

The Quarterly Magazine of Florence Christian Church

Abundant

Volume 2: Issue 2 Summer 2020



Our Guide

Through the Darkness

guide /gīd/

1. A person who advises or shows the way to others

By Pastor Susan Diamond
Senior Minister, Florence Christian Church

The definition of the word “guide” is to advise or show the way to others. With that definition in mind, we focus this Abundant Magazine on how Florence Christian Church is a guide in people’s lives.

Usually, my article is written well before we receive input from others. Not so with this issue, and am I ever grateful. As I read the stories and testimonies from the people who are in this magazine, I am humbled beyond measure! God has been at work as our Guide throughout this liminal time of pandemic and unrest. God gives us hope, purpose and meaning.

One thing for which I am so grateful is your faithfulness in sharing God’s love and support with each other and with your church staff and pastors. With God’s help, we are moving forward together in exciting and unexpected ways. The word that keeps coming to me through phone calls, cards, texts and emails is “Thank you for holding us together.” Indeed, thank you, God, for holding us together and guiding us in your way!

I hope you are as inspired as I am to read these stories.

God guide and bless us all as we continue moving forward with our mission and vision in Jesus’ name!

Blessings, Pastor Susan



Abundant

The quarterly magazine of
Florence Christian Church

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Feeding the Multitudes

I am absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God’s love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.

Romans 8:38-39

“I think this includes our present situation of pandemic, financial insecurity, and demonstrations to promote and protect basic human rights. I take great comfort in knowing that God is loving us through all of life’s challenges and expects us to do the same for each other. The love of God always translates into compassionate action. God guides us to respond in creative and loving ways.”

Phyllis Reed

Florence Christian has a reputation in this community and with the Christian Church in Kentucky of being a “Servant Church.” Certainly, the many outreach

ministries of this congregation warrant this reputation. But look at the growth of our leaders and you will see Florence Christian Church guiding individuals toward a deeper, richer and more abundant life in Christ by supporting their servant hearts.

With creativity, fresh passion and sheer determination, individuals and groups in this congregation stepped up to reimagine and expand existing ministries. Leaders Phyllis Reed, Shauna Releford, Chris McCoy and Adam Moon share how they have been challenged and strengthened by their experience.

Serving God from Home

By Phyllis Reed

Through this crisis, I have been led in many new ways to lean into my calling from God. My mission is to live, encourage and provide compassion to those I meet as well as myself. I believe that the love of God always translates into compassionate action. I have found myself more emotional during this time. In a recent Soul Care Meditation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMaEmnHMLvE>), Rev. Mark Poindexter says that to feel compassion and experience empathy is to feel the presence of God.

In response, I wondered how I could expand the health ministry of Florence Christian while caring for myself by staying home. At first, I worried that the Free and Fresh Food Distributions on Tuesdays might not happen if I weren't there. Instead, I learned to lean on a skilled team. I still make some phone calls and send some emails, but Shauna, Sam, Veston, Jodi from the Health Department and LiveWell, and many of our youth have stepped up to make them happen and even more efficiently than in the past.

Other changes for me have included increased prayer time, taking time for increased study and meditation, even more gratitude for my wonderful family, friends, and many daily blessings. I even dug out an old sewing machine (using a YouTube video to service it) and started making masks. I believe that God is loving us through this current challenge and is inspiring us to serve our neighbors with compassionate action in new, creative, loving ways.

Leadership Grows through Faith

By Shauna Releford

Me? A Leader? I know I possess the skills necessary to be a leader, but lack confidence in my ability to do so. When Phyllis asked Sam and me to lead the

Free and Fresh Food Distributions on Tuesday, I knew that my confidence and skills would be tested.

Now I have the experience and privilege of leading a group of volunteers and young people during these distributions. With the help of our community partners, The Freestore Foodbank, Master Provisions, LiveWell Florence and the Boone County Health Department, and financial support from our amazing congregation, we are able to serve hundreds of families every two weeks. It is a privilege for me to serve guests who feel so humbled at having to reach out for help for the first time in their lives. Now I know with confidence, that I have been called to serve at Florence Christian Church.

Action Made a Difference

By Chris McCoy

I remember attending the board meeting when Adam Moon requested approval for his Eagle Scout project: an outdoor food pantry. The board knew this was a worthy project in line with our congregational calling as a "Servant Church." What we couldn't predict was how fast we would have to take action and at what scale.

