Rev. Dr. Veronica R. Goines, Rev. Dr. John C. Lentz, Co-Pastors Discovering God's call, celebrating the Spirit's presence Witnessing to Christ's transformative power!



The TOWER MARCH 2021





WORDS FROM PASTOR VERONICA



In my doctoral research, I defined "theology of voice" as the ontological and existential creed wherein divine-human relationship is understood, experienced, and embodied through the unifying agency of voice. With this definition, I began to

explore the emergence of a theology of voice as embodied in African American Spirituality. Soon as I discovered a theology of voice as articulated in the writing of Anna Julia Cooper, born in Raleigh, North Carolina in 1858.

Cooper's mother was enslaved, and her father was her mother's "slave master". Remarkably, Anna received her Ph.D. at the Sorbonne and became one of the most highly educated and intellectual people of her time. Among her professional achievements was her work as teacher, administrator and scholar. Her dissertation was entitled "Attitudes toward Slavery in Revolutionary France." In her publication A Voice from the South, published in 1892, Cooper called into question the gross injustices perpetrated by the dominate culture against the weak, challenging racism, sexism, and classism— the nexus of 21st Century womanist scholarship.

In her writing, Dr. Cooper acknowledged the importance of the woman's voice, a voice stifled by sexism. She likened black people to a "muffled chord" and referred to black women as a "mute and voiceless note." Dr. Cooper wrote about voice within a theological framework and describes God as a "Singing Something." She identifies this "Singing Something" with the transition toward freedom and equality in the human being that confronts domination and oppression. In her writing, God acts as a liberating voice and as the originator of social change through divine-human relationship. It is revealing that Dr. Cooper didn't interpret human god-likeness as imagistic. Rather it was for her musical and auditory. In her theology

it was through voice that one asserts one's sacredness.¹ Thus, she understood the concept of humans being made in the image and likeness of God in terms of sound, words, voice.

It must be noted that Dr. Cooper's theological understanding did not develop in a vacuum. Rather, it was influenced by the prevailing spirituality of the descendants of Africa who internalized the liberating power of God through voice, music, and particularly, the spirituals.

Many of the spirituals were preserved by oral tradition, though some remained only for the heightened moment. The spirituals had a living history which was embellished as the black experience unfolded. They were constantly being recomposed and rearranged. Eventually a single song might have a number of arrangements. The spirituals became the primary means of transmitting oral history, theology and faith. They also served as a vehicle of spiritual transport for the congregation in worship, and enabled the congregation to surmount the harshness of daily existence.

Forest Hill Church, please meet and receive a 19th Century hidden figure, Dr. Anna Julia Cooper.

~Grace and Peace, Pastor Veronica R. Goines

Anna Julia Cooper in "Soprano Obligato, The Voices of Black Women and American Conflict in the Thought of Anna Julia Cooper," by Karen Baker-Fletcher in Emilie M. Townes, ed., <u>A Troubling in My Soul,</u> (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 172-185

WORDS FROM PASTOR JOHN



I have been reading Professor Amy-Jill Levine's book <u>Entering The Passion of Jesus: A Beginner's Guide to Holy Week</u>, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2018. Despite my almost 40 years studying the Bible and being a pastor, I still feel like a beginner in coming to understand the richness of the life, ministry, and death of Jesus.

Levine is a practicing Jew who teaches the New Testament to seminary students at Vanderbilt Divinity School. That makes her especially interesting to me. Professor Levine brings a depth of Jewish background and understanding to the life of a Jewish Jesus. She recommends that her book be read in Lent. I want to use her own words rather than attempt to paraphrase:

"In a sense, Lent, and especially Holy Week, is a lot like the ten days leading up to the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur. Those days, between Rosh Hashanah, the new year, and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, represent a time of introspection during which Jewish people take stock of what we have done, what we did not do well, and what we failed to do. We assess our relationships with others – family, friends, neighbors, and even the people we do not like. We take time to repair broken relationships. We realize that we may have hurt someone, and we take the time to apologize."

Levine goes on to write; "More, saying 'sorry' is not enough. We must move from regret and remorse to correction and to action. Just as Jesus at the Last Supper, proclaims, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood' (Luke 22:20) and so sets up a new relationship, so we establish new relationships as well. His disciples commit not just to an apology, but to a life of service and of love." I like that; "...not just to an apology, but to a life of service and love." During this Lenten season ask yourself the question: "Where is my obligation to serve and love others?"

