

THE CEDAR RIDGE QUARTERLY

Lent at Cedar Ridge

March 2020

As a community here at Cedar Ridge, we follow the ancient rhythms of the traditional church calendar. We don't use a specific liturgy, but we do mark the seasons that have become so meaningful to followers of Jesus over the centuries. This roots us in a rich and diverse historical community, and we benefit from the collective wisdom of generations. There's a certain safety and reassurance in the repetition where we keep returning to the life and teaching of Jesus. Novelty is not the goal but rather, a faithful commitment to the journey of enlightenment and change. But we have to be careful of course! An overly familiar approach can lull us into a response that is rote and sterile, barely touching the surface. An overly structured approach can feel forced or even oppressive where the motivation is fear rather than love.

Lent is just such a season. Celebrated in various ways around the world for centuries, these 40 days emulate Jesus' time in the wilderness with a focus on prayer, fasting, self-reflection and personal transformation. But each year there's every chance it could be superficial: we just give up something because that's what you do - we just go through the motions. Each year there's every chance we could slip into fear and austerity: in times of self-reflection we could become despairing of our failings and cower under the critical gaze of a disappointed God who had so much higher expectations of us.

But the good news is that Lent is actually a season of love, hope and the power to change. It's a season of optimism. For sure there's a certain darkness and sobriety to it as we reflect on our own weakness and the brokenness of humanity. We acknowledge our own limitations and mortality embodied in the refrain of Ash Wednesday, "From dust we have come and to dust we shall return." But there's also great joy and

brightness because this reflection is in the presence of God's perfectly unconditional love and acceptance. As we wrestle with the challenge to grow and embrace change, we see fresh potential for ourselves and re-imagine a new humanity. Love is the motivation, the means and the end!

This Lent we are exploring Jesus' teaching in the "Sermon on the Mount" found in Matthew chapters 5-7. It's a fitting theme for the season because here Jesus addresses the ethical and moral challenges we all experience as individuals and communities. But rather than pushing us to try harder or imposing a set of rules on us, Jesus encourages us that since God is Love, it's perfectly safe to be honest. We can vulnerably look at our inner motivations rather than just our outward behaviors. To help us during this season we'll experiment with various practices of stillness that center us, helping us look inside and listen to the voice within. And we'll discover this voice is Love. Love has been there within us all along, gently calling and empowering us to be set free and transformed. ●

Matthew

Matthew Dyer, Lead Pastor



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Around & About

- Winter Highlights -



We had a great turnout on the evening of **January 20, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**, where we honored Dr. King's legacy through learning and action on

racial injustice in public education. Attendees watched and discussed excerpts from the powerful documentary "Teach Us All." This timely film looks at school desegregation 60 years ago, and investigates how much has really changed in the intervening decades.

This was followed by a presentation from Cedar Ridge member and Policy and Advocacy Fellow for Strong Schools Maryland, Linsey Malig-Mayhew. Linsey spoke about the findings of the Kirwan Commission on



Innovation and Excellence in Education, which identified 5 priority areas for increased investment in Maryland's public schools. Legislation to fund the Commission's recommendations is

currently being considered at the state level. In response to the presentation, more than 40 people wrote postcards to key decision makers advocating for equitable funding for all schools.

Did you know...
 ...97% of white and Asian students graduate high school in Montgomery County, compared to 88% of African American and 79% of Hispanic students?
 ...nearly half of Maryland's African American or Hispanic students attend schools in one of the three most underfunded districts in the state?

On the evening of March 9, a group of Cedar Ridge members will travel to Annapolis as part of a broader effort to present the case in person to legislators. We will join members of other community groups to show legislators that their constituents are concerned about this issue. We would love you (and any interested friends, neighbors and co-workers) to join us if you are able. Contact Linsey (linsey@strongschoolsmaryland.org) for more information or to sign up! ●



During the Creative Cup Coffee House on Saturday, February 2, we enjoyed an evening of live music with Rebecca Stryker and Dave Weber, an art show featuring the work of Gina Richardson, together with artists of all ages, and open mic. Highlights included a poetry activity with prompts to write your own poem, which several Cedar Ridgers read during open mic.

