

MADE BY THE **KIND** CRCC COMMUNITY



THE CEDAR RIDGE

# QUARTERLY

WINTER 2023

## **A LOOK BACK ON THE LAST QUARTER**

Does Christmas seem like a lifetime ago? Check out our photos from the holiday season and beyond.

## **COMMUNITY STORIES: ACTS OF KINDNESS**

We asked – you responded. Cedar Ridge folks tell us about some acts of kindness that moved them.

## **UPDATES FROM NEAR AND FAR**

Frozen pipes, farm seedlings, Guatemalan stoves, Greencastle's food pantry, and becoming a beloved community.

**...AND SO MUCH MORE INSIDE THIS ISSUE!**



Photos on cover and page 5  
by Joshua Morganstein

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# A NOTE FROM MATTHEW



**MATTHEW DYER**  
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Welcome to our Winter Quarterly Newsletter which is all about "kindness." We began the new year with a series called "Winter Kindness," and we then we explored the First Letter of John in the Bible, which is all about love. Kindness, whether practiced personally or socially, whether expressed as justice or charity, is simply love in action. It's a tangible, practical expression of the power and mystery of love.

One of Jesus' first ever followers, Simon Peter, said that God's kindness leads to repentance. As we've said many times before, the word "repentance" means to think again or to open your mind. God's kindness towards us is transformative. As we experience it, we become more open, more tenderhearted, more enlightened, and more able to see and feel what really matters.

The author of the First Letter of John points out that "God is love," that love comes from God and through this love we experience intimate communion with God—God lives in us, and we live in God (1 John 4:11-12). But being on the receiving end of love and kindness is not the only way we are transformed. The First Letter of John also implores us to love others.



A bird feeder made  
as part of the "Winter  
Kindness" series



In this way we love God and God is made real (complete) in us, so others can see it. The beauty and mystery of God often transcends our capacity to know or understand, but the author tells us that loving others makes this mystery real and tangible so others can see God... in us!

This really is incredible—the mystery of the universe is revealed and experienced as we love one another, expressed through practical kindness. At one level this is so simple (almost mundane), and yet, as we all know, it's so hard. Love means being kind to people who we might think don't deserve it. It means giving our lives away rather than protecting our own interests. It means being vulnerable, risking losing out, letting go of control, and putting down our pretenses of competence and independence. But as we practice love in these concrete ways, we gently fall into deeper communion with God, and as we become more aware of this oneness, we are empowered to love even more.

This newsletter is full of stories from people in our own church community who have experienced the transforming power of kindness, and how it has changed them. They are stories about everyday life, but through them the mystery of God is revealed. Love opens us up, helps us see differently, and gives us creative options that just aren't apparent when we're stuck in the dead end or interminable cycle of fear and hatred. Love really is the hope of the world!



Sunrise at Cedar Ridge

# Becoming A Beloved Community



In 2022, Cedar Ridge engaged the internationally renowned racial justice consultant Rev. Brenda Girton-Mitchell to help us chart a path to greater diversity, equity and inclusion within our community. As part of this process, we are holding a series of Becoming A Beloved Community gatherings where we can receive input from our whole church on how we can make love and justice pervade every part of our life and work together. At the time of writing, four gatherings had been held, attended by 42 people.

## QUESTIONS WE'RE ASKING:

- What current strengths can we build on and leverage to become a more just and equitable community?
- What obstacles presently stand in our way from becoming that kind of community?
- What positive action can we take within our church to become a more racially equitable and inclusive community?

## MEET BRENDA:

Reverend Brenda Girton-Mitchell is a pastor on staff at Metropolitan Baptist Church. A former elementary school teacher and President of the Indianapolis Education Association, Brenda was appointed by President Obama as the Director of the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the U.S. Department of Education in 2010. She is the Founder and President of Grace and Race Ministries, Inc., a ministry dedicated to promoting leaders to dismantle racism and advance racial reconciliation. Brenda and her husband James currently reside in Silver Spring.



