

FOCUS

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Alive!
In Christ... in the World



October 2020

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Pastors

Peter Whitelock
Head of Staff

Gerald Chinen
Care

Lauren Gully
Mission & Spiritual Formation

Jaime Polson
Families & Executive Leadership



food insecurity and the church's invitation to

RESPOND

By Lauren Gully - Pastor, Mission & Spiritual Formation

The past few months have completely changed my outlook on the importance and relevancy of my faith, and my call to be a Christian, in a way that makes a difference to my community. On one hand, there are many days where the problems, which are so overwhelming, make me think that there is little I can do to make a difference; but on the other hand, it has never been clearer to me that our faith is meant to make a difference in how we are to have compassion on those who tell us they are suffering and to do something about it.

Right now, we have been given an invitation to be people of faith at a time when it is most needed.

To pick one example from many, food insecurity in our community has skyrocketed. Our partners, such as Monument Crisis Center, have seen an increase of at least 60% in the number of clients accessing their food-support programs. We know, through other national data, that this need could continue for the next year or more, and that it will exceed the limits of what food banks can provide. This is a gap, I believe, that churches like LOPC can help fill.

In countless verses of scripture, including Matthew 25:40, we know Jesus cares about those who are poor and who are hungry. We have a clear invitation and simple task of helping to be sure our neighbors are fed.

An important way right now, in this moment, we can live out our faith by picking up extra non-perishable food when we go grocery shopping, and by making sure the food barrels outside the Ministry Center are filled - and continue to be filled, for many weeks to come. I know there is much more we can do together to address the needs in our community. I pray you will join me in starting to meet these needs, one barrel at a time.

stewardship campaign



LOPC IS **STRONGER** *than the storms*

Giving Sunday is November 1!

Your giving keeps this church moving forward in service to many, and an annual pledge that honors God from your substance allows us to plan and direct our ministry to the greatest and most efficient good. On this day, we encourage members and friends to pledge. Your packets will be arriving by mail soon. Please mail your pledge card or drop it by the church office.

You'll also be able to access these materials online at the same time at:

[LOPC.ORG/GIVE-BACK/PLEDGE](https://lop.org/give-back/pledge)

Questions about processing your pledge?
Contact Lidia Jesionek at 925-283-8722 x229 or at lidia@lop.org.

session



RESOLUTION FOR SESSION August 18, 2020

THANK YOU!

Editor's note: the following resolution was unanimously passed by elders on August 18.

We, the Session of the Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church (LOPC), with appreciation and gratefulness, thank everyone in our community for their faith, understanding, grace, trust, and caring for each other in the difficult circumstances and limitations of the Covid-19 pandemic.

We wish to acknowledge our wonderful and dedicated pastors and staff, caring Deacons and Stephen Ministers, committed Seedlings staff, faithful custodians, creative church teams, and flexible leadership.

The members and friends of our church family have been steadfast in supporting our church, each other, and our mission partners through a myriad of new technologies, programs, and offerings.

We express our thanksgiving and gratitude for all these gifts so freely given to the glory of God and the service of others.

Session Highlights August, 2020 Meeting

By Paul Koenig, Clerk of Session

The August session meeting was held via Zoom video conferencing. Pastor Peter Whitelock provided information on the Congregational meeting which was scheduled on September 20, 2020. The meeting provided the congregation with the opportunity to approve the slate of nominees for LOPC leadership positions for terms beginning January 1, 2021. These positions include elders, deacons, and the Congregation Nominating Committee (CNC) members. In addition, members of the Designated Pastor Nominating Committee (DPNC) were approved and work for that committee begins immediately. The ordination/installation of newly elected elders and deacons will take place during worship on November 8 (pre-recorded).

Peter provided an update on the newly formed anti-bias/anti-racism working group which will be monitored by the Session Planning Council. Meetings will take place twice a month and the focus will be to assess and develop efforts in addressing the important issues that we are facing together as a church and broader community.

Pastor Jaime Polson provided updates on staff and fall programming, including plans for in-person instruction at Seedlings preschool which started late August. She also gave updates about campus safety measures in place for both LOPC and Seedlings preschool. Jaime shared the news that Staci Johnston has become the church treasurer. Staci began her new role on 9/1.