At intermission, Paul Chesterton provided ambiance with his banjo in the Commons, while we viewed the art exhibit. Children and adults enjoyed an array of desserts, coffee, Italian soda, and a craft table. Thank you to everyone who turned out and made the evening a great success! ●



Pictured on the right are two paintings by Gina Richardson titled "Embracing North" and "Lolita's Smile."

Of Kittens and Kingdoms

By: Ruth Campbell



My Christmas present this year was two adorable nine-week old kittens. Soft and fluffy, they snuggle under my chin and purr louder than motorboats—and I couldn't

love them more. But, truth be told, whenever they are awake, they straddle the line between playful and naughty. As I write, one kitten is sitting on top of the toilet, tapping the roll of toilet paper, and watching it pile up in ribbons on the floor. The other is happily paddling in the water spilt from the vase he just knocked over. Their sense of adventure has them scaling the curtains and trying to sneak around the back of the fireplace. They are going to need all nine of their lives. Without a doubt, given half a chance, they would bolt outside, and who knows when (or if) I would see them again.

Fortunately, though, they are easily distracted and not too bright. Throw a feathered mouse across the hallway, and they will scamper away before the front door is opened. The only times I've let them stand in the open doorway are when it's raining, cold and windy, and no kitten—however adventurous—would want to venture out. "This," I tell them, "is what the outside world is always like. So stay indoors!"

But of course, it's not what the world is always like. On my phone I have a countdown to spring—to the nearest second. It won't always be wet and windy. It won't always be winter: spring is on its way.

I don't care much for the Cedar Ridge farm at this time of year. The berry bushes are all dry sticks and sharp thorns; the cover crops are slowly rotting; the grass is brittle and brown. But it won't always be this way. Because I'm not a kitten, I know the seasons change. I know this will soon be filled with vegetables, fruit and flowers; bright colors drawing in butterflies and bees; birds circling overhead; groundhogs searching the fence for a chance to enter this place of abundance. Every year, clearing and planting the beds feels like a declaration of hope and faith. Spring will come. Crops will grow. However cold and windy it is today, there will be a harvest.



I feel the same way when I read the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' description of another way of living—another kingdom—where it is the poor who are blessed, the meek who inherit the earth; where hatred is answered with love, and we give up that pernicious drive to judge one another... This too seems like a declaration of hope and faith. The Kingdom is creeping in, day by day, often unnoticed. However hard and cold the world may feel, however scary the news, however strident social media becomes, the Kingdom is coming—is already at hand—and the way of love will prevail.

As a practical demonstration of this hope for a better world, each year we farm half an acre of our land to produce approximately two tons of fresh fruit and vegetables—all of which goes to feed hungry families in our neighborhood. We'd love you to join us! Come out on planting days and workdays throughout the year—all ages and abilities are welcome. Or join the farm team and help plan activities and lead work crews. For more information, contact ruthc@crcc.org.

Lenten Reflections Available Online

The Sermon on the Mount is shocking: Everything we've been told before is called into question; everything reversed. It is the marginalized and oppressed who are fortunate. We should love those who torment us. We should give to anyone who asks, and refuse to stand in judgment... This is the opposite of how the world works! More shocking yet, these upside down messages are dramatically enacted in the story of Easter, where love triumphs over violence, hope is born through surrender, and death is swallowed up in life.

Some of us are at a place where these revolutionary messages and this incredible story inspire excitement and

joy at an alternative way of living. For others of us, right now they make no sense at all.

At Cedar Ridge we treasure everyone's journey. The reflections acknowledge the rich variety of viewpoints within our community, and challenge each of us to explore new ways of thinking. We encourage you to listen to or read the reflections meditatively, opening yourself to God's presence, and daring—if only for a moment—to dream of heaven on earth.