The Care and Share Pantry in the upper parking lot of Florence Christian Church serves as an easily accessible source of food and personal care. With 24-hour access, guests can come to the pantry for items such as pasta, meal kits, crackers, bottles of water, canned goods and more.

My first trip to stock the pantry with a few staples and personal care items was in mid-March. Later the next week our family received the newsletter and video message from Pastors Susan and Diana suggesting that the pantry was a way people could help during the pandemic. For our family, we knew this would be our way of acting. We began spreading the word about the pantry to friends and family.

Since devoting time to the Care and Share Pantry there has been many insights. It is the most amazing feeling to know your actions are making a difference.

- You see tangible results from service. You observe food going in and you observe the food being gone when you return.
- You begin to know others through service. Our eating habits are personal and intimate. We know that our guests like egg noodles more than plain spaghetti, corn is favored over yams, and chocolate pudding will always be a crowd pleaser.
- You find community in service. There was the man who was allowing folks to camp in his backyard; the gentleman who had a job lined up but his ID was expired and the licensing office was closed; and the group of four young adults that have been transitioning through different housing situations. All the conversations were brief, but it was the pantry that brought us all to the same place at that moment.

Timing is Everything!

By Adam Moon

When I built the Care & Share Pantry, I imagined it would be used as a place where people of Florence could come in times of need to get food for themselves and for their families. I never thought there would be such a great need for food because of the COVID-19 crisis. God gave me the opportunity through Troop 1 & FCC to do this project, the skills to build it, and the ability to complete it right before I turned age 18 (an Eagle Scout requirement) and the COVID-19 crisis began.

I'm grateful for all the financial contributions from church, family and friends. Only \$447 was used for building materials which left \$928 to buy food for the pantry. I was overwhelmed by how much was donated so quickly. I'm also thankful for Troop 1's scouts and leaders for the time they donated to help build the pantry.

Adopt-A-Senior Program

"Smiling faces make you happy, and good news makes you feel better." Proverbs 15:30

In the middle of March, Florence Christian Church pastors saw the growing need for connection with our most physically vulnerable community members. Also, the church office was receiving requests for food and transportation from our neighbors at Arcadia. As businesses shut down, our bus stopped running, and all of us were instructed to Stay Home to Stay Healthy, the concern mounted. How can we manage this growing need?

From this struggle Florence Christian Church launched the Adopt-A-Senior program. Seniors requested to be put on the list and ministry partners in our worshipping community volunteered to make weekly contact with them. Several of our dear seniors received phone calls, cards, the occasional meal and frequent encouragement provided by our folks who "adopted" them.

Clara Justice wanted to offer smiling faces and good news to help her adopted seniors feel better. Using her God-given talents of creativity she made cards. Clara says "I have plenty of time, and need something to do. I have brought smiles to many faces, as well as my own. It gives me a warm feeling, creating personal pieces of art. ☺"

Tricia Moore called Donna N. about once a week just to talk. Donna is very vulnerable to coronavirus because she is on oxygen, so Tricia provided much needed connection for her. They both looked forward to their time together. Tricia said "It made me feel good to put my concern for her into action by making the phone calls and spending that time with [Donna]. It has been a very sweet time together. When I was feeling down and my allergies had me feeling bad, she called me to brighten my day."

“Daily Devotion from the Pastor” Provides Respite

It started with “Holy Week at Home.” The idea of celebrating Holy Week and Easter digitally demanded creativity and out-of-the box thinking. Pastors Susan and Diana adapted the “Stay at Home” order due to the COVID 19 restrictions to guide families toward daily faith formation during this most holy week. They created a video devotion for each day, incorporating engaging “at-home” activities for families to experience Jesus’ journey from Palm Sunday to Easter morning. The logical next step was to create 5 more videos for the week after Easter to reflect on the many resurrection appearances of Jesus. From there, the “Daily Devotion from the Pastor” became an important resource for many in our community to find guidance for navigating the pandemic with God’s ever-present abundance.