Jim Nagle, finance elder, updated session on LOPC's current finances. He reported that things are currently relatively good, considering the ongoing pandemic, but which will require continued review. However, the church mission partners have been struggling; thus Session approved giving MIS \$15,000 out of the Session Emerging Needs fund to deploy to LOPC's mission partners.

Again, the pastors, staff, and ministry teams are continuing to provide great and important work in the pandemic situation. Thank you and blessings to all.

finance

By Jim Nagle, elder and Finance Team Chair

This year has been one for the books! But through it all, LOPC has been a guiding light in our community and the world. The congregation's gifts of time, talent, and treasure are much appreciated and have truly made a difference.

The economy has been dramatically different than anticipated. Consequently, the LOPC Finance Team and staff have updated the 2020 budget to reflect the changed needs of the ministries. Fortunately, our financials are strong. Through August, total income was \$2,142,568, which is \$63,113 better than budget, mainly from overpayment of pledges. In addition, pledge payments were about \$200,000 ahead of last year's pace. As a result, our cash position on August 31 totaled \$1,087,744 compared to \$632,052 a year earlier.

Moreover, the staff is doing a great job managing expenses. Through August, expenses totaled \$2,137,985, or \$11,153 less than budgeted, putting us in a strong financial position with a net surplus of \$4,583, or \$74,266 more than expected. This strength has allowed us to transition seamlessly from in-person ministry to remote ministry, and it has also allowed us to give more to mission partners.

We are on track to distribute the previously budgeted \$289,041 to our mission partners, plus an additional

\$37,500, approved by session. A few examples of how these increased gifts are being used: food baskets for hungry families in Guatemala; PPE for local schools, as well as our partners in the Congo, so their students can study safely; Princeton Seminary aid for minority students; motel costs for Stand, which can't add more people to on-campus facilities because of COVID-19 safety protocols; racial justice initiatives; fire-victim assistance; and other similar needs. Thanks to your gifts, we have been able to serve so many in need, both locally and worldwide.

While we are truly thankful for LOPC's strong position, four months still remain in 2020, along with much uncertainty and need among our mission partners. So, what can you do to help? First, know that gifts of any amount are greatly appreciated and make a difference, so please consider increasing your pledge, or if you have not already done so, please consider making a gift. Second, we still need to fund the \$200,000 Faith Component, budgeted to fully meet ministry needs this year, as well as provide additional resources for mission partners in this unprecedented time of need. So, please consider giving directly to this fund.

This will allow us not only to meet our budget, but also satisfy the increasing needs in and beyond our community. Finally, please pray for LOPC and our staff, our mission partners, and the world. Thank you.

LOPC Names New Treasurer



Staci Johnston

LOPC has named Staci Johnston as the new church treasurer. A CPA (inactive), Staci assumed the position September 1. Her professional background includes positions as controller and vp of finance for various companies, "a perfect fit for the LOPC job," says Peter Whitelock,

head of staff.

Staci will work closely with the church's executive leadership and finance team, while managing financial supervision and review, IRS compliance, and setting and monitoring compliance with internal-control

policies and procedures. Staci is no stranger to LOPC, which is an added benefit. A member of LOPC for 17 years, she recently completed a term as LOPC Foundation president, and has served as LOPC elder, and Clerk of Session, in addition to several ministry teams such as Personnel, Church Officer Nominating Committee, and Worship. Staci has been married to her husband, Ian, 26 years; they have two sons.

LOPC's former treasurer was Char Casella, who stepped down several months ago but continued in the job to aid in dealing with the pandemic and the job transition.

foundation

I Hope

By Jim Beckemeyer, Foundation Trustee.



Jim Beckemeyer

One of my all-time favorite films is “The Shawshank Redemption.” Throughout the movie, we follow the character of Ellis “Red” Redding, played by Morgan Freeman. Red served the entirety of his adult life in prison for committing a heinous crime. Finally, he is paroled, yet he struggles with his newfound freedom. It takes all the courage Red can muster to leave his dingy apartment, buy a bus ticket, and head to Mexico in the hopes of reuniting with his longtime friend, Andy Dufresne.

