

MADE BY THE **HOPEFUL** CRCC COMMUNITY



THE CEDAR RIDGE  
**QUARTERLY**  
WINTER 2024

**LOCATIONS  
THAT ARE  
SPECIAL**

Some of our community members share locations that are special to them.

**HOW THE FARM  
SHINES A LIGHT  
ON INJUSTICE**

Learn how our farm helps to make the world a more just place.

**LOOKING BACK  
ON THE LAST  
QUARTER**

Check out some pics from our recent community gatherings and events.

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



# DREAMS

By Langston Hughes

Hold fast to dreams  
For if dreams die  
Life is a broken-winged bird  
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams  
For when dreams go  
Life is a barren field  
Frozen with snow.

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# A NOTE FROM MATTHEW



**MATTHEW DYER**

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As a community here at Cedar Ridge, we follow many of the ancient rhythms of the traditional church calendar. We're not married to any 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 security and reassurance in 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 transformation. But there's always a

potential downside to tradition as well. 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 something up because that's what you do—we just go through the motions. Each year

there's a 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 going on a journey with Jesus as he makes his way to Jerusalem in the second part of our series on the Gospel of Mark. Last year, in part 1, we saw how most people (even his most devoted followers) didn't seem to understand or recognize who Jesus was. Finally, about halfway through the story, his disciples seem to get that he is indeed the Messiah—the One who has come to set humanity free. But in this second half of the

narrative, we'll encounter another deep misunderstanding—Jesus' messianic way is not about power, control, or dominance but about love, servanthood, and sacrifice. That's what makes Jesus the Messiah, and it surprises everyone. For me personally, this is both inspiring and challenging. I want to embody this kind of love, but I also struggle to love others well, especially those I've become accustomed to regarding as my enemies. I want to be a bearer of the light of hope, but when I look at all the war, injustice, hatred, and seemingly irreconcilable cultural conflict in our world, I so easily fall back into darkness and despair. But Lent is a season where I, like all of us, are invited into this tension—to honestly reflect on our frailty and mortality, and courageously lean into the love and hope of Jesus. So let's embrace this season of Lent and intentionally allow the deep love of God to produce a faithfulness that nothing can deter—just like Jesus.





# FOOD AND FARMING INJUSTICE



**RUTH CAMPBELL**  
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As I write this, we are in the middle of Black History Month, Asian New Year is tomorrow, and Ash Wednesday is just a few days away. While these three things may appear unrelated, in my (sometimes odd) mind, they are connected.

With its focus on dirt and earthiness, Ash Wednesday is my annual reminder to start preparing the seedling trays for the coming spring planting. So I venture down to the farm plot on this 60-degree February day (a sure sign the Earth is sick and running a fever) to see how well the cover crops have crowded out the thistles, and to consider what seeds to buy this year.

As I distractedly pull out a few of last season's okra plants, I am struck by how multi-cultural our farm always feels. In addition to the ethnic diversity of our volunteers, we respond differently to various crops according to their cultural associations. I think back to a Haitian family who were delighted to harvest okra as it reminded them of home, and a group of Chinese volunteers who provided advice on growing eggplants. An organization of African American women told stories of growing up picking beans in the family garden, and chided us for not growing mustard greens. A Latin American boy patiently provided the names of all the crops in Spanish while his dad harvested peppers. And a church group from the Midwest bemoaned the disappearance of homestead farms due to the economic pressures of monocropping.

People engage in agriculture all over the world, and have done so for millennia. Crop rotation was practiced as early as 6000 BCE in the Ancient Near East. Most of our fruit and vegetables were introduced from other continents and adapted to our climate through careful selection. Growing food is both a science and an artform that unites people across all kinds of divisions.