Visit the current series page on the website to listen online or download a copy to read: <https://www.crcc.org/what-were-doing-this-month/>

A Look Inside the Lenten Challenge Groups

Racial Justice and Raising Kids: Let's Talk About It, By Sarah Clark



Sarah Clark, together with Deanna French and Mike MacDonald, will lead a challenge group to explore racism in the context of raising children--as parents, teachers, grandparents or other care-givers.

One thing guardians, parents and teachers have in common – we were all kids once.

If you've attended a Cedar Ridge activity (e.g., workshop or book club) related to exploring racial justice issues over the past several years, you have likely reflected on some of your individual experiences related to race and racism. This includes aspects of what you learned and experienced as a child within your family, school or community.

Until now, we have not explored the other side of the equation: being an adult raising kids in a world where racism is pervasive. We know the job of helping to raise kids is not just reserved for parents—guardians, extended family, teachers, and others in a community are all involved.

Our Lenten challenge group formed in response to questions that came up from others at Cedar Ridge and amongst our racial justice team. Black parents sharing their childhood experiences and their kids' current experiences. White parents sharing their experiences and asking questions about how do I raise my kids so they can better understand racism? We also recognize there is a wide range of family compositions and experiences in our Cedar Ridge community, and where we live in the DMV area, including multi-ethnic, multicultural families. Since it has been a while since many of us adults were kids, this challenge group is a response to the need to do more and do better to address the challenges in the world that kids experience today.

Please join us if you want to talk with other adults about understanding and addressing racism as you help raise children. Over three weeks we'll have highly interactive conversations where we share resources and support each other in our journeys. This includes sharing some information related to how and when kids develop their understanding of "race" and racism, and exploring how to address the inequitable systems kids grow up in. Considering there are no easy answers, we look forward to learning together.

When my child was very young, I read research that showed a difference between what white parents thought they were teaching their children about race and what the kids were learning. The white parents in the research meant well, but they were surprised that their approaches did not translate into children without prejudice or who understood racism. This reminded me of what I learned in the predominantly white towns where I grew up. The simplified version is: be nice, don't notice difference, and don't use certain words to describe people.

Here I am several decades later—a white woman parenting a 16-year-old who identifies herself as mixed, and I'm married to an African American man. While it is an understatement to say that what I learned about racism as a child is inadequate, my family and the churches I grew up in instilled values of openness and curiosity, and provided experiences that helped me to explore and learn about the world. This helpful foundation launched me down many paths that helped me to grow and continue to find ways to listen and learn. One of those paths led me to marrying Hubert! Through our differences and commonalities, I continue to find myself learning and growing in our lifelong journey of parenting in a multi-ethnic family. The learning is a non-stop process. I look forward to continuing to learn and grow in this area with many of you. ●

A Conversation on Contemplation By Kate Thomas and Jonathan Freeman-Coppadge



As part of CRCC's Lenten challenge series, Kate and Jonathan will be facilitating a group on contemplative prayer. The main focus will be spending intentional contemplative space together as a group—in simple silence, making art messes, and Comment end being outdoors. We sat down to talk about our own experiences and what we're hoping for the group.

Kate: Jonathan, how would you describe contemplative prayer?

Jonathan: I always go back to Mother Teresa's response to

Dan Rather when he asked her, "What do you say to God when you pray?" "Nothing. Mostly I just listen," she said. "What does God say to you?" Rather pursued. "Nothing. He just listens," she responded. Sometimes that reciprocal listening feels just as paradoxical as it sounds. But if I'm able to sit patiently in the paradox without trying to resolve it or fill the silence, sometimes I attain a depth of simple being that I didn't plan or manufacture. Some call this "practicing presence," and that feels right. It also takes the pressure off me to "make something happen" in contemplative prayer. It's not my job to pray "successfully." My only task is to remain present and open to God's open presence.

Kate, where are you now with your contemplative practice? What are you currently yearning for or striving for?

Kate: For many years, the inside of my mind felt like a high-speed highway with heavy traffic and loud honking. I've spent a lot of time trying to learn how to slow down and let God guide things. This is still a daily struggle!