The five lines uttered by Red at the end of Shawshank are amazing given his life experience. “I think it’s the excitement only a free man can feel - a free man at the start of a long journey whose conclusion is uncertain. I hope I can make it across the border. I hope to see my friend and shake his hand. I hope the Pacific is as blue as it has been in my dreams. I hope.”

So far, 2020 has been a difficult year for all of us. We continue to wrestle with the health and economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. Our nation grapples with the need to address systemic racial

injustice. We have dealt with wildfires across California, and are grinding it out through the usual zaniness of a major election cycle. It would be easy to lose hope.

Yet, on August 30, the LOPC Youth Sunday worship service gave me a renewed sense of hope. It was a major lift for me to hear the stories and perspectives of the young people we are privileged to nurture at LOPC. Our youth are persevering, taking God’s message of love to heart, and finding ways to share it in our broader community.

The Youth program at LOPC is one of the many ministry areas supported by an annual gift from the LOPC Foundation. Planning a legacy gift to the Foundation represents a primary way for my wife and me to invest in the future. Might you consider a plan to leave a legacy gift and become a “Friend of the Foundation?” I hope so.

To learn more, please feel free to contact any of the LOPC Foundation Trustees: Jim Beckemeyer, Lois Boyd, Jen Crocker, Jerry Ducey, Kristi Haigh, Staci Johnston, Phil Placier, Mike Ross, and Dara Youngdale.

seedlings

By Coleen Moulton – Director, Seedlings Preschool

This September we welcomed our classes physically back to school. Seedlings is strictly following all of the government health protocols for childcare centers and are at about 50% of the usual capacity and two-thirds of the staff. Classes are on-site Tuesday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. No children are present on Mondays when teachers and staff conduct most planning and meetings virtually -- for the time being.



State protocols dictate that visitors’ entry into the building is limited as much as possible. Child drop-off with families is done outside so only teachers and students enter the building. If you have a need to come into the CLC building, please call the Seedlings office (925-284-3870) to let them know, and remember to bring your mask.

Please keep us in your prayers for continued health and wellness of our students, staff, and their families.

journey of faith

By Bobbie Dodson-Nielsen, LOPC member



Paul Koenig

Paul Koenig's growing-up years involved moving to foreign lands. Born in New York City, his family moved to Rome when he was 8. They were only there a year and then moved to The Hague, Netherlands. The year 1960 brought them to Lafayette. Wherever they lived,

they always sought out a church home, and now it was LOPC, where his parents soon became members, and Paul attended services with them.

"Being raised in such diverse communities and countries exposed me to people of different backgrounds, cultures, and faiths," he says. "I feel blessed to have had such wonderful opportunities and the consequent learning. Even in the '50s, we had gay friends, and a cousin who married a Black doctor. We loved them all. These 'differences' didn't matter. If only everyone were raised as I was, I do believe the world would be a much better place."

As to his personal faith, Paul relates it was the death of his sister, Elise, in 1957 from cancer at age 3 that really brought him close to God. "Every night, my father came home from work and would go directly to sit with Elise. I was almost 13 when she died. My parents, Louis and Margarete, were so devastated they were not able to provide me with the emotional help I needed. To deal with the loss, I came to realize the only way to get the help I needed was by trying to communicate with God. So, I went to my room, closed the door, prayed, and looked for answers.

"Wonderfully, I somehow learned how I could 'get through' our terrible situation. I came to understand I had to keep 'going forward.' I have never forgotten how much my dialogue and looking for guidance from God helped me."

Paul says that early in his legal career he was encouraged to be involved in helping others. "I became active in a number of charitable organizations, particularly related to the developmentally disabled, and ultimately served two years as president of the Epilepsy Foundation of American in the mid-1980s. "I feel I had leadership skills and believe God nudged me a

bit to get more involved in this work because the need for understanding and helping those with epilepsy was so great. "

His leadership skills have been recognized at LOPC as he has been Clerk of Session four times. "In this position, you work with people with deep faith, all trying to chart a course for LOPC. It's an honor and a challenge.

"As Christians I believe we have the responsibility to choose how we can help others. These are areas where I have been led. We each have a different path, but in everything, it's my creed to put people first, love them, and try to understand them. It's an important part of my faith. We need to remember we all don't see things the same way. We might be totally unaware of what our neighbor is thinking and why.

