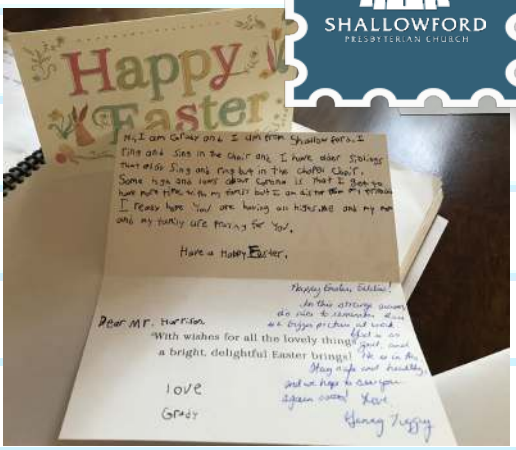
We Are In This Together:

Shallowford Pen Pal Project

Submitted by Betsy Smith

Intergenerational activities are not new to Shallowford. Years ago when the All Church Retreat was known as "Church Family Camp," the hundred or so campers prepared all of the meals. Folks were divided into cooking teams made up of members from different families - some young, some old. These children and adults formed friendships, many of which continued for years. Wednesdays at Shallowford gave another intergenerational opportunity when cleaning supplies were packed for Presbyterian Disaster Relief. In both of these, young and old came together for a common cause.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented yet another common cause - children going to school online while sheltering in place, with time on their hands and seniors sheltering in place with time on their hands. Four creative women – Jill Jung, Rev. Catherine Foster, Anne Thomas, and Mary Ann Rutkowski – came up with the idea for a note-writing project in an attempt to connect restless children and lonely seniors. They used the restrictions forced by the virus to come up with a project which would give kids, stuck at home, something fun to do, plus a way to reach out to seniors, many of whom were also stuck at home. **The goal was to help close the social distancing gap by forming ongoing connections with Shallowford's more isolated and vulnerable members – those with limited family and visitors for engagement.**



A family with young children was matched with a senior and ask that a "letter" be sent weekly. This could be a written page, a card, a drawing, a poem, a photo with a note ...whatever the child was inspired to do. **The families filled out a survey, and the kids were off. Here are some of the results:**

Barbara Houze was thrilled when she received notes from Harper, Jordan, and Riley Spruill. She then wrote each girl a note of her own, saying, "Children like to get their own notes." Later, the girls made a cross using black construction paper and cellophane. Barbara has it in the window by her kitchen table so she can enjoy it every day - especially when the sun is shining through.

Betty Jordan received pictures from Thomas Iredale. She has them on her refrigerator and was delighted with how much they brightened her kitchen.

Whalen Phister has sent several drawings to Margaret McGarity. According to Margaret, "Whalen is an excellent artist. My daughter is an art teacher, and I know talent." When Laura shared this praise with her son, he replied:

"...it's cool that I'm doing something I'm good at and she feels good about it and not so alone!"