~John





Family, Youth, and Children Ministries

Sweet Treats! Families of children and youth received a surprise at their front doors on the snowy, frigid Saturday of February 13th. A message containing the passage from I Corinthians 13 ("Love is patient, Love is kind...") was accompanied by a package of ready-to-bake cookie dough. Families were invited to bake cookies together and enjoy the delicious treats to celebrate Valentine's Day.

Story Time for our youngest children presents engaging picture books with a message. Parents may access these stories anytime to share with their preschoolers. Older children will enjoy them, too! You'll find links to Story time on the FHC Facebook page and YouTube channel.

Young Children (K-5th grade) meet via Zoom on Sundays from 10 am - 10:30 am. This month we will hear stories of People Jesus Met, with wondering questions and activities to accompany our story. We will be reading from the Growing in God's Love Story Bible. Families are invited to stop by the church to pick up a copy of this Bible to read along with at home. A Zoom link for our gathering is shared each week. To register, please send an email to ce@fhcpresb.org.

Youth (Grades 6-12) are invited to drop into our Zoom gatherings in March on Sundays from 12:30 pm- 1:00 pm. We enjoy a time of sharing and discussion, followed by an opportunity for fellowship. A Zoom link for our gathering is shared each week. To register, please send an email to <u>ce@fhcpresb.org</u>.

If your family is not receiving communication from our FYC program and would like to be informed about our programming, please contact Amy Wheatley, Director of Family, Youth and Children's Ministry at ce@fhcpresb.org. We'd love to add you to our list!



Would you like to get back into singing? Or are you eager to connect with singers and music-lovers from Forest Hill Church? The Chancel Choir is meeting weekly on Zoom! Join us for practice. Please email Ying at music@fhcpresb.org for information on how to access the Zoom meeting and download music.



EARTH CARE JUSTICE



A new 'advent' has dawned......the installation of a new government focusing on many avenues of justice has given great hope for Earth Care Justice--- a better life for many and for the planet. Already executive orders and actions have begun, such as rejoining the Paris Climate accord, halting the construction of border walls and Keystone pipeline, suspending drilling orders on public lands, and many others.

Now we can relax, right? Wrong! We are still a very much divided society, and divergent thoughts and opinions abound regarding expectations and impacts of actions following up on the words, especially economic impacts.

Regarding Earth Care, two of the most important government agencies that can make a difference in improving our environment are the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of the Interior. For shepherding clean air and water, combatting industrial pollution, protecting our forests and wilderness, these agencies deserve and require our fullest support.

In particular, the Dept. of the Interior is now headed by a Native American, Deb Haaland. One of their themes is 'Stewarding Conservation' through eleven Bureaus under their guidance, including Land Management, Ocean Management, Reclamation, Safety and Environment, National Park Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service.

There is great hope that under the Secretary's guidance, the Dept. will reverse past negative actions and nurture new programs to enrich our American Earth Care Responsibility. But she will need the help of all of us to accomplish what is necessary. Here is the contact information----let Secretary Haaland know that you support her efforts:

Department of the interior 1849 C Street NW Washington DC 20240 Comment Line 202-208-3100

> ~Dave Neff Earth Care Leader

FHC IMMIGRATION TASK FORCE

Mission Statement

As Christians we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves and to be welcoming to the newcomer in our land. The mission of the Forest Hill Church - Immigration Task Force (ITF) is to identify ways Forest Hill Church responds to this call. We strive to respond to immigrants on an individual, organizational and institutional level. The ITF serves as a clearinghouse for issues requiring financial support from FHC's Justice & Mission committee and it makes recommendations and carries out related activities including education of FHC and the community at large about immigration challenges. The ITF also acts as a liaison between FHC and the Heights Friends of Immigrants group with whom they interface around similar goals and objectives.

2020 Report of Activities and Accomplishments

 Presented an Immigration Education Forum for the church and the wider community regarding the history of immigration in the United States, current immigration policy and law, and a listing of opportunities for participants to get involved and support immigration reform. This virtual event was attended by over 80 people.

