi közé jött, de az övéi nem fogadták be őt." Ráadásul leköpték, arcul verték, majd keresztre feszítették. Egyszer kimentettem egy kis csipmankot a cicánk elől... "köszönetként" megharapta az ujjamat. Igen ám, de itt nem egy ösztönös kis állatseregről van szó, hanem hálátlan emberekről, akiknek a Hold már nem is elég, a Marsra küldenek járművet, hogy előkészítse az ember útját. Mondjátok, el lehet ezt hinni? Hogy a pokol felé rohanó teremtmény megtagadja Teremtőjét? Elárulja, és megölje azt az Isten-fiút, aki azért jött, hogy megmentse, és "ráadásul" mindent neki adjon? Gondolkodjunk el ezen, és mondjuk el a Krisztust még elutasító "teremtményeknek", hogy miért is jött el a Megváltó?

Akarjuk, hogy minden a "helyén legyen" ezen a karácsonyon? Nagyszerű! Akkor szépen díszítsétek fel a karácsonyfát, süssétek meg a bejglit meg a halat, vagy mit tudom én, még mit... Adjunk egymásnak ajándékot, aztán menjünk el a templomba... De adjuk meg Istennek is az ajándékot: mondd ki hangosan a szobád csendjében –talán életedben először, vagy sokadszor– azt, hogy "*Itt van szívem, neked adom Uram." Itt van bűnösen, szennyesen, gyere Jézus, és tisztítsd meg azt a golgotai kereszten kifolyt drága véreddel!* Vagy ha –Istennek hála– ezt már komolyan megtetted, akkor imádkozz, és kérd: *Jöjj újra Jézusom, és vedd át az uralmat az életem felett!* Ilyen valóságos, és csodákkal teli karácsonyi ünnepeket kívánunk mindenkinek. rádiót. Nagyon "mélyre" került, kimerül, megfáradt, és alkalmatlanná vált. Valaki megtalálta és haza vitte, de nem tudott vele mit kezdeni, a műhelybe került, ahol aztán folytatta "poros" életét. Majd a kézműves keze alá került, mert ő többet látott benne, mint csak egy 71 éves dobozt.

Rádió

Kaptam egy 1952-ben, Dnyipróban készült

Igy kapott új életet!

Így van ez Isten dolgában is.

Sokan megfáradnak, elkopnak, mélyre kerülnek, majd a sátán kidobja őket. Jön Isten és azt mondja: "nem számít, hogy milyen mélyen vagy, én többet látok benned, és helyre akarlak állítani. Jöjj!" És megtörténik a csoda, "szól a rádió", mert az Úr helyre állította!

ifj. Bakos Imre A Beregújfalui Gyülekezet presbiter-vezetője, Kárpátalja







(folytatjuk)

Nt. dr. László Imre

Calvin Synod Homeland and Overseas Mission

Mission Coordinator: Rt. Rev. Peter Pal Bodor, Auxiliary Bishop 19157 NW 23rd Place Pembrooke Pines, FL 33029 Tel: (954) 614-4524

TRANSYLVANIA

Support the following schools and needy.

a. The School Fund is coordinated by Ms. Gabriella Nadas

b. Sepsiszentgyorgy: Szekely Miko Reformed High School

c. Szekelyudrahely: Backarmadasi Kis Gergely Reformed High School and Roof Fund.

d. Nagyvarad: Charitable and Mission Fund

e. Nagykaroly-Kertvaros; Construction project of a new church building and parsonage

f. Nagyenyed: Bethlen Gabor Kollegium

g. Marosvasarhely: Reformed Kollegium

h. Csiha Kalman Church and School Fund

i. Fund Reformed Schools and help poor people in Transylvania Reformed Assistance Committee (TRAC)

j. Fületelke: Financial assistance for Enikő Rózsa who provides meals for 24 small children. Please write on the check, in the memo section: Rózsa Enikő.

UKRAINE

a. Support the refugees from Ukraine and our friends and fellow Hungarians in Karpatalja.

b. Support the Good Samaritan Orphanage and School in Nagydobrony in their mission work.

c. Support the food pantry named "Crumbs for Lazarus" to feed the hungry in Csap.

d. Center for children's Evangelism Center burned down in Carpatho-Ukrain. The Bereg Camp workers voluntarily offer their services. The request is made to help rebuild this Center.

SLOVAKIA

Rozsnyo: Support request for the roof expenses of the Reformed Church's Elementary School.

Please send your donations to the Calvin Synod Treasurer. Kérjük, hogy adományaikat az Egyházkerületi pénztároshoz küldjék:

Mr. James D. Ballas, Synod Treasurer 2 Spruce Hill Road, Shelton, CT 06484-4485 Tel: (203) 929-9425



LELKIPÁSZTOROK JELENTKEZÉSE:

Érdeklődő lelkipásztorok vegyék fel a kapcsolatot a püspöki irodával:

Rt. Rev. Dr. Csaba G. Krasznai 14530 Alexander Road • Walton Hills, OH calvinsynod1939@gmail.com 440-786-7272 ext. 13

Kálvin Egyházkerület bel- és külmisszió

MISSZIÓI KOORDINÁTOR: Ft. Bodor Péter Pál 19157 NW 23rd Place Pembrooke Pines, FL 33029 Tel: (954) 614-4524

ERDÉLY

Segítséget kérnek a következő templomok és iskolák: a. Az Erdélyi Iskola Alap koordinátora Nádas Gabriella.

b. Sepsiszentgyörgy: Székely Mikó Református Kollégium

c. Székelyudrahely: Backamadarasi Kis Gergely Református Kollégium és tetőjavitási akció.

d. Nagyvárad: Szeretetszolgálat és Missziói Alap.

e. Kolozsvár: Református Iskola.

f. Nagykároly-Kertváros: új templom és parókia felépítésére alap.

g. Nagyenyed: Bethlen Gábor Kollégium.

h. Marosvásárhely: Református Kollégium.

i. Csiha Kálmán Templom és Iskola Alap.

j. Fületelke: Rózsa Enikő megsegítésére, aki 24 fiatal gyermekről gondoskodik minden segítség nélkül. A csekk memo részébe kérjük írják rá Rózsa Enikő nevét.

KÁRPÁTALJA:

a. Segítsük a menekülteket Ukrajnából és a kárpátaljai magyar barátainkat és honfitársainkat.

b. Nagydobrony: Az "Irgalmas Samaritánus" árvaház és iskola folyamatos segítséget kér.

c. Csap: "Morzsákat Lázárnak" ingyenkonyha támogatására segítséget kér Balogh János lelkipásztor. d. Leégett a Kárpátaljai Bereg Camp gyermek és evangélizációs központ fő épülete. A Bereg Camp évente több mint 100 rászoruló gyermeknek biztosít üdültetést. A központ munkásai önkéntesen dolgoznak. Elvesztése a református egyház lelki tragédiája. Előre is köszönik a segítséget.

SZLOVÁKIA:

Rozsnyó: A Református Egyházközség Alapiskola támogatást kér a tetőszerkezet költségeinek fedezésére.



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