

THE CEDAR RIDGE QUARTERLY

Waiting for God

December 2019

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Welcome to the Advent edition of our quarterly newsletter. I hope you enjoy reading the various articles and contributions that reflect our community. Recently we have been focusing together on ways to experience God more fully. We can have all kinds of thoughts and theories about God, but in the ups and downs of life, in the pain and the joy, few of us probably find ourselves longing for a better hypothesis—we want to experience God directly. We long for love, acceptance, meaning and purpose.

One of the greatest mysteries of the spiritual life is surely the “hiddenness of God.” If God is real, why does God seem so hard to find? That’s a question I am often asked and often find myself asking. Why is it such a struggle to experience God? I honestly don’t know the answer to that, but as always perhaps the truth we are seeking is found more in our struggle with the question than in any pat answer. Our own experience tells us that the things we truly value in life have usually not come easily. That’s probably true for our accomplishments and especially for our relationships. We seem to find the true meaning and experience of love through both our pain and our joy, in our hopes and our disappointments, through both our losing and our finding. It takes time, determination, patience...we have to wait.

Advent is a season of waiting. We’re waiting for hope, peace, love and joy...a deep and beautiful experience of God that we see embodied in Jesus—and we are invited into that experience. But we struggle with the wait. We seem conditioned for quicker responses. We want (and now have) instant access to information, entertainment, and a wealth of wisdom and knowledge. We speed up our thinking time, rush to conclusions, and make up our minds about people and situations before we even realize we’ve done it. But in the waiting, Advent becomes a time of surprises. We find God in unexpected places—born into a refugee family in the Middle East, growing up in a backwater region, suffering all the vulnerabilities that we do. Perhaps in all the waiting this Advent, we might find God in unexpected places—in our friendships, in our conflicts, in our questions, in the darkness and in the light. And in the stillness, maybe we will find that God has been there all along: deep within us. ●

Matthew

Matthew Dyer, Lead Pastor



Around & About



On Sunday, September 8, we celebrated the completion of the farmhouse stabilization project with a potluck picnic on our beautiful 63-acre property.



The following Sunday, we kicked off the fall with a **Ministry Fair** to highlight the many ways to serve and connect at Cedar Ridge.

An estimated 80 people attended the **Outdoor Movie night** on Friday, September 20, in celebration of Burtonsville Day. Volunteers helped serve popcorn and hot chocolate, and supervised s'mores making, while we showed the movie "Up" on the side of the barn. The next morning, Cedar Ridge participated in the Burtonsville Day festivities, picking up trash at the end of the parade, and hosting a booth where we invited about 200 people to the Harvest Festival.



On Saturday, October 5, Cedar Ridge celebrated another successful growing season on the farm with the **Harvest Festival**. Among the festivities that visitors enjoyed was a petting zoo with bunnies, turtles and a piglet, face-painting, a pumpkin patch and pumpkin decorating, hay rides, roasting s'mores at the firepits out back, inflatables and complimentary refreshments. Thank

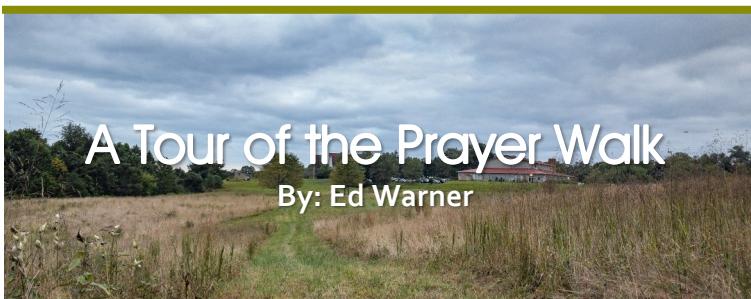


you to the many volunteers who helped make this wonderful celebration a success!

Middle schoolers helped with Harvest Festival clean-up and then stayed overnight in the barn for a supposed "sleep-over" ...but there was very little sleep!