- Reviewed various books dealing with immigration issues including "American Dirt:" and "The Death and Life of Aida Hernandez, A Border Story." A book club for the entire congregation is being planned for 2021.
- Love, emotional support and financial support have been provided by the congregation and the community for Emmanuel, Issoufou, and Idrissa, our Burkina Faso guests living in our Sanctuary apartment. The men are doing odd jobs at the church and in the community whenever possible. They work very hard each week at the FHC pantry. Their English is improving significantly due to the cadre of dedicated teachers and the Tri-C Aspire program. A separate Asylum Fund was established to document all expenses and financial support given.
- Love, emotional support and financial support have been provided by the congregation and the community for Leonor Garcia and her children in the form of a monthly check to help cover their day-to-day expenses, computers for on-line school classes, food from the FHC Pantry, and socially distant visits.
 Legal and logistical support for the children to be able to see their father, who was unjustly deported, is underway. The established Sanctuary Fund keeps track of all financial support given.
- Endowment requests to help offset some of Leonor's monthly expenses and money for eventually setting the Burkina men up in their own apartment were submitted and approved.
- Immigration reform advocacy work of the Task Force has been closely tied, for maximum impact, by its close relationship with

"Heights Friends of Immigrants" and "Americans Making Immigrants Safe (AMIS)", and other local and national organizations.

- A relationship with Jonas Nsongi Mbonga, an asylum seeker from the Congo who was in detention with our three men, has been developed to include food deliveries from the pantry, including him in all the English lessons provided our men, and inviting him to work at the FHC pantry.
- Help was given to three immigrants residing at 2100 Lakeside, the county's homeless men's shelter. These men were from Libya, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Ivory Coast. The help provided included replacing a stolen Green Card, finding housing, and legal support.

Donations to the Sanctuary Fund and/or the Asylum Fund are always greatly appreciated. Monies received are used for living expenses, medical co-pays, legal expenses, as well as local and national advocacy for a just and equitable immigration system.

FHC Immigration Task Force:

Gary Lustic	Steve Sedam	Jeff Smith
Julie Lustic	Sharon Shumaker	Charity Stock
Ron Register	Anne Smith	Virginia Weiss

RACIAL EQUITY

Back in July 2020, in the thick of the pandemic, book clubs from Forest Hill Church (FHC) started meeting, via Zoom, to read and discuss Me and White Supremacy by Layla Saad. The Presbytery of the Western Reserve, catalyzed by the Race Action Network, worked with leaders in our own congregation including Ajah Hales, Marcie Denton and Mark Wedell. They chose Saad's text as a community-wide read, created helpful guides and a Facebook page with additional content to support the work, and three Forest Hill groups were up and running quickly.

One group, consisting of 6 white women, scheduled their original meetings as outlined by the book. As this small group's facilitator, Lisa Vahey describes it "Me and White Supremacy is organized into four 'weeks' of learning, each with a theme and seven lessons. Every single day - 28 of them - brings knowledge about white supremacy. Each day asks us to unpack and deeply understand our complicitness, despite our good intentions. And if we were still bravely reading, we were then invited to reflect and pushed to write - by Layla Saad and by the good work our group was doing."

Melanie Alban, Danielle Cosgrove, Julie Lustic, Linda Martin, and Vikki Nowak and Lisa Vahey have written about their experiences and they invite you to read them here: http://bit.ly/FHCreflections

Here are some action items to consider, representing the many entry points to racial equity work available to us all.

Racial Equity Learning Opportunities					
April 2021, on a Saturday morning	Join the Black Caucus in reading <i>The Origin of Others</i> by Toni Morrison. Email blackcaucus@fhcpresb.org to get information about the April dates and future reads				
Saturdays	Contact Julie Lustic to be added to the email list for Walking Care Groups that walk in the community every Saturdays (some groups early morning, some in the afternoon): jlustic@gmail.com				
updates	Follow the work of the Presbytery of the Western Reserve via their Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/preswesres/				
Matthew 25	Learn more about the larger mission of becoming a Matthew 25 church: https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/matthew-25/become-a-matthew-25-church/				