# ACTS OF KINDNESS



Following on from our series *Winter Kindness*, we asked attendees at the Creative Cup Coffeehouse to tell us about an act of kindness that was meaningful to them.



I was riding my bike home from the wharf, following another cyclist. He stopped and pointed out a bald eagle that I had not seen. Grateful, I thanked God for the natural beauty of this world—and for the kindness of the stranger in showing me.

At bedtime, Baba, Jacob and I play *Wander Home* together. This is fun before I fall asleep.



I was at work and a frazzled secretary was covering for her colleague and doing her own job. I left a sticky note on her computer screen saying she is doing such a great job, and thanking her for all she does with a smiley face. I felt so thankful, appreciative and happy after she told me it helped her through the day.



At my AA meeting this week, a young man brought a beautiful long winter coat with a fur-lined hood, and gave it to a woman who was new, and coming from rehab. He said his grandmother had died, and he was taking care of her things, and the woman was just the same size as his grandma. I was touched by the thoughtfulness of this young tough guy who rarely spoke, and thought how people really notice each other, and care.

When my mother-in-law passed away, my wife's church provided lunch after the funeral. I felt very grateful—it was such a kind thing to do.



Mom told me she had stage IV pancreatic cancer. There is no cure and it is inoperable. People all over are praying for her and for us. I feel blessed to have the power of prayer, and overwhelmed with gratefulness for friends to pray with us and for us.

I was feeling sad and lonely and I said so on Facebook. I said I needed chocolate and flowers. The next day, there was a knock at the door and a guy delivered a beautiful bouquet from a Facebook friend from church. We didn't even know each other well. It was incredibly kind, and made me feel seen and accompanied in my grief.



When we had tollbooths, I would sometimes pay for the car behind me. Sometimes I could hear the person argue because they did not pay—then race and honk a "thank you." It felt good to bless a stranger.



*Paul*



*James*

When a friend drops stuff at school, I pick it up. I know I should help because it's not fun, but it is nice.

## WINTER KINDNESS PROJECTS



We packed 60 winter kits for people experiencing homelessness...



and made pinecone feeders for hungry birds and animals.

# FROM THE BOARD



**JENNIFER HAIR**  
Board Chair

## KINDNESS FROM UNEXPECTED PLACES

"Be kinder than necessary, because everyone you meet is fighting some kind of battle." That quote – perched on my desk in a simple wooden sign – serves as a daily mantra: choose kindness. For me, kindness is about human connection. It's expressing love by elevating others to make them feel seen, heard, and valued.

Kindness comes from unexpected places. Last summer, my employer abruptly announced substantial layoffs and restructuring plans. My entire team was impacted; we would lose our jobs, along with nearly 1,000 of our coworkers. While many of my colleagues were forced out immediately, I was given the option to stay on for a few months along with some others. The transition period stirred up many emotions as I grappled with the uncertainty of "what's next?", yet it was also a time of unprecedented kindness and support. A few examples:

A retired leadership coach (and company alum) heard of the layoffs and immediately offered her career coaching services to whoever might benefit, free of charge. I eagerly took advantage of this opportunity. Over many phone conversations and email exchanges, my new coach helped me target what I was looking for in my next job and learn how to market myself accordingly. Moreover, beyond the shared advice and wisdom, I discovered a lovely human being – a kind, encouraging, and funny woman who was



genuinely invested in my success. We connected in a much deeper way than I had ever expected, and we still keep in touch.

My boss was another source of extraordinary kindness. For reasons I never fully understood, she was directed to depart the company immediately when the layoffs occurred. Unable to shepherd her team of 45 through the transition period, she instead dedicated her time to helping from afar. She quickly leveraged social media to assemble a support network: we shared job leads, assisted with resume editing, wrote letters of recommendation, and served as professional references for one another. The resulting spirit of camaraderie was immense; the entire group was genuinely excited whenever any of its members officially landed their next job.