It’s hard to feel that anything is bigger than war-time death tolls, economic devastation, the destruction of our most fundamental daily routines, and the relentlessness of daily living through a crisis. Somehow, our pastors are reminding me, in a few minutes each morning, that there is a larger story at work. And that the larger story is too complex to try to sum it in beginning/middle/end. Through their devotions, Pastors Susan and Diana are allowing some space around COVID-19. It is not ignored. It is not over-emphasized. It is not questioned as conspiracy or explained away with platitudes. The pandemic just is, the way a lot of things in our life just are. We try to do the best that we can during whatever time we have on earth. That to me is the essence of ministry, that persistent, “Hey, you! There is room for all of it. You are loved through all of it. You can love through all of it.” *Beth Silvers*

“You can love through all of it.” Beth

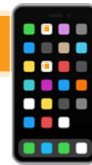
Fifty-something days into social distancing, I find myself increasingly grateful for the pastors’ digital leadership — especially the morning devotions that I receive by text message and email. Pastor Susan’s voice via video is comforting and resolute, which reminds me that some things endure even when it feels like everything has changed. Pastor Diana’s creativity shines through her messages, which inspires me to connect with my own. Short passages of scripture each day serve as a gentle nudge: Hey, you! God gets it. Hey, you! There’s nothing new under the sun. Hey, you! God is still here today and will be here tomorrow. I even like receiving the devotion 2 different ways. It reminds me that God takes many forms to get my attention, even as I stubbornly distract myself from God’s abundant love, grace and acceptance. God follows up and circles back and waits patiently.

“I feel grounded.” Cindy

Like most of us, this pandemic brought our entire world into our home. In addition to being our home, the house is now a schoolhouse, two offices, a daycare, a dog kennel, a 24-hour diner, a

reading scripture and praying for my family, friends, community, and the world.

The Daily Devotion provided by the pastors helps me stay focused on hope and faith. Reading the scripture and listening to their interpretation of the meaning and going deeper in thought is giving me the hope I need to survive during this pandemic. This is such good food for the soul that I forward the text/email to my family members to give them a dose of hope. This ministry is reaching a lot of people who are hungry for "Soul Food." *Peggy Chukwudolue*



"I feel God's support." Maleah

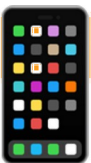
Despite the stress COVID-19 has added to all our lives, it has also revealed silver linings. I'm grateful my mornings are now MUCH less stressful and

my devotion time more meaningful. Most days I wake up before my alarm, feeling well rested. I look forward to hearing and seeing our pastors on my phone while relaxing in bed. After watching the devotion, I close my eyes and replay it to just listen and better absorb the message. Most days I then pray and reflect upon it before thinking about my next task.

This process has without question been a positive life change. I now begin each day more centered and peaceful with myself and God. I feel God's support and presence which encourages me to face whatever challenge the day presents. I feel personally connected to Pastors Susan & Diana due to their willingness to invite us into their homes via video. On these difficult & sometimes lonely social-distancing days, I am often soothed simply by their voices and the background music Melissa has so carefully chosen. The video devotions have without a doubt strengthened my faith during this difficult time and kept me connected to Florence Christian and our pastors. I hope you too can find such silver linings as we patiently await in-person community again! *Maleah Rhodes*



gymnastics studio, a place of worship, and so much more. To be honest, around 2 PM it gets to be too much for me and that's when I open my daily devotional text. I find a quiet(ish) place in our home and open the text message. Saving the text for a time when I am tired and drained is like a small gift in the middle of the day. It allows me to stop and read the word of God. I use this time to bring God back into my day. Am I leading with love today? Am I focusing on what I believe is most important or have I gotten wrapped up in the daily responsibilities of this busy stage of life? My favorite thing about the video is that I get to pray with Pastor Susan or Pastor Diana on a daily basis. I feel grounded at the end of the prayer and ready to continue with my day. *Cindy Haren*



"Giving me the hope I need." Peggy

When the world began to shut down, anxiety seeped in. I began to feel nervous and unsure of my future because of the effect of this disease in people 60 and older with underling health issues. While working from home, I try to keep up with the daily routine as if I am going to work to calm my anxiousness. Part of my routine in the morning is

"I never thought I would give up church for Lent."
Shauna Releford

Of course, church must go on. A worshipping community has banded together at the corner of US 42 and Dixie Highway since 1831. It was not stopped by a fire. It was not stopped by a civil war. It was not stopped when walls collapsed. It would not be stopped by a pandemic. The mission of this congregation to celebrate the abundance of God's love, grace and acceptance would not be squelched.

