



Buffalo United Methodist

May 2020

1000 30th Street NE
Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52402



Joy, Junk, and Jesus

by Bishop Laurie Haller

If you don't have a sense of humor, the coronavirus life may not be for you. That's because every day is a new adventure in patience, fortitude, and creativity. It's been five weeks since the Iowa United Methodist Conference Center closed, and life at home has fallen into a new routine. For the last four years, I've yearned for less travel and more time at home. Now that I have it, I'm finding all sorts of projects in between multiple Zoom and Teams meetings every day.

Granted, we're now beginning to hear talk about a lessening of restrictions and a gradual return to work when there are firm indications of a decline in new cases and assurances of a robust testing program. However, that won't happen for a while. Schools have now been closed in Iowa for the rest of the school year. And we dare not downplay the seriousness of the Pandemic, including the economic toll on many of our businesses, restaurants, and churches; the number of deaths that increase every day; the risks that our front-line workers experience every day; and mental health issues that arise from depression, isolation, and fear.

A few weeks ago, I was invited by Becca Nims, Director of Youth Ministry at St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Cedar Rapids, to be a "Mystery Guest" at their Wednesday afternoon Zoom Hangout. Because school is not in session, this gives youth a chance to be together virtually during the week.

After introductions, we played a game where we had to submit something funny or unusual about ourselves to Becca, and then everyone had to guess to whom it applied. "I partially amputated my finger." "I have five shelves of legos in my room." "I have twenty pairs of shoes." "I have an obsession with Lil Spooky in On My Block on Netflix." "I love to run 5K's." "My hair caught

on fire as a kid." Even if for only a brief time, I was able to let go of my role and enjoyed the banter.

Then Becca invited the youth to offer prayer concerns and told me that every time they meet, they share "Joy, Junk, and Jesus." Where have you experienced joy? What junk or heavy loads are you carrying that you may need to let go of? And how is Jesus at work in your life? "My dad's cousin died of cancer." "I saw a family with gloves going around picking up trash in a garbage bag." "I'm grateful for technology that allows us to be together in Google Hangout." "Sam has been cancer free for two years." "Thank you for 'mom,' a woman who is supportive of all the youth."

Being together virtually with the youth was a meaningful way to observe Holy Week, which was, admittedly, a serious time because of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the preparations that our clergy and local churches were making for virtual worship on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter. What I learned from the youth is that they are being well disciplined by adults who care deeply about them.

It also prompted me to look at my own life in a different way. I am discovering that our collective enforced "time-out" because of COVID-19 can be a joy and a blessing. Right now, Gary and I connect with our children and grandchildren on Sunday evenings via Zoom. We also use WhatsApp for Family Chats during the week. I find great joy in simply hanging out with our children and grandchildren online.

We are also finding joy in reconnecting with friends we've made during the course of our lives. We had a long conversation with a mother and daughter from Oregon with whom we walked for about ten days along the El Camino in Spain last summer. And just a few days ago

we reconnected with a woman from Sicily whom we befriended during the trek. In addition, Gary and I find joy in donating to charitable causes, especially food banks, and I am making phone calls to those I am aware of who are experiencing difficulties during this time.

Working from home because of COVID-19 has also given me the opportunity to sort through all my “stuff” and decide what is junk and what I should keep. Last week I began cleaning out a room in the basement that was full of boxes that hadn’t been touched since I moved to Iowa almost three and a half years ago. Because there was little time between my election as a bishop and the move from Michigan to Iowa, I didn’t have time to sort through anything and just threw stuff into boxes.

Do you know what I found as I opened the boxes? I found Joy, Junk, and Jesus! The joy came from reading old letters, finding pictures of our three children when they were young, and rediscovering precious possessions from my childhood that I could never part with. Among the treasures that I uncovered was a “muff” that my grandmother wore a hundred years ago to keep her hands warm and a dress that I made in 7th grade sewing class and that still fits!

I also found part of a journal that I wrote during a class that I took from Henri Nouwen at Yale Divinity School called “Ministry and Spirituality.” What joy to relive my spiritual growth during that time. Although I was admitted to Yale as an organist in the Master of Music program, I continued my studies at Yale Divinity School. Nouwen’s class was a game changer for my spiritual life.

Of course, along with the joy came the difficulty of determining what among my many possessions was junk and needed to be disposed of. This included books and more books that never made it to the bookshelves in my home office and my office in the Conference Center. Sorting through books is kind of like choosing my favorite child. It’s just not possible.

I also disposed of cracked vases, knick knacks, broken picture frames, threadbare blankets, old church newsletters and church conference materials, and torn backpacks. I found my field hockey stick from high school, my very first pair of running shoes, and a precious picture of Bill and Sylvia, an older couple who took care of our children when they were growing up and Gary and I were serving separate churches.

Matthew 6:19-21 came to mind more than once. “Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and

steal them. Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don’t eat them and where thieves don’t break in and steal them. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Most of all, I found Jesus. Sorting through all the boxes of things that are precious to me, I was reminded that nothing is as important as my relationship to Jesus. I found notes of encouragement from people in every church I have served. I found some of my favorite inspirational books that guided my ministry. I found my mother’s Bible that she used growing up, and I read through several dozen journals that I have kept since 1974.