Recommendations from our group				
Danielle Taking action, learning locally	The YWCA's 21-Day Challenge for Racial Equity and Social Justice starts March 1! Register here: https://www.ywcaofcleveland.org/eliminate-racism/21-day-racial-equity-challenge/			
Julie Reading, understanding history	My gift to myself this month is <i>Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America 1619-2019</i> , edited by Ibram X. Kendi and Keisha N. Blain. Eighty different writers have each chronicled a five year span of Black America's history, and every section ends with a poem.			
Linda Learning through music	Sacred Notes Music Blog by Ruth Draper (Lakewood Presbyterian) is a place to learn how we can grow through music: http://www.ruthdrapermusic.com/blog/			
Lisa Taking action, building a network	Showing Up for Racial Justice hosts a learning call the first Wednesday of each month from 6:00-7:30 pm for those interested in ending white silence (a core concept from <i>Me and White Supremacy</i>): https://www.facebook.com/surjneo/			
Melanie Reading, social justice in our world	Sojourners magazine and newsletter founded by Jim Wallis. They focus on the "biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship." Check them out at sojo.net			
Vikki Learning through art	For art lovers, events, exhibitions and virtual discussions The Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts & Culture https://www.ganttcenter.org/			

REV. VERONICA R. GOINES: SPEAKING TRUTH TO FOREST HILL CHURCH

It's been two years and two months since Reverend Veronica Goines answered God's call to leave her kith and kin in Marin County and go into the land God would show her, Forest Hill Presbyterian Church. From the moment she delivered her first sermon on Epiphany Sunday, we knew our congregation would be forever changed. What we didn't know is that the entire world would be changing right along with us.

As we have seen in the past year, change rarely happens in our comfort zones, and Forest Hill's change in leadership structure was no exception to that rule. Pastors Goines and Lentz face technical, tangible challenges like navigating the 'Head of Staff' title, purchasing designated mics, changing the church voicemail and apportioning ministry advisory duties. They also faced murkier, less tangible challenges like learning how to decenter whiteness and value cross cultural experiences in worship, music, ministry work and special services.

Our congregation made the same mistake many well-meaning Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) make when bringing on leaders from minoritized backgrounds--we expected the change in demographics to be the change itself. In other words, we liked having a Black woman as co-pastor, so long as we could keep everything exactly the same as it has always been.

We were basically asking Pastor Veronica to leave her Black womxnhood at the door. We soon found out that God had not called part of Veronica to us. God wanted Forest Hill to experience the full richness of an authentic pastoral relationship with Veronica, just as we have with John.

Building this relationship has taken time, effort, and compromise. Despite being met with constant dismissal and resistance, Pastor Goines continued to push for changes that would make worship more culturally inclusive and accessible, even managing to incorporate a 'libation' service that honored our Black church elders last Black History Month.

Veronica has continually encouraged the congregation to try new things, and to resist our very Presbyterian urge to 'lock things down.' While many congregation members were excited to explore new ways of being church together, others found it too difficult to let go of control and were unwilling to move forward together. With a heavy heart, Forest Hill said goodbye to long time members and even staff members who no longer felt at home in the beloved community in changing times.

The Covid-19 pandemic presented its own set of challenges for our congregation, but under the leadership of Pastors John and Veronica, we were able to find adaptive ways to build new connections. Pastors Goines and Lentz encouraged the Session to be co-creators of the beloved community in changing times. Our ministries have come up with several innovative ways to build community and do outreach, including the Deacons phone checkins, Family, Youth and Children's at-home kits, Justice and Mission's COVID 19 Emergency Fund, Abundance pantry's drive-thru food pantry, digital exploring membership classes and more!

In reflecting on all that our church has accomplished in spite of a global pandemic, I am humbled once again by how God always knows exactly what we need. Veronica's ten plus years working in parachurch ministry with incarcerated men, womxn, and youth has equipped her to minister to those trapped indoors in circumstances not of their choosing. Her twenty-three years at St. Andrew prepared her to be sensitive to the needs of an aging congregation. Her national leadership on the GA Way Forward Committee gave her the

fortitude to move the 'frozen chosen,' and the hardships young Veronica watched her mother go through as one of the first Black female Baptist ministers prepared her for the type of resistance a Black woman in leadership will inevitably face.