We concluded October with our Community **Sunday and Annual Meeting** on the 27th. During the service, we welcomed 5 new members, and dedicated 4 children and their parents to God. At the Annual Meeting after lunch, we voted in new board members, Jennifer Hair and Ginger Donohue, and returning members, Melinda Anderson and Steve Mather. Matthew shared about the many highlights of the previous year, and Alison expressed gratitude for the incredible generosity of our community.

On Sunday, November 3, Cedar Ridgers gathered for a **Fall Day of Service** to serve our community together. We visited seniors at Morningside House in Laurel, conducted beautification projects at Greencastle and Galway elementary schools, picked up trash at Edgewood Park, raked leaves for neighbors in need of help, and made a meal for Sophia House Women's Shelter. Onsite projects included making cards for people in need of encouragement, no-sew blankets for the Linus Project, and dog chew toys for local shelters; assembling Christmas Eve gift boxes; planting flowers to support native pollinators; and getting the farm and property ready for winter. ●



A Tour of the Prayer Walk By: Ed Warner

After church on September 29, a group of about a dozen Cedar Ridge attendees went for a guided tour of the church's Prayer Walk. The marked path dates to the early years of the church at its current location and arises, in part, from its founding pastor Brian McLaren's sense of finding kinship with the divine while in nature. The Walk consists of a path punctuated by about 15 signposts, each displaying a spiritual

message associated with the vista at that point.

The tour was led by Harry Stone, who stopped at each signpost to read to the group from the inspirational message. We began at Cedar Ridge's wonderfully renovated old farmhouse and moved to the gazebo just east of the church, which is often the starting point for doing the walk in the correct order of the signposts. From there, we went to the labyrinth, which was dedicated to McLaren when he left Cedar Ridge, and then walked northward along the fence line, noting the many new bluebird houses along the fence — the work of Cedar Ridge Kids.



Passing the un-mowed section of field on our left, several walkers commented on its beauty and how it was making

habitat for wildlife. Then, we moved into the shade of the woods at the far northern corner of the church's property and walked downhill on the walk's well-maintained steps, originally installed on the steep hillside by a Scout seeking his Eagle status.

We stopped at the bottom of the hill at the stream, as it's both a natural stopping point and a point where the beauty of the woods is arguably at its greatest. (I've often gone to the walk specifically to sit on the bench there and just feel God's presence.)

From there, we walked uphill and out of the woods,

convening again at the firepit and then, passing the beehives, we returned to the church parking lot. Several on the walk spoke of being moved by how our church embraces the natural world, and how lovely the natural world is in our little corner of it. ●

For more information about the Prayer Walk, visit: www.crc.org/our-property/prayer-walk.

Ed Warner is retired from the U.S. State Department and has attended Cedar Ridge, with his wife Marianne, since 2003.



Giving this Advent at Cedar Ridge

By: Ginger Donohue



Seeking ways to serve my church was instilled in me at a young age. As far back as my memories go, I can

think of many ways my family members taught me to participate actively in my church and community. These lessons were taught by example, not lecture. In our church community, my parents and grandparents were Sunday school teachers, communion servers, church elders, and members of the choir. I learned to serve by joining my family's activities around the church. Along the way, I gained much pleasure in serving God, and it helped me feel more grounded.

In addition to learning how to share my time and energy serving at church, I also learned about sharing our financial resources as well. At a young age, I

participated in dropping our family's offering into the baskets as they were passed each Sunday. Before long I brought my own hard earned dollars to place in the offering baskets.

These lessons from childhood stayed with me and helped to form my character and value system. All of my life, assessing needs and helping when and where I can has been second nature, just something I do. For me, it is important to belong to a church community like Cedar Ridge with a focus on service. Cedar Ridge strives to care not only for our members, but to also provide practical support to folks in need in our surrounding community—like donating the fresh produce grown on our farm, and our efforts to partner with Greencastle Elementary.