It was, however, *changed* by a pandemic. On March 11, Governor Beshear recommended that churches refrain from face-to-face meetings in order to "flatten the curve" of coronavirus cases in Kentucky. The next day, Florence Christian Church decided to livestream the worship service planned for that Sunday. Many questions needed to be answered. Who would video it with what equipment? How would the children be engaged? How would we tell people to find us online, not in the building? And finally, how could we continue to welcome radically, serve boldly and form faith every day while protecting each other's health and wellbeing?

Sam Combs readily accepted the new role of videographer. Sam writes: "Being a newer ministry partner of the church, I really did not know what kind of equipment we had to work with. My now 25-year-old degree in audio/visual communication had to catch up with the ever-changing technology. Pastor Diana, the worship team and I started pulling together what we could get our hands on to make the stream happen, all the while trying to satisfy new social distancing requirements. We had to play a quick game of catch-up to get ourselves online.

"Our pastors know...that digital context is a new mission field for the church, and the coronavirus has forced us to adapt to that culture. No matter how frustrating, confusing, or scary this crisis gets, we

remembered the words of 1 John 4:18: 'There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.' Our hope is built on the perfect love of Jesus Christ, so we have been called to share that love with the world."

The church staff and leaders reached out to all the members of the congregation to make sure our most digitally-challenged community members were able to access the new online content. As Sam says, people of all ages stepped up to the challenge and learned new skills to stay connected.

Brenda Strong was a ventilator nurse for many years, so she has a first-hand knowledge of how dangerous this disease could be. She also recognized that she was in the most vulnerable demographic. So, Brenda stayed home and stayed healthy. To stay connected she started to engage online.

CHURCH IN THE

Here is how Brenda has used multiple digital platforms to stay connected:

- Daily Devotion from the Pastors - It brightens her day to see the Pastors who are so dear to her and the scriptures and lessons are wonderful.
- Zoom Mary/Deborah Bible Study - "It was so good to see friends and share with each other. It's amazing to connect with people."
- Attends worship at Florence Christian's Facebook page every week. She loves the music and appreciates the Praise Team's leading of Praise and Worship.
- Does a weekly Bible Study on Facebook called "The Rock, The Road and The Rabbi." She virtually tours the Holy Land while studying the book with others.

Children are a vital part of the worshipping community at Florence Christian. *Children Worship and Wonder* and *Following Jesus* stories were readily adapted to the online content, allowing the entire family to “attend” worship together.

Brandon Releford shared this reflection on how online worship continues to minister to his family. “Luckily for us, Florence Christian Church went straight to the drawing board to make sure that each family was able to experience church in such a way that we would feel as though we were present in the church sanctuary. Staff at the church began to use technology to provide services on Facebook Live, where everyone could celebrate God’s welcome table of abundant love, grace, and acceptance. Not only did Pastor Susan deliver a message, but our wonderful praise and worship team brought forth

sanctuary when we share this resource with friends and family.

Vickie Batzka, Pastor Diana’s mother, lives in Lexington, Kentucky. Now she can attend worship at her own church, Central Christian, and with her daughter. “So I get to go to church online twice in the same day.” Further, Vickie shares the worship service with her friends at her former Disciples church in Jacksonville, FL. “They appreciate seeing how [Children Worship and Wonder] can be used to reach children in a nontraditional setting.”

Delma Santos attends worship on Sunday mornings with her family who live all around the globe: the Philippines, Australia, Italy and the US. There are 12 hours difference between the Philippines and Florence, KY, so Delma calls her brothers, sisters and in-laws at 9 AM (9 PM their time) to check in before

the service starts. Then Delma accesses the online worship service on Facebook and Skypes with her family at the same time. They use this weekly time to gather in worship and catch up on the week’s

happenings. Delma says she accesses the worship service later in the afternoon on YouTube so she can watch it uninterrupted as well.

“Though we may be physically distant, we are connected to one another through God’s power, the gifts of technology and our care for each other that surpasses any limitations. Whether you have been involved with the church your whole life or have been introduced to our community through our new online content, we want you to know that you are welcome here. Do not fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener. Act on what you hear! (James 1:22) This is exactly what we will be doing in the coming weeks, months and years to come.”