Contemplative prayer has been a slow and steady reminder to loosen my grip a little, and ease into God's pace. This kind of prayer feels more like a Sunday afternoon drive with wind in my hair and the warm, bright sun shining down. Lately I've noticed that I lean toward contemplative practices where my hands are still engaged in activity. I'm yearning for more Sabbath; simple, quiet space where God and I can just spend time together.

Jonathan, I'd love to hear about a time of your life that pulled you toward spending more open, contemplative space with God.

Jonathan: When I think back on the contemplative experiences I've had, one of my first stands out. It happened while I was in college and really trying to explore other Christian traditions that I had been ignorant or suspicious of. St. Mary's Catholic Church in Annapolis was right down the street, and I took to visiting their prayer chapel at all hours. One particular night during Lent, I attended a praying of the rosary structured around readings of the passion and crucifixion, interspersed with music and silence. I sat down self-consciously and began to imitate those around me, mumbling Hail Marys and Our Fathers like a clumsy Protestant, listening and waiting.

From the scriptures, Jesus said, "It is finished," and breathed his last. And then we waited. And when we began again to recite "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee...", something happened that I can only describe as spiritual sight. In my mind I suddenly saw Jesus hanging on the cross, but I saw him from below. I saw him as Mary

would have seen him when she sat at the foot of the cross next to John, her new spiritual son. It was as if I was transported through a gap in space-time to that cosmic instant when the Universal Christ and the temple veil were torn. I saw and felt Jesus' death not intellectually or theologically but personally and relationally through Mary's point of view. I don't think my experience that night was because I did anything "right." I think, if anything, I was just unusually open to whatever the experience would be. And what it turned out to be was something that will never leave me.

Kate, have you ever struggled to embrace the experience of contemplative prayer?

Kate: My first silent retreat at CRCC was petrifying. How can I simply be silent for hours on end??? I would come well-prepared with books, journals, and prayer exercises. But how would I know if I was doing it right???

It took me some time (more than one silent retreat) to take the onus off myself and be willing to step into the flow of God's grace. Yes, I may just feel like I'm wandering around on the property, waiting for something to happen. And really, I am. But in the midst of that, moments of wonder start to arise. Often the deepest most meaningful experiences and lessons come from these times that we're willing to see God's vision for our lives. ●

Listening in Nature, By Melanie Griffin



Melanie Griffin, and Charles and Hannah Guedenet are co-leading a Lenten Challenge Group that focuses on connecting with God and ourselves through nature. The group will share stories of experiencing God in the natural world, and spend time exploring and contemplating the springtime wonders of our church property. Using the themes of earth, air, fire, and water, the group will learn some simple practices to help carry a sense of stillness, awareness, mindfulness, and celebration back into our busy lives.

I love Lent. A season that encourages me to clear my mind and declutter my schedule so that I can rest and reflect? You don't have to tell me twice. Such simplicity is usually reserved for major snowstorms and the serious flu.

One of my favorite things about Cedar Ridge is that we value stillness and silence, prioritizing "being" over "doing." Then when we're busy with our "doings," our efforts come

from a place of healthy centeredness instead of frenzied agitation. Many spiritual practices help us set aside busyness and focus on God's presence, including fasting, meditation, and body and breath prayers. (Yoga, anyone?) Yet one of the best and most accessible practices often gets overlooked because it's so simple: Go outside.

Yup, put on your jacket, open the door, and step out into God's glorious creation. Dozens of studies show that being outside is good for our mental and physical health—simply sitting quietly in a green space for thirty minutes a week lowers blood pressure and reduces instances of depression. Being in nature is also good for our spiritual health. Humans were made to be outside, we are a part of nature, and we belong in it. As we heard on Ash Wednesday, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Stardust, specifically.

In nature, we connect with our true selves, and we connect with the Divine Artist who created it all. We get a sense of perspective and order. As the Book of Romans says, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—God's eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."