But I am also reminded of how it has been—and in so many places continues to be—a sector fueled by injustice and oppression. All over the world, people have been forced from their lands or compelled to work in harsh conditions for low wages. Here in the U.S., farms and plantations became prosperous through the agricultural knowledge, skill, and labor of enslaved Africans and their descendants for hundreds of years. Since Emancipation, Black farmers have been systematically discriminated against: in addition to violence and intimidation, they have been denied the grants and subsidies provided to White farmers, and subjected to racially targeted laws and practices, resulting in widespread land theft. In 1910, African Americans owned 16 million acres of land. Now they own less than 5 million.

Similarly, food insecurity continues to have a racial dimension. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Black and Hispanic households are twice as likely as White households to lack access to adequate food. And here in Montgomery County, Census Data indicates Black and Latino children are three times as likely to live in families earning less than the federal poverty line.

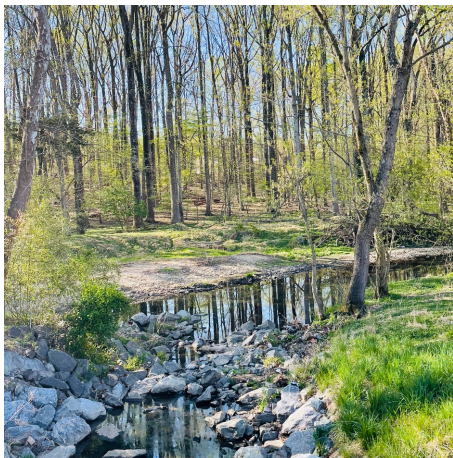
Our half-acre community garden can do little to address such profound and widespread injustice and inequity. But we can shine a light on it. Our aim is to grow awareness, as well as vegetables; to feed a commitment to justice, in addition to feeding hungry neighbors. Join us as we seek to make a difference in our world. We need farm team members who are committed to leading and supporting our community to farm our land week in, week out. You can also come out to planting days and farm nights this season—beginning on the morning of Saturday, April 6. Or contact Ruth ([ruthc@crcc.org](mailto:ruthc@crcc.org)) to learn more about the farm and ways to get involved.





# LOCATIONS THAT ARE SPECIAL

Our message series this Lent looks at various characters from Mark's Gospel as they encounter Jesus in different locations. Locations can be special places where we encounter God, remember loved ones, connect with family, or just feel more alive. Read below as several members of the Cedar Ridge community share locations that are special to them.



## Kirsy Blietz

"I love walking on the Matthew Henson trail. This is from a bridge near Turkey Branch Pkwy. The calmness that the trees and sound of water falling brings is unbelievable. After a snowfall, the sound of my boots crunching on the snow makes me feel like I'm in the middle of nowhere. Every season is special along this trail."

## Debi Qualls

"I am a lover of travel, exploring new places, meeting new people and trying foods from different countries! But what I love most is getting there - my favorite place is being above the clouds. I love being on a plane watching the ground fall away and the feeling of soaring through the air. Being in the clouds is such a heavenly experience for me."







## Pat & Dave Martinsen

“Looking today for a respite from indoor quarantine, we decided to head to a “place” we often go to for a serene experience outdoors in nature—Brookside Gardens in Wheaton, MD. Long before we knew of the Japanese practice of shinrin-yoku “forest bathing,” we suburbanites liked to escape from work/home/family pressures by taking a walk in this public garden within Montgomery County’s Wheaton Regional Park. The asphalt paths are wide enough to walk side by side should we choose to engage in conversation, or sometimes we walk a lap around the garden, getting nature into our senses before we begin to talk.

“Often, we go to Brookside Gardens even if we are not under any pressure to just take in the seasonal changes. During the COVID school-at-home years, we re-discovered the place through the eyes of our young grandchildren—who was the leader, what path would we take, what new thing would we discover? Over the years, there have been items added to this place—a visitor center, new gardens, separate paths, a memorial, butterfly benches, and a maze. Each time we visit this place, we discover something new to us, both in nature and in ourselves. Today we discovered the buds on the Japanese Flowering Apricot tree and were reminded how fortunate we are that we are at the end of our isolation period.”

## Janet Heitkamp

“We can all love the beach! The beaches in San Diego hold a special place in my heart. For years I would go to a conference in San Diego that was designed for family to attend.