Sam Combs

DIGITAL AGE

songs of celebration to our King so that families can worship in their own homes. Pastor Diana would also deliver a message for the children, so that children could participate as though they were sitting crisscross-applesauce in their children’s church service. Jayden absolutely loved this opportunity during the worship service. She would say, ‘Daddy, when is it time for Pastor Diana to come on?’ Before she knew it, there popped up Pastor Diana.”

The livestream on Facebook is also broadcast on the website, so that people who do not participate in Facebook can still access the worship service online. Also, the worship service, once complete, is preserved forever on our YouTube channel. Our church’s purpose and reach extend far beyond our

When God Calls: How a Calling to Leadership Changes Us.

God's call to all of us is unique and individual. Maybe you are like Samuel and God has spoken to you several times before you recognized the call as God's voice. (1 Samuel 3) Or maybe as Paul was struck by a bright and blinding light, God had to use dramatic events to get your attention. (Acts 9) Perhaps, like John the Baptist, you were nurtured in faith and family for Christian service all of your life. (Luke 1) However God speaks to you, you can be confident that you are called to live abundantly into the vision God has for your life.

Leadership Academy is a nine-month course for Ministry Partners of Florence Christian to explore how God has called and equipped them to serve as leaders in the congregation. Topics of study included "Leadership for Life" as well as "Church Leadership" specifically. Dean Phelps, Kentucky's Regional Minister, visited the class to discuss leadership in the Christian Church: the roles of pastor, elder and deacon. Class members were also trained in conflict resolution strategies.

The following testimonies from the inaugural class of Leadership Academy speak to how the class formed them and their understanding of their calling.



**Brian
Emch**

When I started the leadership class, I believed my mission was to bring joy to the people of the church with music. That hasn't changed. After reading the book *The One Thing* for class I decided I was going to focus on getting better at playing melodies on the guitar because a strong melody will help me better achieve my mission. I've got a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly plan. I work my plan every day and check it off on a calendar. I haven't missed a day since I started in October.

Other benefits of taking the class include learning more about the Disciples Church, why we celebrate communion every Sunday and why it's open to everyone. Also, I've learned why a little conflict is a good thing for the church.



**Sallee
Fry**

My experience in Leadership Academy has been invaluable. My first instinct was to say "no" to the invitation with many excuses running through my mind. But, instead of focusing on all of the negatives, Brian and I shifted, through prayer, to the positives. "We will commute together," we said, "so we will bond. We will be in community with people that we don't know very well," we said, "so we will bond with others too." And it is an honor to participate in a pilot program, not a burden! It was clear that God wanted us to shift our focus and say "yes" to Leadership Academy.

I'm so glad we decided to participate. Before Leadership Academy, I thought I had a good grasp on my role as a Christian in this worshipping community. I was humbled to realize that I still have much to learn and I am excited about some of the prospects that lie ahead. Leadership Academy has helped me see how I could foster my interest in both children's ministry and prison ministry (especially assisting family members who have loved ones incarcerated) as a Christian in a worshipping community. The moral of my story: Be open to receiving unexpected gifts!



**Josh
Isaacs**

In the time I have been involved in Florence Christian I have participated in church ministry in various ways, but not in a formal leadership role. In my profession, I am a corporate leader, but the Leadership Academy has been more than just another notch in my leadership tool belt. It has been spiritually and professionally insightful and empowering. When Dean Phelps, Regional Minister, partnered with Pastor Susan in discussing the journey of the Disciples, the founders' ideals and the ways in which Disciples have evolved to meet the needs of people, I was truly engaged. Today, I recognize that I am called to be a Disciple of Christ ministry partner and a leader within our community of faith. I am humbled in the idea that Florence Christian would trust me to stand as a leader

in our congregation, and I am excited for any chance I have to serve now and in the future.



Janet Jackson

I was hesitant to say yes when asked by Pastor Susan to be part of Florence Christian's first Leadership Academy. I was content to sit in my pew on Sunday mornings and assist with various ministries as needed. Now, I believe I can be a part of the church as a leader with the knowledge I've gained. We covered a lot of helpful information, but getting to *My One Thing* has made a real difference for me. Guess it's true, you're never too old to learn.



