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“...that they may be
encouraged in heart
and united in love...”
Colossians 2.2 (NIV)

October 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

On October 1, 2019, I began a new call to a small congregation in a village of 1100 in rural Ohio. As we were getting to know one another, we were doing good to resume the “normal” ministries of Sunday School, Bible Study, and Confirmation. I was building trust so I could begin trying new things. Less than 6 months later, Covid struck.

During this time of Covid, I have been trying a lot of new things that, a year ago, would have been way outside my comfort zone. One of those things is Facebook Live. Now, every Tuesday and Thursday morning I offer some thoughts for the day.

As we look forward to Thanksgiving, Advent and Christmas, things will look very different. We will need to try new things. Sometimes we just need to bounce ideas to find something that excites us.

In Philippians 4, we read Paul’s encouragement...

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Do not worry. When we are the ones who are supposed to have the answers and ideas, that can be a difficult task. I know personally that I am weary. I am tired of thinking through all of the Covid-protocols, keeping up with research, maintaining day to day activities while planning ahead. I have also come to realize that, as tired as I am of Zoom, I need those online seminars and workshops more than ever.

The Northwestern Ohio Synod offered a weekend with Pastor Michael Beck, a Methodist pastor who lives in Florida. Their congregation, Wildwood UMC, which began as a dozen or so people, now has more than a dozen “expressions” of church. They are the church at tattoo parlor church, the yoga church, and, my favorite, the burrito restaurant church! People who are passionate about the love of God, go out into the world to share that love.

Pastor Beck said that as they were first meeting at the burrito restaurant, one day it was him and his wife, eating burritos and no one came. But they didn’t give up, they kept inviting people. Before long, they had outgrown the space and had to find another restaurant.

One of the members in his 80’s, said he didn’t do anything but his Saturday visits to the dog park. But one day, he offered to arrive a few minutes early if anyone wanted to pray. A few weeks later they added a Jesus story. Now, each week, while the dogs run and play, they have worship.

I also have been participating in the free online offerings of the PRC – Practical Resources for Churches. Our team has discovered that often times there are not a lot of new ideas but ideas that we have forgotten, ideas that can be resurrected and adapted. Thanks to one of these webinars, our team is excited about our Sunday School Christmas Worship service. Another team has created a list of how we will make Christmas Eve special without the usual traditions. One person even suggested that this might be the start of new traditions – like going outside with candles to sing *Silent Night*.

Paul reminds us to begin with prayer. So, let me encourage you. As you are preparing for this fall season, remember you are not alone. Gather your people and pray. Invite the congregation to pray for your faith formation team, your staff and teachers. Pray, encourage one another, be kind to yourself and remember to start with your WHY.

My prayer for you, wherever you are is that...

⁷...*the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Blessings on your journey,
Pastor Juli Lejman-Guy, President