For several years, my Mom, sister (Colleen), nephews, and sister-in-law would come with me. Walking on the beach with the soothing sound of the waves and the cool sand between your toes is such a delight. The majestic evening sunsets wrapped in a cozy sweatshirt were Pacific beach traditions for us. With all the beauty, nothing, absolutely nothing, can compare with the memories of talking with those you love while walking on that glorious beach!”

## Laura Brewer-Heilig

“This photo brings me much joy because of its innocence and creativity. I am blessed to spend 3 days a week caring for my young grandchildren—one of my favorite places on earth. This is one of the many ‘masterpieces’ that my granddaughter Scarlett put together in December. She said everyone was there to celebrate Jesus's birth—including the animals on the ‘train.’ What I love is the creativity of these projects and the stories that always accompany them. I once read that children are ‘fresh from God’—still uncensored by our world, and so full of creative thought. Amen to that!”



## Joe Tonkin

“We live in a small townhouse, which means there isn’t a lot of extra room. I also like model trains, where even a modest layout can take up many, many square feet. When I bought the house 20 years ago, I started building a layout that filled over half the basement. Later I got married and had two little boys. So the train layout went away. However, I enjoy working with my hands and making things. In the corner of our small utility room, I have been able to keep a workbench. Recently I re-organized everything and made it a nicer place. It gives me a place where I can have a bit of escape. For me, it really does give me some peace and rejuvenation. Another aspect is that Patrick will often come to watch what I am doing, so my workspace helps do some Dad/son bonding.



“The other place that is important to me (and my family) is in the forest. When I was only about 2 years old, my parents bought an old hunting cabin in Pennsylvania. It’s about 2 hours away off I-81 between Hagerstown and Harrisburg. We would go up for long weekend

vacations many times a year. About 15 years ago, the old cabin finally became uninhabitable. In its place, my parents had a modern log home custom-built. Not long after it was finished, my Dad passed away due to cancer. I think he enjoyed being up there more than anyone else. My Mom continued to go up, often by herself, for a few more years until she also passed away. So now Rachel and I (and James and Patrick) try to get up there a few times a year. Rachel really likes to sit on the large porch and read and watch nature. James will occasionally take the camera and go off to take pictures of birds. Patrick enjoys exploring in the forest. I, myself, just enjoy the time to have some extended peace and quiet.”



# FROM THE BOARD



**BEN SANDBERG**

My family moved from California to Maryland when I was seven years old. We quickly started looking for a church to attend and got connected to Cedar Ridge Community Church (CRCC). My brother Zach and I grew up in the children, middle school, and high school programs. I went off to college at the University of Maryland College Park and then found myself back at CRCC. My parents continued to attend, as well as some close friends and mentors. Now, at the age of 30, I have been attending the church in some form or fashion for approximately 23 years. My wife's parents became acquainted with my parents at CRCC, before we had even started dating. Yasmeen and I got married on the church's beautiful grounds, and we attended several of our best friends' weddings here as well. I've had, and continue to have, really important people in my life attend CRCC—men and women who I look up to and seek to emulate. I have many fond memories that are connected to this church, including my two trips to Ipala, Guatemala.

I feel that my spiritual journey has evolved to align with many of the church's values. Namely, that life is a journey and that the journey itself is the destination. We are all works in progress.

What draws me to this church is the community's willingness to open itself to people from all walks of life and the desire to tackle difficult issues in our





society. We will drop the ball, we will mess up, and that's ok. But I think Jesus calls us to humble ourselves, realize that we lack understanding, and seek to grow. We can reach out and lift others up, the way we all need to be lifted up at one time or another.

More and more, these are the beliefs that I am drawn to. That in reality, I know much less than I think I do. I think and hope that God cares less about my theological beliefs, and more about showing Christ-like love to those around me. That's a vision I am drawn back to, even when it can feel nebulous and difficult to fully embrace. I've found that's comforting to me, because if life is a journey, then we are on the path together, figuring it out and supporting each other along the way. I'm excited to serve on the board to continue to support these beliefs and help them continue to be a reality here at CRCC. I'm excited to learn from the other board members and see where the journey takes me.