Another example of kindness came during my last week of work. I found a package on my doorstep containing a beautiful floral arrangement, energy crystals (symbolizing strength and abundance), and the best gift of all: a card with personal, handwritten messages of love and encouragement from each of my four co-managers. What's noteworthy is that these four live in California, Texas, Wisconsin, and Minnesota – so my card first separately traveled to each of them to pen their messages before it arrived in my hands. My heart was full.

To be sure, being laid off was stressful, uncertain, and brought many challenges with it. But, due to these acts of kindness, among many others, the experience was transformed into something positive. My new coach, departing boss, and former colleagues reminded me that human connection is deeply powerful and that kindness has a beautiful ripple effect: kindness breeds more kindness. Receiving, witnessing, and participating in acts of kindness fuels my sense of hope for the future.



# EVENTS ROUND UP



## CHRISTMAS AT THE BARN

We welcomed about 250 people to kick off the holiday season with us, with fire pits and s'mores making, a Santa's grotto, festive hay wagon rides, cookie decorating, fair-trade gift shopping, Santa's workshop, music and refreshments.





## ADVENT QUIET DAY

Over a dozen people spent the day experiencing God's presence through prayer exercises, silent mediation, and walking the labyrinth.

## CHRISTMAS EVE

Mulled wine and cookies, candle-lit carols, a children's choir, and a falling Advent wreath that *almost* proved disastrous!



## BURST PIPES

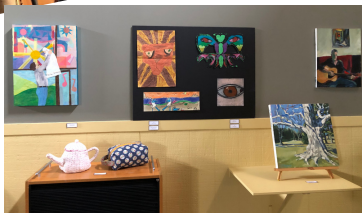
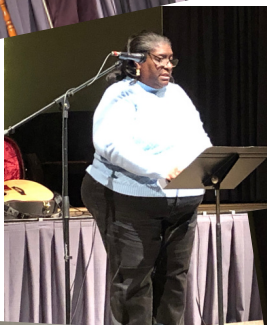
We dodged the fire, but succumbed to burst pipes and flooding.





# CREATIVE CUP COFFEEHOUSE

55 people came out to enjoy the creative contributions of 15 artists and 14 performers over coffee and desserts.



# FROM THE CASTLE



## **Greencastle Elementary School**

*The Castle ~ Home of the Noble Knights!*

*Where Everyone is Respectful, Responsible, and Ready to Learn!*

Thanks to your generous donations, we continued to keep the food pantry at Greencastle Elementary School well stocked with breakfast items, snacks, ready meals, and food staples. To donate, please sign up via our website at [www.crrc.org/serve](http://www.crrc.org/serve).

A financial donation from the Giant grocery store in Burtonsville supplemented our funds, and we gave \$20 gift cards to each of the 20 supported families in December. A couple of the notes of thanks are below.



*Dear everyone who has helped us with everything, we appreciate it from the bottom of our hearts, we appreciate the work you do for us, we genuinely enjoy what you provide for us ongoing and a Thanks isn't enough but Thanks a Million. ~ Family with a disabled parent and 10 kids.*

*Thank you so much , I truly appreciate . Happy Holidays. God bless you all. ~ Undocumented family with two children.*



On Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Day, we held a "Policing in Schools" event to explore the controversy around police officers' presence in public schools. We watched the documentary "On These Grounds," discussed the local situation, and engaged in advocacy.

# GUAT'S UP?

## NUMBERS AND NAMES



**BRYAN PETERSON**

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As I have been reflecting on Cedar Ridge's long-term commitment to advancing economic justice amongst the most vulnerable people in Ipala, Guatemala, some numbers have jumped out and help tell the story of our partnership there.