"Listening is an important skill for all of us. It's too easy to be judgmental. We must try to see why a person may have another perspective. It may not change your mind, but at least you can appreciate why someone thinks differently than you. Of course, we know God is the final judge."

Observes Paul: "There are many important scriptures but the one that keeps guiding me is to 'Love thy God' and to 'Love thy neighbor as thyself'. (Matthew 22:37-39.) I have always felt that calls for my involvement and includes many values, including to love and do right to others, being grateful, and forgiving.

"The precepts expressed seem so relevant to today's life, with so many struggling with the pandemic, afraid for themselves, family members, friends, and not being able to live normal lives. Also, they are relevant to the unrest our country is experiencing, the partisanship divides, the fears and frightening incidents. We should always be thinking of our neighbors, which means everyone, and how we can live peacefully and helpfully.

"In that light, I am pleased that LOPC's programs are, and will be, helping others, will hopefully help to expand diversity in our midst, and model Jesus's words to 'love thy neighbors as thyself.'"

mission

LOPC Responds to COVID-19

By Beth & Phil Hunter, LOPC members



Who could have ever imagined the surreal lifestyles we now live due to the COVID-19 pandemic? Virtually every aspect of our lives has been disrupted. And yet, even in these unimaginable and difficult times, there also is a love story at work.

It's a story of endless love and compassion as shown by LOPC members. Generous gifts of time, talent, and treasure have been poured out to many of our mission partners in the past few months.

Countless hours under socially distanced safety have resulted in 7,455 N-95 masks being refurbished; over 18,000 pounds of beans and rice repacked into family-sized bags for Monument Crisis Center; clothing donated 'curb side' and sorted for the homeless at Trinity Center; hygiene kits for the homeless assembled; and who knows what else others have done, independent of LOPC-sponsored opportunities.

For many people all over the world, including thousands in our local communities, the disruption of everyday life has resulted in the inability to put food on the table - a very real, daily struggle. Children around the world often receive their healthiest meal of the day at school. With schools physically closed, daily nutritional needs moved home, adding to the burden that unemployed parents must navigate.

With this in mind, LOPC's Mission in Society (MIS) team has recently donated funds to the Monument Crisis Center, the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano Counties, Trinity Center (serving the homeless in central Contra Costa County), and Operation Dignity (helping the homeless in Alameda County). Some of these monies also have gone to salaries of staff who help distribute food, assist clients find employment and/or housing, help clients complete forms for SNAP, or find medical assistance. Operation Dignity used

funds to relocate high-risk homeless people to trailers or hotels so they can isolate safely.

LOPC support also has helped some of its international partners. The COVID-19 virus forced the closure of Atfaluna School for the Deaf in the Gaza Strip. Funds from LOPC were used by social workers to evaluate the families with the greatest needs and provide food to hundreds of people.

For families of Fotokids in Guatemala, food baskets were distributed to the most destitute. These baskets held the basics of corn, rice, pasta, cooking oil, eggs, salt and sugar.

Before COVID-19, the JF Kapnek Trust in Zimbabwe had provided a fortified porridge to 23,000 preschool children every day. With schools closed, Kapnek worked with local school administrators and distributed 60,000 pounds of porridge to the most desperate families. Sometimes, this meant feeding not just the preschooler, but older siblings in the home as well.

Congo is faced not only with COVID-19 but measles and Ebola outbreaks. LOPC funds went to hospitals to purchase more PPE, ventilators, hand-washing stations, and education materials.

In summary, the MIS team approved \$17,000 for mission partners. Additionally, \$9,000 was raised in the May special offering, \$5,000 was contributed from the Deacon's Fund, and an additional \$4,000 was contributed by individuals. In total, \$35,000 has been donated to help COVID-19 victims.

Yet, for the foreseeable future too many people will be out of work, and children out of school, and 'good Samaritans' working overtime. LOPC has a history of generosity. When possible - and it seems it's always possible - we have dug deep to be generous, again and again. With this in mind, more recently session has authorized an additional \$15,000 to MIS for continuing needs.

Thank you for all you've done to donate your time, talent, and treasure. Give thanks that for many of us, the greatest burden is the inconveniences of sheltering

continued next page →

youth



Parking Lot Youth Groups!