# EVENTS ROUND UP

## Christmas at the Barn

We hosted our community on our property to kick off the holiday season 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 meditation, and walking the labyrinth.



## Christmas Eve Service

Mulled wine and cookies, carols by candle light, and a full-house made the Christmas Eve service special.



## MLK Day Event

After being postponed because of the snow, we gathered on Sunday after our morning service to learn more about the unjust systems that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline.



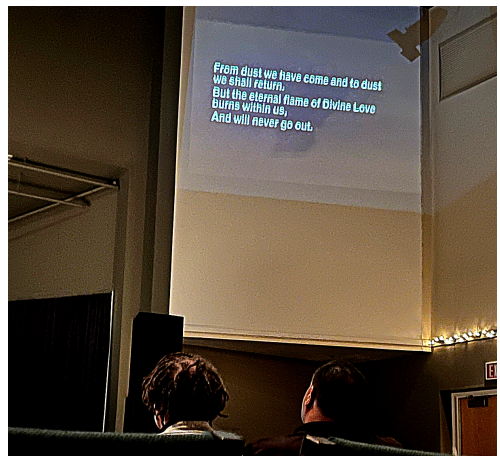
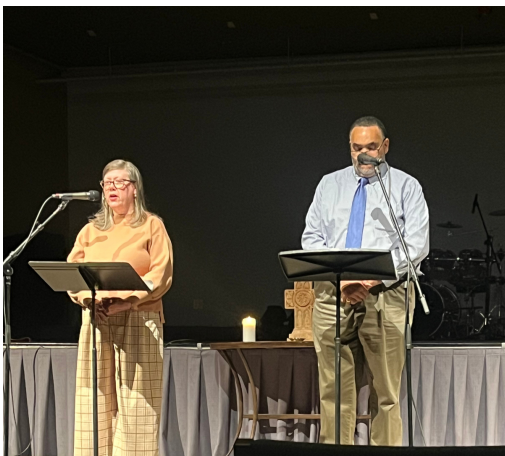
# Creative Cup Coffeehouse

60 people came out to enjoy the artistic gifts of our community.



## Ash Wednesday

We gathered to mark the beginning of the season of Lent with scripture reading, silence, and the imposition of ashes.





# SUPPORTING GREENCASTLE



**RUTH CAMPBELL**  
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We began partnering with Greencastle Elementary over 15 years ago—back when Lady Bird Johnson was still alive and before the first *Transformers* movie. We started with drives for school supplies, Thanksgiving baskets and Christmas gifts for low-income families, movie tickets and treats for teachers, and service projects to beautify the property. As our understanding of the situation at Greencastle deepened, we engaged in advocacy to address some of the systemic issues around underfunding—hosting workshops, sending postcards and emails, and attending rallies.

Greencastle was granted Title I status three years ago, making it eligible for additional federal resources, but the needs also continue to grow. Official capacity is 582 students, but current enrollment is 704. 80% of students receive free or reduced-price meals. Almost 20% receive special education, and 16% are emergent multilingual learners. Like many of the *de facto* segregated schools in our area, less than 5% of students are White.

Growing needs and staffing changes have meant a shift in our focus from targeted support to 30 families through the Linkages to Learning program, to assisting students' families throughout the school. With more organizations now providing non-perishable foods, we responded to Greencastle's request to provide much-needed toiletries. Through the generosity of our community, we deliver six 50-gallon storage bins (plus several other bags and boxes) of toiletry and sanitation items each month. You can sign up to donate on our website: [www.crcc.org/serve](http://www.crcc.org/serve).

This coming year, we hope to again collaborate on service projects, provide fresh farm produce during the summer months, and host families on our property for games, pizza and ice cream, nature walks, and fire pits. Thank you for your help in making this possible.