As long time members of Cedar Ridge, my husband John and I are very comfortable sharing our financial

resources with Cedar Ridge, as the leadership has consistently been wise and faithful stewards of the church's finances. Our church is blessed with a beautiful building, barn, farmhouse, outbuildings and 63 acres of land to care for. This all takes financial resources, and the time and energy of willing members to keep it reflecting pride of ownership and good stewardship. As a youngster, it was hard for me to really understand how my offerings were pleasing to God, and why giving financially was such an important aspect of faith. I understand it more fully now and can honestly say, sharing in the practical aspects of our church community truly makes me feel part of a family.

During this season of generosity will you consider how you can help our church financially? Be a part of sharing God's love, and help us to accomplish wonderful things together. ●

Highlights from the Harvest Festival

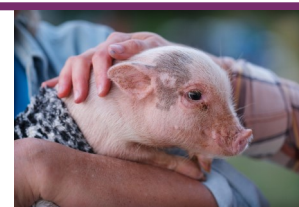
By: Caroline Fuller



I really enjoyed the Harvest Festival. My favorite part was probably the caramel apples, but it's very hard to decide on the best part because everything was super fun.

One of the best parts was petting the animals. They were adorable! The inflatables were also really fun. They were bouncy, but a little out of control and dangerously crowded. My favorite one had to be the

obstacle course. The people were more of obstacles than the actual obstacles though. I got to get on the hay ride without much of a line at all, and have popcorn. I loved the s'mores, and there were seemingly endless supplies! The Harvest Festival was so fun! ●



Caroline, age 9, attends Cedar Ridge with her parents, John and Jennifer Fuller, and younger brother, Jack.

By: Linsey Malig-Mayhew

For about the last ten years, Cedar Ridge has been working with Greencastle Elementary School to support the needs of students and the facility through service projects, food-in-backpacks, and donation drives. Almost 60% of the students at Greencastle Elementary receive free or reduced price meals, with only 42% passing the math and literacy benchmark tests (PARCC). Unfortunately, the increased economic needs of students in our region correlate to decreasing academic outcomes that often persist into high school and adulthood.

Understanding that students at Greencastle have similar needs to those at the other five elementary schools, two middle schools and one high school in the Paint Branch cluster, Cedar Ridge members began analyzing how to maximize the impact of our support. At the request of the Montgomery County Public Schools Superintendent, we reached out to other faith-based communities to begin to grow a coalition to support cluster schools through donations, advocacy, and volunteers.

As part of our advocacy support, Cedar Ridge members attended the Montgomery County Blueprint for Maryland's Future forum on November 6th at Blair High School. The Blueprint is a kickstart for Maryland's 10-year plan to transform public schools from mediocre (Maryland ranks 26th on the National Report Card) to world-class. The Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education (also called the Kirwan Commission after the chair, former UMD Chancellor, Brit Kirwan) analyzed the best practices of the most successful school systems from all over the world, and developed five recommendations: universal pre-K, diverse and highly-qualified teachers and leaders, increasing pathways to college and career readiness, more resources for students with special needs (poverty, English language

support, and special education services), and an independent accountability system to ensure funding is used for the specific recommendations.



For Greencastle Elementary, and many other local schools, this plan provides a state-funded, full-time nurse practitioner (the same kind you see at your doctor's office) and a community schools coordinator to provide wrap-around services for students. Teachers will have 20% more planning time, and will receive a 10% raise. Students will get free, full-day pre-k at four years old, and individualized tutoring when they don't meet academic benchmarks at the elementary and high school levels.

Cedar Ridge hopes to get more involved in advocacy for these recommendations since the Blueprint only provided three years of funding, starting in 2019—meaning all the new supports students and teachers are receiving will end by 2023. The Kirwan Commission just approved the funding formula for the full ten-year plan, which will become a bill that our legislators will vote on in winter or spring of 2020. We hope to support our leaders in the Maryland General Assembly to make the best decision for our children.

If you want to get more involved in education advocacy, please feel free to contact me at linseymmayhew@gmail.com. ●

Linsey is a former teacher and is now a Policy and Advocacy Fellow for Strong Schools Maryland. She attends Cedar Ridge with her wife, Vivien.