This has always been true for me. I did not grow up in a religious home, didn't attend church or pray. Yet from the time I was a little girl, I've felt a loving and companionable presence in nature that I began to talk to and later came to know as God, my creator. God came to find me in the woods in New Hampshire, in the swamps of Florida, in our backyard in Maryland. Last year, one of my New Year's intentions (I gave up resolutions years ago) was to be near water more often. It's amazing how this simple practice has contributed to my peace and serenity.

By my backdoor hangs a small rustic wooden sign painted with a mountain scene. In black letters, it says, "Go outside, you silly human." Sometimes, it's that simple.

"But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; Or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In God's hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all humankind." - Job 12: 7-10, NIV ●

Help When You're Feeling Stuck Lenten Challenge Group, By Roger Sandberg



Roger Sandberg, together with Amy Rich, (both of whom are licensed clinical professional counselors) will be leading a challenge group that aims to help and support people wanting to address painful issues and behaviors in their lives. If you're feeling "stuck" emotionally, spiritually, or in your relationships, and you want to journey along with others who are feeling the same way, then this group is for you.

"The world breaks everyone,
and afterward many are strong at the broken places."
Ernest Hemingway

This quote by Ernest Hemingway beautifully describes the benefits of experiencing emotional healing in this broken world. God has put within our hearts the desire and motivation for healing, health, and wholeness. There is a sense of resilience--a belief that we can change--innate in all of us. Our challenge is to learn how to access and use this inborn desire for transformation.

Sometimes, despite our longing for change, we can "feel stuck." We experience stagnation in our emotional or spiritual life, or in our relationships with others. We resolve to be different, we try to be different, but nothing seems to change. This sense of being "stuck" often results in feelings of pain or fear, or in unhealthy behaviors.

If we are honest, most of us "feel stuck" at certain times in our lives. Often we are aware when this is the case, but sometimes we fail to recognize that we are stagnating, and it takes others to notice and shine a light on our lack of change.

A client I worked with a number of years ago became very stuck on the notion of whether or not their life was meaningful. They had difficulty seeing that their life had counted for much. As we worked together, they began to lean into what God and important people in their life had to say about their impact. Through talking about their struggles with someone they trusted, allowing themselves to feel their emotions (sadness/pain, and fear), and beginning some contemplative practices, including Mindfulness, the Welcoming Prayer, Centering Prayer, and Lectio Divina, they were able to connect intimately with Jesus, gain perspective, and realize that life had, in fact, been meaningful for them. From time to time they have struggled with this question of

meaning, but by connecting with others and with Jesus in a very intimate way, they have continued to live an “unstuck” life.

The aim of this group is to provide a safe place to identify what being stuck looks like and feels like in the particulars of our own lives. We will support and encourage one another through nonjudgmental listening, and will together explore various strategies for becoming “unstuck.” We will look at the importance of stillness, mindfulness, solitude and rest,

as well as active practices that help bring healing and transformation.

The Ernest Hemingway quote at the beginning of this article speaks to me personally. Others have cared for me and supported me in becoming “strong at the broken places.” It is my desire to support those who want to address the brokenness that assails all of us living in this complex, complicated world. Amy and I invite you to join us as we journey together. ●

A Note from Board Member, Jennifer Hair



I’m a doer by nature: a list-making, party-planning, organizing, executing, results-driven person. Many of my weeks feel like a highly choreographed juggling routine to manage the responsibilities of co-

parenting two young children, being a supportive wife, working a full-time job, running a household, etc. I realize this feeling of busyness is not unique to me, as many others (particularly in my life stage) have shared a similar sentiment. While I derive a strong sense of satisfaction in caring for my family and “getting things done,” the struggles and pressures of this routine can be exhausting. And at times, it’s easy to lose sight of the bigger picture. Without regularly carving out time for relaxation, reflection, and prayer, I’ve found that priorities can quickly feel out of balance.