Clara Justice

I have been in leadership since I was 16 when I became Superintendent of Sunday School. There wasn't anyone to do it, so I did. I didn't look at it as a calling, it was just a job. This class has taught me that it was a call of leadership. This year I found that faith was important and it is my calling. This class has showed me a new and creative way to plan, provide, implement and lead in whatever I am working on. This is possible with prayer, love and trust in God.



Sharon Stanley

When I started the Leadership Academy, I did not consider myself a leader. I considered myself more a person who liked to serve. Taking this class, I learned a lot about myself, and look forward to using what I learned at church and at work. I learned that it is important to know "The Why" when you are planning an event because it will inspire and motivate you and your team. I identified my core values, including passion, honesty and integrity, and how they guide my interaction with others. The class also helped me see that while I communicate with volunteers and staff well, I also had to communicate with God. Finally, I found out that I have a hard time setting goals, but I received tools that can help me improve and help me become a leader. Yes, I said Leader. I am finally thinking I could be one. YAY!

Leadership Academy

Class of 2019-2020



Brian Emch



Sallee Fry



Joshua Isaacs



Clara Justice



Janet Jackson



Shauna Releford



Sharon Stanley



Laurie Rini



Melanie Triplett



Melissa Stephens

Finding the sacred at home

By Shari Iden

For the Idens, living abundantly as a family during this time when we are at home is dependent on two things that seem to be polar opposites – space away and closeness. We are blessed to have a home that allows for both. When we need time to read, exercise, or video chat with friends, we can go to our bedrooms to get some distance. However, the three of us rarely make that choice.

Other than the bedrooms, our home has an open concept floor plan that helps us feel close. We can hear each other working, even when the only sound is keyboard tapping. Without seeing each other, we know that we are all there. We choose to be near each other, even when working on separate activities. The evening meal has become a sacred time together. The guys get annoyed with me when I'm "late" to dinner in my own house.

Another sacred time for us is Sunday morning at church. We have chosen to watch church together in our loft that is Ben's home office. We all gather there, along with our three dogs, for church service. It has been a blessing to receive communion from my husband or son each week. We also have included Luke in the offering time. Ben has taught him how to use the donate button online and we discuss how much to give and where to give it to. Luke recently completed the Financial Peace University for Youth program offered by Florence Christian and it has

really helped him become aware of the importance of finances and how to spend, give and save wisely.

Florence Christian Church (DOC) has been such a blessing to our family because it allows us to have the space and autonomy we need while having the closeness we so often crave. Without any pressure or guilt, we are provided with opportunities to serve

and grow in ways that will enhance our relationship with God and help our neighbors. Luke has been practicing driving almost every Saturday. Practice usually ends with a trip to Costco and a stop by church to add food to the pantry.

While this pandemic forced us to be away from each other physically, I feel more connected than ever due to the daily devotions. It has become a daily practice for Ben and me that I doubt would have occurred without the pandemic. A silver lining of being forced away from each other is having a new way to feel close.

There is so much talk right now about what the "new normal" will look like. For me, I hope that some of the sacred time that we have chosen to spend together will be carried forward into our new lives. We have always been so busy that this time of slowing down and staying home – while sometimes incredibly difficult – has made us appreciate the simplicity of a home cooked meal, a good book (or movie or Netflix series) and time well spent with those we love and treasure.



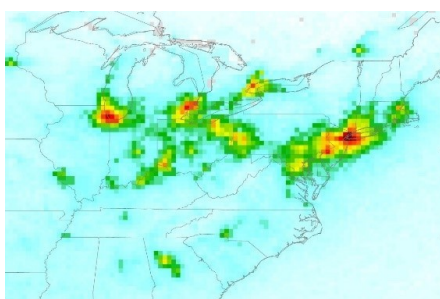
Blue skies, Smiling at me, Nothing but blue skies, Do I see....

By Glenna Galbraith

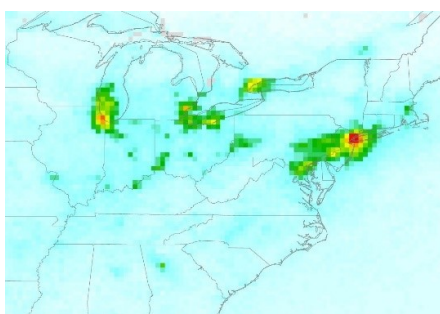
Perhaps you noticed that you don't have to fill your gas tank as often. Have you realized that there are fewer planes flying overhead?