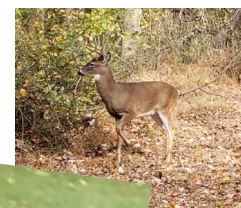


On the Property



As usual, this fall was a busy time on the Cedar Ridge property. In September, Mark Hartley, Property and Facilities manager, oversaw the installation of a new auditorium HVAC. Tom Baker joined Mark to dig posts for signage and a rope fence around the silo as part of our ongoing historic preservation efforts. Among other highlights

were a few wildlife sightings of a handsome buck and a bald eagle!





Inside Story

Experiencing God During Advent

We asked a few Cedar Ridgers to share ways that they have experienced God's presence during Advent, and here are their stories. . .



Raphael Houston



The smell of fresh fruit and coffee filled the air in the Barn at Cedar Ridge. I didn't know what to expect at the Advent Quiet Day. Contemplative practices were an infrequent part of my life. However, on that wintery day, I felt I needed to pause.

I didn't think much of Advent. The days before Christmas were usually awash with busyness for me. The end of the year slows down work, in some sense, but makes me anxious to end the year "strong" (whatever that might mean). The march toward Christmas included a lot of parties and gatherings, plus shopping for gifts. As usual, the list of to-do and to-don't would start to mount.

However, at the silent retreat, as we used art and scripture to draw our focus on the present, I felt an opening appeared. It was in those moments, the goodness of Advent washed over me. No longer was it about expecting or preparing, but humbly seeing the Divine break through the most mundane things. Afterward, it made me think of how much the longing for celebration sometimes denies the goodness that is always available in the present moment. It is hard to see what is here and now when I am looking elsewhere.

How can I stay in expectation and reverence in the here and now? Christians and non-Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus, and the traditions around celebrations of Jesus's birth are an opportunity for giving and receiving across lines that divide us globally. However, those traditions can pull me away from the present goodness.

I realized Advent could represent both a time of expectation and celebration of the richness of the present. It is in that tension between the present and the not-yet that I feel awake to the teachings of Jesus and become able to practice them.

I still struggle to find practices that keep me focused on the sense of joyful expectation of the season and entangled in

the present moment. To me, contemplation is a doorway to enter, and let those tensions exist with compassion and joy. Contemplative practices such as centering prayer help to move me toward actions aligned with Jesus' teachings.

Alignment feels like inhaling God's love and exhaling everything that pulls me away from it. For me, it allows me to recognize the image of God in my loved ones as well as in neighbors, strangers, or enemies. I can then participate in this love and let it transform me. Advent can become just a countdown until Christmas: It has been that way for me at times. But Advent has been good for me when I step through the doorway of the here and not-yet.

When I think of Christmas, I think of Genesis. I am reminded that everything has been good from the beginning.

God looked over everything he had made; it was so good, so very good! It was evening, it was morning. Genesis 1:31 (MSG) ●



Margy Lee Constable



I knew it would be our last Thanksgiving together, so I made sure to be there early and stayed later than I normally would. I always did my "duty" of showing up at mom's for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner. What is it about the holidays that make siblings want to push the usual buttons? Where's the cheer and goodwill? So, every year I timed it so that I would be at the door when the meal started and ready to leave as soon as the last plate was taken up.

It was different this time. I came early. I wanted to help her with the dinner. I wanted to do the washing, the chopping, the stirring, the standing, the waiting, the tasting. And as she stood by the sink with her warm knitted hat that my grandmother made with her arthritic hands over the chemo wig, she told me she got this. She was only three months into the chemo, and she looked so frail. She started the many rounds of radiation over the summer, and then the

chemo started. The treatments took so much out of her, but she wanted this holiday dinner. I wanted to know what she was thinking. Do people think about whether this would be their last anything? We talked and planned for Christmas and New Year's. A month after New Year's, she was gone.

When Thanksgiving came later that year, it was just us—me and Morrison. It was our first Thanksgiving together. We had just gotten married two months earlier, and we had nowhere to go. He never got to meet mom. He couldn't enter the country from New Zealand because his visa still wasn't approved, so he wasn't able to attend the funeral in February. Thanksgiving was new to Morrison, since it's a traditional American holiday. I don't think it would have mattered to him whether we got the turkey. Heck, they didn't even have turkeys in New Zealand at the time, although they do now.