Enter Cedar Ridge. I discovered Cedar Ridge about seven years ago, at a time in my life when I was searching for a supportive community to help me reconnect with God. I immediately felt that Cedar Ridge offered a different spiritual experience compared to any other church I had previously attended. So I wanted more! Through participation in various projects and ministries over the years, I have learned that serving others helps me to feel more connected to my true self, to others in the community, and to God. Equally important for me has been taking advantage of Quiet Days, practicing contemplative prayer strategies, and learning to be still amid all the noise of daily life. Sunday mornings at Cedar Ridge have become an important respite, a time to remove distractions and re-center myself on the most important priorities.

A quote recently stuck with me as a personal mantra: “The grass is greener where you water it.” In keeping with that idea, I have made a conscious effort to be more selective and mindful about how I spend my time. Investing time and energy into Cedar Ridge has paid dividends toward my mental health and my overall feeling of connectedness – both to God and the local community. So when I was approached to serve on the Board of Trustees at Cedar Ridge, I didn’t feel as though the commitment would be just one more thing to add to a never-ending to-do list, but, rather, a wonderful opportunity to dig deeper into an organization, mission, and group of people I care deeply about. I feel truly honored to have been selected to serve on the Board. When the secretary position was announced, of course I volunteered to fill that role—why not add more list-making and organizational tasks to the mix?! As I begin my service as Board Secretary, I am excited to become more involved in the important decisions facing our church community and to develop deeper bonds with another group of people who love this church and want it to flourish just as much as I do! ●

Pictured on the right (and above), Jennifer volunteering on the farm with friends and family.



GUAT'S UP

A Decade of Listening, Learning and Co-working.

By: Bryan Peterson



In the fall of 2010, a small team of representatives from Cedar Ridge touched down in Guatemala, eager to explore the possibility of establishing a relationship with the town of Ipala in the southeastern part of the country. Cedar

Ridge staff member Patsy Fratanduono together with Dayna Kranker and Vernon Archer, the mayor of Riverdale Park, were there to check out how we might piggyback on that community's sister city relationship with Ipala. Their expedition was putting feet to a thoughtful, prayerful, and vision-inspired process that resulted in the decision to make Guatemala our international focus.

Since that time, the plight of Guatemalans and other Latin Americans has made its way into international headlines and has been the subject of much debate in the U.S. But also during the past decade, the connection between Cedar Ridge and Ipala has blossomed. 99 Cedar Ridge attendees have ventured to the Central American town of 20,000, and several Ipaltecos have visited Cedar Ridge. Our initial and ongoing conversations with community leaders and volunteer partners led to our current focus on projects addressing educational and healthcare needs as a means of pursuing economic justice.



In cooperation with CIDHER (the partner organization we established early on), Cedar Ridge has funded the construction of 7 homes for vulnerable families, provided infrastructure support for several local

schools, purchased lesson books for dozens of students,

helped establish a self-sustaining computer school for low-income youth, furnished over 200 "smokeless" stoves, and funded scholarships for up to 60 adolescents each year. We've seen over 35 of those students, most of whom would have been unable to continue school past the sixth grade, graduate from high school. Just as importantly, we've established lasting relationships with a number of senior adults, English teachers and learners, restauranteurs, government employees, firefighters, environmental workers, school directors, teachers, small business owners, people with disabilities, farmers, tuc tuc drivers, along with countless children and parents. These women, men, and young people have taught us much about resilience, faith, determination, heartfelt service, resourcefulness, generosity, and gratitude.

This past year has been one of reflection on our progress, and planning for the future of our work in Ipala. CIDHER has expanded its membership and is in the process of upgrading its status as a non-profit



organization in Guatemala. As part of our ongoing partnership, we had invited the seven members of CIDHER to spend a week with us here at Cedar Ridge in January to strengthen our relationship and plan together for the future, but only one of them was granted a visa. As a result, plans are underway to send a small number of leaders to work with CIDHER to develop strategic priorities for the years ahead. As we continue to listen to and learn from each other, we anticipate many more years of fruitful, empowering, and sustainable labor together. ●

Photos: The 2010 Cedar Ridge Guatemala Team (top left); Chas Foster (bottom left) and Gina Richardson (bottom right) during their subsequent visits to Guatemala.



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