A bluer, cleaner sky is the result! Various sources have estimated that pollution levels have been reduced 20-30% in many countries as a result of the "Stay at Home" policy during this pandemic.

Below are two images of the eastern portion of the United States provided by NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) for the same time period in 2019 and this year to illustrate the change of Nitrogen Dioxide, the primary emission from burning fuel:



NO₂ concentrations as seen from the Sentinel-5P satellite in **March 2019**.



NO₂ concentrations as seen from the Sentinel-5P satellite in **March 2020**.

Dr. Luz Claudio, Professor of Environmental Medicine and Public Health (drluzclaudio.com) said: *One of the things that we can learn from the pandemic's effects on the environment is that we CAN actually have an impact if there were a global effort to do so. It is inspiring how in cities that have extreme levels of air pollution, from Los Angeles to New Delhi, people are seeing the difference of what the air and life quality would be like if there were a minimal number of cars and emissions from polluting industries.* "

Title: Irving Berlin, 1926

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could continue this trend as we reopen our country? Why can't more businesses have work at home opportunities? Why can't we suggest a video meeting for those associates or clients who would typically fly in for meetings? Why can't we reduce the number of times we run errands in our cars? What if there was a global collaboration – as there has been to find a vaccine for COVID-19 – to make changes to improve the world's environment?

Dr. Thomas Lovejoy, Senior Fellow at UN Foundation and a Professor at George Mason University wrote: *"The wise way forward is to invest in conservation and science, and to embrace nature and the glorious variety of life with which we share this planet. A healthy future for humanity and a healthy biodiverse planet go hand in hand."* Perspective on protecting nature in the midst of a pandemic: One Earth, May 1, 2020

God created a marvelously rich and beautiful world that is indeed "very good" (Genesis 1:31). We honor God by gratefully caring for it.



The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. Out of our call to "do justice" (Micah 6:8), we strive to demonstrate the fullness of God's shalom through living out our faith by caring for God's creation.

<https://www.discipleshomemissions.org/missions-advocacy/green-chalice/>

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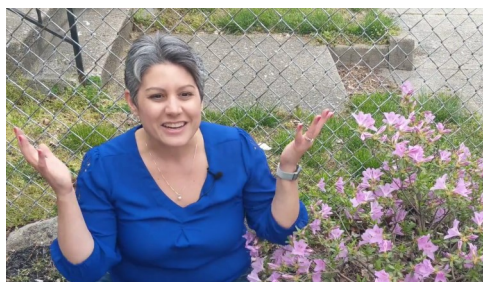
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What would it mean for Christians to give up that little piece of the American Dream that says, “You are limitless?” Everything is not possible. . . . What is *rich* did not have to mean *wealthy* and *whole*, did not have to mean *healed*? What if being people of “the gospel” meant that we are simply people with good news? God is here. We are loved. It is enough.

Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I've Loved

by Kate Bowler P. 21



Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I've Loved

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A Book Review by Rev. Diana Hodges-Batzka

May 14, 2019, I hit a milestone in my life. I had a major surgery requiring weeks of recovery. I went from being very active (working out every day, running a 5K twice a week, and easily walking 8 miles a day) to being EXHAUSTED after walking a block around my house. I had to learn how to rely on others to help care for me and I had to learn how to slow down. During this time, I read and savored some books on my “to-read” bookshelf. One of the books that I read was a memoir and spiritual reflection called *Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I've Loved* by Kate Bowler.

In this poignant, real, raw, and reflective book, Kate Bowler, a woman and mom about my age shares the story of her life and faith as she is suddenly diagnosed with stage IV colon cancer. Almost overnight, she goes from health to possibly dying, from being an active professor at Duke Divinity School to struggling to make it through each day.

She shares her very real and honest struggle with mortality. She defines narratives and beliefs as no longer true like determination and positive thinking can make bad things go way.

One thing that I most appreciated is that Kate helps her reader move through the hard emotions. In her honesty about grief and hardship, she makes space for ALL of us to be honest about the grief and hardships in our own lives. As I was recovering from surgery, Kate’s story helped me to be honest about what I was going through. She helped me reflect on what I believed and helped me make meaning of my experience. Bowler wrestles in a real and accessible way with questions of theodicy. (Why is there evil or suffering in the world?) Sometimes making you laugh; sometimes making you cry. Bowler’s journey is one in which she invites you to journey along side her.