# GUATEMALA UPDATE



**MATTHEW DYER**  
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For close to 15 years, we have enjoyed a beautiful friendship with the people of Ipala in Guatemala. Our intent has been to partner with them to bring about a more just, healthy, and loving way of living, both in Ipala and right here in our own community too. Our friends have shared so much love with us and brought us so much joy. Their lives have challenged and inspired us, leaving an indelible mark on our community.

Initially, our partnership was quite informal—we worked through a small group of leaders from diverse walks of life who helped plan and coordinate our shared projects in Ipala. From the beginning, we have sought to empower our partners to act in ways they felt best for the good of their town and the surrounding municipality of villages. Most of our work has been in education. We currently provide scholarships for 53 students who would otherwise not be able to attend school, and we have supported a variety of projects to improve the infrastructure of local schools in general. We've also partnered with projects focused on housing and health, and helped establish a computer training center that is now economically self-sufficient.

There have been some exciting and encouraging recent developments. In 2021 our partner leadership team in Ipala became a formal non-profit (which goes by the acronym ACIDHER). This has empowered them to grow and develop their scope of operation and to seek out funding from other sources too. They have turned their attention to helping some of the poorest households access electrical power through the installation of solar panels. Many of these are in the surrounding villages, and they have worked

with local councils within those villages to identify the families most in need of support. Cedar Ridge provided solar panels for 10 households in 2022, a further 13 last year, and this month we sent funds for 25 more as a result of the incredible generosity our community expressed through our year-end giving campaign. Without these panels, the families have no source of electricity, so these installations have been deeply transformative.

But perhaps even more encouraging is that ACIDHER has been engaging resources through other avenues. These include another non-profit in the US as well as a recent application to a US foundation for a grant that would enable ACIDHER to install solar panels in all the remaining homes without electricity in the villages throughout the whole municipality of Ipala. Our support of these earlier pilot projects and their proven success has created a strong basis for this application, and let's all pray for a great outcome.

From the outset of our friendship, we have focused on the empowerment of our partners and the sustainability of projects, so these are all very encouraging developments, for which we can thank God and celebrate with the people of Ipala.





# NATURE'S JUSTICE



**KIM BOLDEN**

In the heart of nature's embrace,  
Where the sun kisses the earth's face,  
Stories unfold replete with God's grace.

Listen, my friends,  
Do you hear it?  
The whistles in the trees,  
The wind swirls like a song on repeat.

For in the branches echo the call for justice.  
In the rustle of leaves, a tail of unrest  
Creation knows both praise and protest.

Busy like bees  
Yet unhurried,  
Changing time  
While marking time.

To be seen just as they see  
How the land is plundered for the sake of greed.  
Nefarious devices divide people  
Of blood and bone  
And renders them without a home.

So the land cries out.  
The beasts of the fields, the skies, and the seas  
In orchestra lament, each soul denied.  
It cries for justice of all kinds.

May mountains rise, barriers fall,  
As nature calls, "Inclusion for all!"  
The lioness roars, fierce and bold,  
For the voiceless to be heard.  
Justice for both young and old

As justice rolls down as a mighty river,  
May the waters that rush  
Cleanse, grow, and deliver us  
From our blind spots, biases, and stigmas.

Imagine a tree with branches wide,  
Each leaf a soul, where none is denied.  
Healing's canopy, shelter for every hue,  
Nature's plea, "Let justice renew!"

All people gathered from all nations.  
Protected realms where love reigns,  
A place where harmony sustains.

Here I stand, I testify.  
Birth from different lands and different sands  
With grit that chafes and smooths,  
Yet grafted into bloom where I am planted.  
Amidst the blooms of resilience, justice takes root,  
Spreading the pollen of peace.

Making space for wonder  
Holding space for others  
Taking. up. space.  
Helping others find their voice;  
Lending their voice to proclaim  
Earth should be a sanctuary for all.



These Dutch Crocus flowers blooming on our property are a sign that Spring is just around the corner.



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