As an update, BTW (for High School youth) has been meeting on Sundays, 4:00 - 5:15 p.m., since September 20 and will run until October 25. YOW (for 5th-8th grade youth) has been meeting on Wednesdays at 4:00 - 5:15 p.m. since September 23 and will go until October 28.

Both programs required advance registration. Any youth who wants to participate and missed the registration, please email keris@lopc.org for high school or allison@lopc.org for middle school to check if space is available.

What Does the Program Look Like?

- Each program includes:
- A socially distanced and safe ice-breaker game for small group pods.
- Bible-based devotional teaching relevant to current life events.
- Small-group pod discussion time and prayer.
- Individual spiritual practice activities.

Weekly themes share a faith-based perspective on relevant topics, such as responding to the pandemic and other disasters, racial justice, caring for creation, growing in faith in quarantine, and more. The small-group pods serve as a safe space for youths to share how they are doing as they deal with quarantine and online school. Participants also gain experience with spiritual practices that can be repeated at home, including alternative methods for worship, prayer, and service. Each youth group will also be a fun break from the stresses of online school and the disappointments of canceled activities and will share a hopeful message of God's constant presence amid difficult times.

in place, working from home with school-age children, social isolation, and needing masks to do the simplest errands. If the latter describes your situation, please consider how you can continue to support those still unable to provide for themselves.

However, if you are struggling either financially or spiritually, please reach out in confidence to one of the pastors. We are all in this together, and with God, all things are possible. Mathew 25:40: "I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these followers of mine, you did it for me! (*Good News translation*)."

Winter Nights Family Shelter Update



Due to the pandemic, the role of LOPC will be different than our usual one of hosting Warm Winter Nights for two weeks in the fall. The Winter Nights Shelter has been forced to modify its program due to County mandates concerning Covid-19. Congregations that participate must keep families for at least 4 weeks as well as be able to house families 24/7 in case of another Shelter In Place (SIP) this fall. In addition, churches that have on-site preschools such as Seedlings are not allowed to host due to licensing conflicts.

In light of these new mandates, many congregations are not able to host this year. Though LOPC will not be hosting on campus, we will be co-hosting with another congregation by providing meals for the clients they are sheltering. LOPC has a legacy of providing a warm and welcoming campus to the Winter Nights Shelter and we are saddened not to be able to participate as we usually do, yet we look forward to working with another congregation to provide meals. We will continue to keep the congregation posted on the dates LOPC will be participating and volunteer opportunities.

To learn more about Winter Nights Shelter to to cccwinternights.org/about/

spiritual formation

10:10

grow empowered to live in faith

10/4 - What's So 'Good' About The Good News?
with Ray Campton & Pastor Lauren Gully

Sometimes we just go through the motions of religion and even our own faith. It is important to remind ourselves of the purpose behind the rituals and things that we do in worship.

10/11 - Commitment to the Common Good
with Terry Clark & Pastor Lauren Gully

How does our faith call us to put our individual wants or needs aside for the good of others or the community?



Are you seeking a way to listen for how God may be speaking into your life or how the Holy Spirit may be at work in you? Consider joining LOPC for a nine-month adventure with Companions for the Journey. We will meet once a month on Monday evenings or Thursday mornings on Zoom from October through May.

Mondays, 6:30 p.m. - 9:15 p.m. Oct 12, Nov 9, Dec 7, Jan 11, Feb 15, Mar 15, Apr 12, May 3.

Thursdays, 9:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Oct 15, Nov 12, Dec 10, Jan 14, Feb 18, Mar 18, Apr 15, May 6.

To sign up, email Lexi at lexi@lopc.org.

Artificial Intelligence the Topic for October Discussion

Monday, October 19, at 7:15 p.m.

Would it surprise you to learn this article was written totally by a computer?



Well, it wasn't. But the point is that artificial-intelligence (AI) software has advanced to the degree where, before too much longer, Peter Whitelock may simply tell a machine: "Please write my sermon for Sunday, November 1." In fact, the headline on a recent *New York Times* article read: "How Do You Know a Human Wrote This?"

At its Zoom meeting Monday, October 19, LOPC's Science and Religion Study Group will focus on AI – again. The discussion will be led by long-time LOPC member Chuck Smith, a UC Berkeley-trained electrical engineer and scientist. This time the topic will be about controlling this amazing new technology.