**2009** – our first exploratory trip to Ipala, during which we solidified our commitment to the town

**\$270,000** – the amount of money Cedar Ridge has invested in direct support to the people of Ipala

**5** – new homes constructed

**579** – annual scholarships granted, allowing low-income middle and high school students to continue their education

**73** – students who have graduated from high school thanks in part to funding from Cedar Ridge

**13** – school facilities enhanced, impacting thousands of students over the years

**1** – CIDHER Computer Center established, offering low-cost computer training for hundreds of students each year

**85** – approximate number of people who have received needed medications or medical tests



**20** – families who now have electricity because of solar panels installed on their roofs

**170** – smokeless stoves furnished to increase efficiency and reduce respiratory illness

**99** – individuals from Cedar Ridge who have traveled to Ipala, 41 of whom have traveled more than once

These are just some of the numbers that quantify the impact our community, in partnership with ACIDHER in Ipala, is making on this small central American town. But numbers tell only part of the story. There are thousands of people behind these statistics, one of whom is Alejandrina Perez.

One of our first graduates, Alejandrina has worked in a bank for the last five years. While working, she has also completed seven semesters at a local university. When she earns her degree, her desire is to run a business – her own dessert and pastry shop. She is grateful for the education she received and the personal connection she made with people at Cedar Ridge during our visits. It's young women like her who inspire us to continue to follow Jesus and love our Guatemalan neighbors!



# SPRINGING FORTH

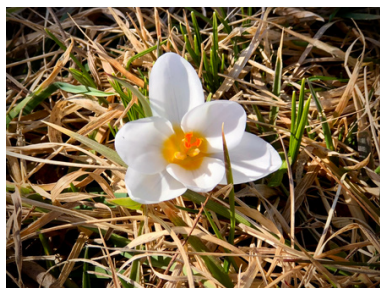


**RUTH CAMPBELL**  
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With the warm temperatures we've been having lately, it is easy to forget that it is still winter. Our church property seems to be already waking from its slumber: the birds are singing, the crocus are blooming, and the trees are popping out buds!

Ash Wednesday marks the start of the farm season at Cedar Ridge – once Lent begins, we can plant seeds under our UV lights to grow seedlings for April planting.

It has become our tradition to hold the first planting day on Easter Saturday each year. We welcome dozens of local volunteers onto our half-acre farm to serve alongside us, and to celebrate once again the victory of life over death. Come and join us! Help us to collectively practice hospitality and kindness as we share our property and our vision for economic justice with our neighbors.



Jesus set many of his parables in an agricultural context, and it is obvious why. We can learn so much from nature. It bears the fingerprints of God in its beauty and miraculous vitality. The agricultural cycle teaches us patience, discipline, and faith. The soil grounds us as part of a diverse and interdependent ecosystem... Come grow with us in 2023: not just fruit and vegetables, but hearts and minds that can see the Divine at work all around us.

Join the farm team, or simply commit to showing up regularly.

- Middle and high school students – earn your community service hours with us.
- Younger kids, earn a **Cedar Ridge Junior Gardener Certificate** by covering each stage of the planting to harvesting process.

All ages and abilities are welcome. Please contact me with any questions. We look forward to seeing you out on the farm soon!

## **Kids: do you have what it takes to become a Junior Gardener? Take the quiz.**

1. What is a shovel?
  - a vegetable
  - a tool
  - a bug
2. Which makes soil a good home for plants?
  - ants
  - mold
  - worms
3. What is compost?
  - food garbage
  - cow poop
  - rocks you take out of the garden
4. How do bees help our plants?
  - they feed the flowers honey
  - they pollinate the plants to help new plants grow
  - they chase away the groundhogs

Answers are on the next page.

**Answers:**

1. a tool   2. worms   3. food garbage   4. they pollinate the plants

If you got 3 or 4 answers correct: we need your help! You have just what we need in a Junior Gardener!

If you got 1 or 2 answers correct: we would love you to come and learn with us, and become a Junior Gardener!

If you got 0 answers correct: we love how your mind works! You are one of a kind, and we'd love to meet you! Come learn to be a Junior Gardener!



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