When people say that the holidays are a very lonely time, believe them. My tradition has always been some big dinner with family and all the quibbles (or rather epic battles) that went with it. It really wasn't a holiday dinner without someone walking out. But things were different that year. Our friends from our discipleship group wanted us to know that if we didn't have any plans, we should just come over to their place. I told Morrison that I was going to decline because I was sure they would have their own family, and we would just be imposing. But if you know Morrison, then you know he doesn't turn down an offer of food. To my surprise, many of our friends from Cedar Ridge were there that night. The dining table extended into the living room. I had the most wonderful time, and guess what? No one huffed and puffed and stormed out. ●

Margy (pictured here with husband, Constable in DC at Awesome Con last year) has been attending CRCC for 11 years (she thinks, but has lost count) and she recently joined the children's ministry to share her love of crafts.



Pat & Dave Martinsen



We didn't think too much about alternatives to traditional Christmas before we had kids. Our Christmas at that time consisted of Christmas cards, cookies, gifts for family, and traveling from Minneapolis to either Chicago or Clearwater to be with our parents.

Once kids arrived, we began to think about alternatives, including a conscious focus on looking outside our family to share the peace and joy of Christmas with others. Some years this involved hosting international college students with Christmas International House. Other years we participated in Angel Tree and similar programs. Some years we served meals with the Community Based Shelter in Montgomery County. Often we opened our more modest family presents on St. Nicholas Day or Epiphany, to focus on Jesus on Christmas Day.

In retrospect, we sometimes wonder whether we overdid things by not having a constant tradition. But we did have some constants: a Christmas Eve service, with our elementary, middle, and then high schoolers in the choir. And the reading of a Christmas story. One of our favorites is Martin the Cobbler, based on the story Where Love Is, by Leo Tolstoy. The cobbler spends Christmas wondering when he will be visited by Jesus. Only after a number of encounters with his neighbors does he realize that Jesus did visit him in the ordinary and needy people around him. The story is based on Matthew 25:37-40: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' That helps us better understand where to look for Jesus today. ●

Pat and Dave Martinsen are both retired and lead the Sunday morning book group and a discipleship group.

Advent Reflections Now Available

Advent reflections are available as audio recordings on the Cedar Ridge website (www.crcc.org/christmas/) and on the Cedar Ridge app. You can stream them while driving or walking; or you may wish to find a quiet time at home to light a candle, listen (or read), and reflect on the wonder of the Christmas story. There are 4 reflections—one for each of the 4 weeks in Advent. They follow the same order of scripture reading practices used in the 4 Sunday messages: Ignatian reading, study, Lectio Divina, and worshipful reading. But you can listen to them at any time and in any order. ●



Wrapped Up in Grief at Christmastime

By: Sarah Burke



This fall, I had a poignant conversation with my son about the mystery of Santa Claus. Let's just say the big reveal was followed by my son's fingers pressed into his ears to stave off the buzz kill I was putting on Christmas. Once the initial disappointment subsided, a discussion followed about the things which still remained true—one being the deep love expressed by mom and dad and the rest of the family in continuing to play along with the magic. All that love is demonstrated in the element of surprise, when dozens of presents magically appear on Christmas morning.

Thankfully the disappointment didn't last long, and he moved on to other concerns more pertinent to ten-year-old boys. What hangs, though, is the reminder that eventually the luster of the fairytale is gone. This is a small loss, which most of us recover from, comforted by the many traditions which remain: Christmas trees, sparkly lights, and all those presents that still appear even when we don't believe the fairytale anymore. But how do we experience the magic and beauty of this season when we've lost something more?

The first Christmas after my divorce, I had to consider this question for the first time. I had lost the partner with whom I'd established new traditions as an adult. I was broken-hearted and unsure of how it would feel to wake up with my children on Christmas morning with just the three of us. Grief was interwoven with every Christmas first as a newly single mom: buying a tree on my own, shopping for presents for the kids without someone to share in the joy, and deciding what traditions to hold onto and count as my own going forward. As I look back, I recall a few perspectives that kept me grounded when I was wrapped up in grief at Christmas.