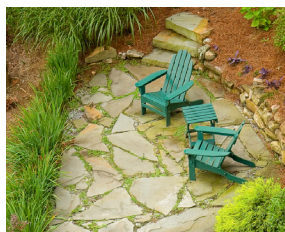
Says Chuck: "AI may prove to be a great danger to those who are intended to benefit from its implementation. The concern is that, if and when we can build AI with human or near-human intelligence, it may take over and quickly surpass human intelligence, leaving humanity behind in any contest for control."

Lately, a number of observers have suggested the time for regulation is approaching, perhaps rapidly, says Chuck. "An additional question concerns the choosing of regulators— governments or users - who, for the most part, are large companies located in the U.S. and China."

A background note: Chuck will be drawing upon a recent book by Dr. Stuart Russell, a computer science professor at UC Berkeley, long involved in the evolution of AI.

All are welcome! RSVP to Darlene James at darlene.james@comcast.net, who will send you the Zoom link.

Spiritual Direction at LOPC



Spiritual Direction is part of the Spiritual Formation Ministry at LOPC. It is a reflective process in which a trained spiritual companion walks with individual participants to help them pay

attention to God's work in their lives and their most important questions. It is the art of discovering that everyday events are often the means by which God comes to meet us. In Spiritual Direction, participants are invited to explore their experiences, seek awareness of God, and discover authentic questions and desires. A participant is accompanied on this journey by a trained and grace-filled companion - a personal Spiritual Director.

NOTE: All sessions are confidential. There is a modest fee on a sliding scale. To find out more about Spiritual Direction, contact Diane Grant, LOPC Spiritual Direction Coordinator, at 925-825-8225 or dianebeegee@yahoo.com.



Community Life

SMALL GROUPS

Join one of our newly-formed small groups designed to create conversations based on Christian discipleship, mission, community, and inclusivity. This may be a perfect place for you to connect with others—join a group that feels right:

Men's Group (aged 30-50 somethings) Leaders: Chris Baldwin & Jonathan Nolen • Women's Group - Leader: Sharon Bartlett • Moms Support Group - Leader: Pastor Jaime Polson • Christian History & Theology Discussion - Leader: Jim Davis • Senior Adult Group - Leaders: Jeff & Laura Patton • Anti-Bias Study Group - Leader: Pastor Jaime Polson (currently full) • Mixed Group - Leaders: Jody Black & Chad Runyon

For more information, visit lopc.org

community

Presbyterian Women

October 3, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.



Presbyterian Women in the Presbytery (PWP) invites everyone to their October 3 online meeting, when they host a speaker of particular interest to Bay Area Presbyterians.

Donaldina Cameron's work in late 1800s San Francisco, rescuing Chinese girls from human trafficking and opening a Presbyterian settlement house later named for Cameron, is the subject of Julia Flynn Siler's book *The White Devil's Daughters*, featured in the May/June issue of PCUSA's *Horizons Magazine*.

Join us as we hear the author speak about how writing her book led her to modern day abolitionists.

To sign up, email PWP leader Karen Vied at kvied@comcast.net.

Fourth Friday Book Group

October 23, 4:00 p.m.

On October 23, we will discuss the book *Reliance, Illinois* by Mary Volmer. All are welcome. Email Catherine Coleman to receive the Zoom link.

Email Catherine Coleman at awaitingword@gmail.com to sign up.



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OCTOBER 2020

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Coleen Moulton, Seedlings Preschool
Ryan Timpte, Children

FOCUS NEWSLETTER

Jon Corry, Communications
Editors: Dick James, Lexi Morrissey
Thank you to all who contribute to each issue!

Monthly FOCUS Newsletter Deadline:

October 1 for the November issue.
Email items to communications@lopc.org.

Weekly CONNECTIONS Deadline:

Every Monday by 5 p.m.
for the following Sunday's issue.
Email items to communications@lopc.org.

We're all in this
TOGETHER!

Join us for worship online

LOPC.ORG

Sundays at 9 a.m.

or any time you wish!

**ONLINE Sunday
Worship Service**
9:00 a.m.

Invite Friends & Family!

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