My journey with Jesus has taken me all over the world, to different ministry locations, and into the depths of my spirit. And so, I wonder.

- What does it mean to be a Christ-follower and part of one human family during COVID-19 when some racial/ethnic groups have a higher death rate than others and the poor/undocumented/uninsured do not always have the same access to health care as others?
- Will we take advantage of this time at home to do some deep soul-searching about our connection with one another around the globe?
- How will the new skills that we have learned about virtual communication help our churches to emerge stronger because of a renewed commitment to Christ and to evangelism?
- How will joy, junk, and Jesus enrich your life and faith in the coming weeks?

This article, accompanied by photographs, was posted to Bishop Haller’s blog on 20 April 2020.

Special Offerings

The special offering for May will be for the Native American Ministries. This offering nurtures mission with Native Americans and provides scholarships for United Methodist Native American seminarians. In April \$35 was collected for Golden Cross Sunday.

Primary Election, June 2

For the Primary Election in June, the voting sites in Linn County have been reduced, and the Buffalo church will not be used. Although voters in our area can vote in person at the Mt. Mercy University Graduate Center, everyone is encouraged to vote via absentee ballot. The request form can be obtained from the Auditor’s office by calling 319-892-5300, option 1.

The Buffalo Church Calendar

Until further notice, all church activities at Buffalo have been canceled or postponed. Information on the resumption of Sunday worship and other ministries will be posted on the website, distributed through email, and shouted from the nearest mountain top.

Buffalo Church Website

- #1: You can check out any of Pastor Kathryn's Sunday morning pastoral messages (going back to March 29) by visiting the Pastor's page on the church website.
- #2: Recent Bison Blog postings to the church website have included the following:
- 28 April: "Top Five Biblical Patterns for Prayer in a Pandemic"
 - 17 April: "Methodist Virtual Choir Sings 'Christ the Lord is Risen Today'"
 - 13 April: "Two Easter Poems by Malcolm Guite"
 - 8 April: "Private or Family Easter Sunrise Service" (provides a model for private Sunday services at any time of the year)
- Website address: <http://buffalounitedmethodist.weebly.com/>

Our Financial Obligations

During the COVID-19 outbreak, the church still has many bills to pay. Please do not forget to mail your offering to the church address (Buffalo United Methodist Church, 1000 30th Street NE, Cedar Rapids, IA 52402) or put the envelope in the locked church mail box by the meeting room door. Thank you.

A "Thank You" and a "Thank You" and . . .

- To Gary and Judy Hackney for checking the mailbox daily & keeping an eye on the church.
- To Pat Ferguson for ringing the church bell at 10 am daily to remind us to pray for everyone affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- To Pastor Kathryn for her Sunday morning sermons and music. Keep up the good work!
- To Marlene Himes for being available when the termite inspector and fire department came to call.
- To the spring flowers that are cheery reminders of better days ahead.
- To all members of the congregation for their prayers and support of our church community.

May 2020

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness. Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for a house of defence to save me. (Psalm 31, 1-2)					1	2
3	4	5 Cinco de Mayo	6	7 National Day of Prayer	8	9
10 Mother's Day	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21 Ascension Day	22	23
24/31	25 Memorial Day	26	27	28	29	30

May Birthdays 1 – Judy Hackney 6 – Bob Marrs 7 – George Gochenouer, Pat Ferguson, Melissa Brown
 9 – Erin Terrill 29 - Larry Hartmann
Wedding Anniversary 30 – Ward & Nancy Seufferlein

Advice recently heard on NPR: "We may be in a storm, but we need to find a way to dance in the rain."

Letter from Bishop Laurie Haller (April 27, 2020)

Dear Friends,

In light of the expectation that positive cases of COVID-19 will peak in Iowa in the next few weeks, I am strongly encouraging all United Methodist churches in Iowa to refrain from in-person worship until June 1, when I will reassess. I am going beyond the Governor's recommendations despite my previously stated intention of following Governor Reynold's guidelines around worship.

My reasoning is that our first priority as disciples of Jesus Christ is to protect those who are most vulnerable, which includes the elderly, the very young, and those with underlying health conditions. Even though we all want to return to our churches and be a part of the body of Christ in person, I believe that it is more important to assure the safety of our communities from further infections.

John Wesley's Three General Rules included: Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God. In the midst of our own personal desires to get back to normal, our faith requires us to seek the good of all. By practicing good judgment and common sense and out of a concern for the welfare of our neighbor, we must continue to stay the course by being diligent around social distancing and refraining from being in large groups. At the same time, there are ample opportunities to safely engage in mission and outreach in our communities.

In the Wednesday April 29 edition of the Weekly 360°, you will find a process for staged re-opening of local churches entitled, "Incremental Reentry Process for the Iowa Annual Conference." I urge the clergy and lay leadership of every local church to read through it as you ready your congregation. [A link to this UMC document is on the UMC Connections page on the website.]

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