It's ok to be sad, even at Christmas. There's no time limit for grief. During the holidays, grief takes on a life of its own. Reminders of your loss may creep in more often than you would hope. Recognize and welcome this natural part of the

grieving process. Consider setting aside a time to recognize the magnitude of your loss. Whether it is the absence of a loved one or the loss of a marriage, relationship or long-held dream, give yourself a space in which to grieve. You might light a candle or listen to a song during a time when you can be free of distractions and just be. Similarly, find a way to make room for joy by choosing an activity or tradition that you particularly enjoy. There's room for both, even at Christmastime.

Don't wait to celebrate when you're done grieving. Grief is an ongoing process. Don't wait to be done grieving to celebrate; let celebrating be part of your healing process. Celebrating can look many different ways, from meaningful traditions to small gestures you do for others or even yourself. Much healing takes place when we're doing the things that bring us comfort, so match your grief with love in equal measure.

Take comfort in Emmanuel. God is with us, and God is with you. Even when you don't feel the elusive spirit of Christmas, practicing the spiritual disciplines of prayer, reading scripture, and meditation are intentional ways to create space for God to enter. The beauty of Emmanuel is that God shows up in our longing, in our reaching, and in all the ways that we make room. Whatever beauty you seek to create for yourself and others, God is there. Take heart and hope from that reminder as you make room for your grief and God's love to enter during Advent. After all, Emmanuel-- God is with us, and God is with you. ●

Sarah (pictured here with husband Noel and kids, Rebekah and Benjamin) has been attending Cedar Ridge since 2003 and is on staff as the Director of Communication and Administration.



By: Debra Frew



I have been a part of the Guatemala Team since 2012. The night before applications were due for the 2012 trip, my daughter had completed hers on her own and made a request for me to fill one out as well. Honestly, I was hoping she had changed her mind. I was very hesitant in signing up for the trip, out of fear of the unknown and all that comes with traveling out of the country to this foreign land of Ipala, Guatemala.

Fast forward to 2019, and I am the Guatemala team leader having made four trips to Ipala, participated in monthly meetings since 2013, and having engaged in building relationships with these lovely people many miles away. I tell you this because it has not been an easy journey for me. I have moved in and out of fear, discomfort, doubt, sadness, and anger through this process. On the other side of the coin, I have experienced grace, love, connection, trust, strength, growth and perseverance.

I have come to know that God puts us in situations that make and mold us into the people God wants us to become. Who would have thought that this fearful, doubting person would still be involved in this Guatemala program today? Well, the

fact is, I am. I am with joy, gratitude and thankfulness for...

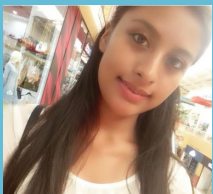
- the privilege to be part of a church community that supports the dream of making the world a better place by engaging in relationships far from home, through giving and spiritual support
- the travel teams who stay connected in relationship with our friends in Ipala
- the Guatemala Team that stays focused on our mission
- the people of Ipala who welcome us in to their community as family
- the impact of knowing and following Jesus on this journey, and the ripple effect that it has here in Spencerville, MD and in Ipala, Guatemala
- the lessons learned in this process that could not have been learned in any other way

I long to live in permanent joyfulness, continual prayer, and constant thankfulness. Being part of this mission keeps the door open for my desires to grow.

If you want to talk about how you can be more involved, please reach out to me at guatemala@crcc.org.



Grad-itude



I thank Cedar Ridge and CIDHER very much for the support you have given me during these three years of study. I have appreciated everything you did for me, because thanks to God and you I was able to graduate! I thank you very much and I want you to know that you will always be able to count on me.... I appreciate you very much!

The following note (originally in Spanish) comes from Ipala scholarship student Bianka Anahi Martinez Manuel, who graduated from high school in October.



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