With grace, compassion, honesty and humility, Veronica Goines continues to move us forward, stretching us so that we can have the flexibility to live into being the beloved community in changing times. Reverend Veronica Goines stands shoulder to shoulder with giants. Her ministry is informed and enriched by Katie Geneva Cannon, the first Black Womxn to be ordained in PCUSA and mother of womanist theology, Emilie Maureen Townes, the first Black womxn to be elected president of the American Academy of Religion, Rev. Dr. Andrea C. White, author of "Political Apostasy, Black Nihilism, and Barth," and many more.

Learn more: <u>17 African American Women Theologians You Should Know About.</u>

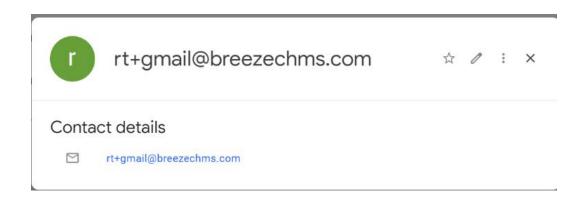
~Ajah Hales

Just a little www.fhc.breezechms.com

Some of you may remember when ministry minutes were sent to our office for distribution to Session and staff and others. Now, however, ministries are sending out their own minutes....via the Tag and Email features of Breeze.

Emails sent via Breeze will show up in your email Inbox as coming from an unusual email address. Mine will appear as pegweissbrod_rt+gmail@breezechms.com

That "rt+gmail@breezechms.com" part looks to some email programs and recipients as spam and is blocked. When that happens, church emails have no way of reaching you. To make sure that doesn't happen, you can add it to your email Contact list on your computer. This is what it looked like when I added it to mine:



Are you one of the more than 70 people who recently received an invitation to become a Breeze User?

If so, hang onto your instructions and the email with your Username and Password so you can get the most out of Breeze. And be sure to call me at 216-291-2586 with any questions...because remember: we're all in this (Breeze) together!

~Peg Weissbrod



With the losses and hardships due to COVID, we are missing loved ones and many aspects of life as we knew it prior to the pandemic. Just a year ago, news stories about a new virus began to multiply and spread like—well, like the virus itself. In 21st century terms, it was becoming "a thing"— an event or phenomenon that gets our attention appears frequently in the news and social media and becomes part of daily conversation, a marker in our time.

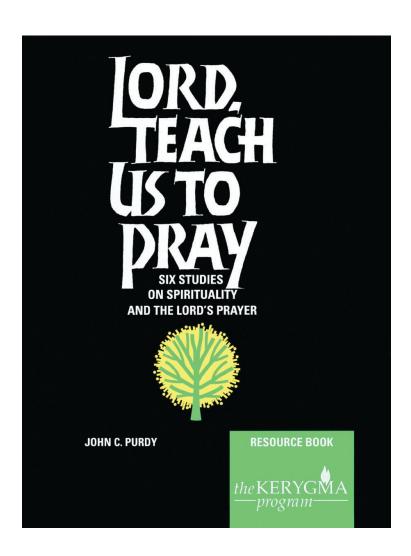
Looking at our present circumstances through the lens of faith provides a much larger picture. With the Scriptures as a resource, we read about events over millennia and observe time after time when God, the author of all things, including human beings, intervened to rescue and save, to heal and sustain, and above all to demonstrate an abiding love for his creation as well as an active concern for righteousness and justice.

This is why the seasons of Lent and the celebration of the first Easter have become part of the church's calendar—reading the biblical accounts of events in the life of Jesus and reflections on their meaning, repeated daily, weekly, yearly—so that we remember the big picture.

Faith cannot sit in a corner; it must be nourished and must be active to remain strong. Studying the scriptures with others is a major way to find sustenance and to encourage each other in keeping our lives of faith active and strong.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY 6 SESSIONS BY JOHN C. PURDY

Prayer is often called a spiritual practice, an exercise, or an active expression of faith. The Lord's Prayer, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer described it, is the prayer that contains every other prayer. Engage in a focused study considering each of the petitions that Jesus used to teach us how to pray and to invite us to approach the Lord of all creation with all that concerns us and our world.



Please check your emails during the month of March for your next Adult Education courses.