As we journey together during this time of pandemic, we are all experiencing grief and hardships. We need to make room in our lives for these difficult emotions and reflect upon what they may or may not mean, leaning on God’s love. Kate’s story can help all of us as we journey together acknowledging the dark times in life and how we can find beauty even then.

SPOILER ALERT: Kate has a podcast called “Everything Happens” where she talks with people in a warm, caring and compassionate way about what they’ve learned in dark times. You can listen anywhere you get your podcasts.

My Anchor

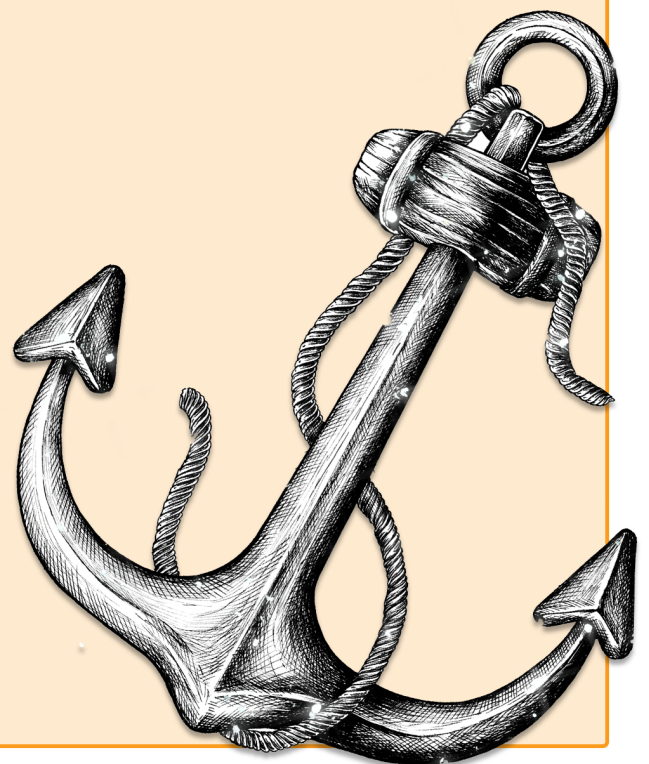
By Judy Slayback

Liminal time is an expression that Pastor Susan and Pastor Diana have used often in the past few weeks. That time of transition between what was and what is to be. This is where we find ourselves. It was not a gentle shift but the feeling that Covid19 picked us up bodily and threw us into this evolution. We were leading our routine lives: going to work, some of us were getting the kids off to school, shopping, eating out, visiting family and friends. It was a time of ease. Then, with little warning, everything changed.

When the pandemic arrived I was just emerging from my own personal, liminal time. My husband had died in 2018. Losing a spouse sets you adrift. Suddenly, "we" becomes "I." Finding the direction for my life was difficult. Can God use me in the life I have remaining or do I just float from day to day? After prayer and discernment, I sold the house, moved back to Boone County where I grew up, and rejoined Florence Christian Church. Slowly, I stuck my toe back into society and by the end of 2019 I was participating in a book club, attending church functions, and beginning to think about traveling.

Then suddenly we were in social distancing, putting social gatherings on hold. I miss going to church. Things will be different when we finally return to worshipping face-to-face again. I mourn the ease of Sunday morning greetings: a hug or a kiss on the cheek. But I know that for awhile we will need to maintain our distance.

Like most of us, I have had periods of anxiety during this quarantine. It seems there are so many things coming at us at once. But I have developed a morning routine which has helped me greatly. Each morning I go to the kitchen, put the coffee on, and sit down to listen to a message from Pastor Susan or Pastor Diana. I think of this time as **My Anchor**. I've been reassured that God's love is constant, no matter what is going on in the world. I've been reminded we always have hope through the love of God. God will give us the strength to face whatever occurs each day. All these things I have known for years but in this particular time I needed to hear them again. They seem to come at just the right time. It's uncanny how often they address exactly what is bothering me. They are keeping me anchored to my church and more importantly, to my faith.





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