Staff Emails

Antoinette Richardson Administration office@fhcpresb.org finance@fhcpresb.org Genetha (Nita) Clark Finance Ann Donkin Building Mar. adonkin@fhcpresb.org custodian@fhcpresb.org Stavros Gazis Head Custodian pastorgoines@fhcpresb.org Rev. Dr. Veronica Goines Co-Pastor pastorlentz@fhcpresb.org Rev. Dr. John Lentz Jr. Co-Pastor Peg Weissbrod pegw@fhcpresb.org Outreach/Breeze Dr. Amy Wheatley Family, Youth, Children CE@fhcpresb.org Dr. Qin Ying Tan music@fhcpresb.org Music

Rev. Carol Wedell Parish Associate

3031 Monticello Blvd, Cleveland Hts. OH 44118 216-321-2660 Fax: 216-320-1214 Pastoral Care Emergencies: 216-319-3596

Email: office@fhcpresb.org Website: www.fhcpresb.org

Rev. Dr. Veronica R. Goines, Rev. Dr. John C. Lentz, Jr., Co-Pastors Dr. Amy Wheatley, Dir. of Family, Youth & Children's Ministries Dr. Qin Ying Tan, Interim Director of Music Rev. Carol Wedell, Parish Associate

Next TOWER deadline: 8 am on March18 (for April)

Custodians' cell phone: 216-217-5257

Giving/donation options- Friends of FHC, during this time, you may give monetary gifts/donations by texting 216-400-5300 or give online using either <u>our BREEZE Giving Page</u> or via <u>PayPal</u>. You may also mail in a check to the church bookkeeper (3031 Monticello Blvd. Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118).

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
-	6:00 pm	11:00 am	7:30 am	1:30 pm	9:30 am	
Regularly	-AA: Progress not	-Abundance	–Bible & Bagels	-English Dance	-Al Anon: Hand	
scheduled	Perfection	Pantry	(virtual)	5:00 pm	in Hand	
events:	7:00 pm	5:00 pm	12:00 pm	-Fitness Fusion		
meet every	-Al Anon: Now	-Fitness Fusion	-Staff Meeting	exercise class		
week	There's Hope	exercise class	(virtual)	6:20 pm		
unless	-Book Group	-Bulletin and	-AA:	-Voices in		
noted	7:30 pm	Weekly email	Wednesday	Bronze		
	-AA: Borton Group	Deadline		7:30 pm		
	-Boy Scout Trp.		Group	-Chancel Choir		
	#403 -OA Big Book		7:00 pm -Guest Group:			
	- -UA big book		Speak Life Bible			
			Study			
February 28	March 1	March 2	March 3	March 4	March 5	March 6
Drive-Up						
dinner with			6:00 pm: Lenten			9:00 am: Tax
BHT			Dinners			Prep
D. 11						
7:30 pm:						
BHT Concert		1				
March 7	March 8	March 9	March 10	March 11	March 12	March 13
Communion			6:00 pm: Lenten			8:00 am-
Sunday			Dinners			Men's
			Difficis			Group
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						9:00 am Tax
		1	<u> </u>			Prep
March 14	March 15	March 16	March 17	March 18	March 19	March 20
Daylight				8:00 am-		9:00 am: Tax
Savings Time				TOWER		Prep
				DEADLINE		
9:30 am:						
Adult						
Education						
course March 21	March 22	March 23	March 24	March 25	March 26	March 27
	IVIAICII ZZ	Ivial CI1 23	Ivial Cli 24	Watch 25	IVIAICII 20	9:00 am: Tax
9:30 am:						Prep
Adult						1 16b
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March 28	March 29	March 30	March 31	April 1	April 2	April 3
	Mai on 23	mai on ou	ina on or	ו ווואָר,	April 2	Zhi i z
HOLY				Maundy	Good Friday	9:00 am: Tax
WEEK				Thursday	Socarriday	Prep
BEGINS				.		- 1
9:30 am:						
Adult						
Education course						
April 4	April 5	April 6	April 7	April 8	April 9	April 10
Easter/						-
Communion			6:00 pm: Lenten			8:00 am-
Sunday			Dinners			Men's
						Group
0.30 am						
9:30 am:						
9:30 am: Adult Education						9:00 am-Tax Prep

March 2021