

# REACHING FOR CONNECTION

2024



Foundry's 30<sup>th</sup> annual Lenten Devotional  
is a Discipleship Ministry under the direction  
of Jonathan Brown, Associate Pastor and  
Director of Discipleship with lay co-leaders  
Joanne Steller, Lynn Smarte, and Elder Wellborn.

# THE TIME TO RETURN

**E**very Ash Wednesday and Lenten season, a different part of the text or liturgy draws my attention. This year, I've been laser-focused on the word "return."

*"Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart."*  
Joel 2:12 NRSV

In any season of life, it's easy for our hearts to get disconnected from God. As the hymn says, we're "prone to wander," to leave the God we love, to wander into places and habits that steal life or put distance between us and God. Today we are invited by God to re-turn, to turn **again** toward the grace of God, the mercy of God, the love of God.

There are moments when waking to a world covered in snow or the first crocus poking out of earth draws us toward wonder, gratitude and hope. On Ash Wednesday, we are ritually shaken out of distractions and reminded of God's grace, reminded that we are finite and that every day we face an important choice. As the character Red in *Shawshank Redemption* says: We either "get busy livin' or get busy dyin'." We choose where to turn — toward things that, at the end of our season, leave us empty or toward those that fill life with meaning, purpose, beauty and joy.

As we move into this Lenten season, turn again to God who assures you of your beauty and sacred worth. Turn again to God who takes the dry dust of us and breathes in life, making the dust dance and sing, create and care. Turn again to God who encourages you through every season.

Any minute, any moment, even now, you can return to a God who will never turn away from you and who loves you in season, out of season, and unto eternity.

**Ginger Gaines-Cirelli**  
Senior Pastor

# GOD'S EXPRESSION OF LOVE

**N**egative and threatening thoughts and events are part of our lives. Just this week, I am visiting a dying friend, seeing a doctor about continual physical pain, and learning the cost of a major car repair.

Some days such thoughts greet me as I awake and do not leave my mind as I head to bed at night.

God created us out of love, and love includes the full range of emotion. The negative cannot separate us from the positive.

*“Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come. Not height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God. . .”* (Romans 8:38-39 KJV).

I now acknowledge that connection each morning and night. When I open my eyes in the morning, I think immediately about three things to anticipate that day. Maybe no rain, time to rearrange a crowded closet, and lunch with a friend. When I close my eyes at night, I think of three positives from the day. Maybe less pain, a letter from a long-silent relative, and bipartisan action providing funding for housing the poor. Not everything went well during the day, but God is still with me. I can deal with the negative and affirm the positive by acknowledging God's presence and power.

An English monk, Aelred of Rievaulx, wrote long ago: “How joyful you are if you have found a friend with whom you may talk as freely as yourself, to whom you neither fear to confess any fault or blush at revealing any spiritual progress ....”

During Lent, let's share both our faults and our spiritual progress as we focus on God's expression of love in the life, death, and rebirth of Christ.

**Barbara Cambridge**

# THE URGE TO REACH

**F**or two people to have a connection, there must be a point where the two bond. As the scorching flames of a welder's torch ignite two metallic pieces, the fusion creates a point where there are no longer two separate objects but one.

We are covered in these connection points, visible and invisible. They are embedded in our DNA, sprinkled on our faces like freckles, tethered to our heartstrings and linked to our stories.

As we go about our lives, we gain more connection points. We are bound to be connected to one another. **With the probability of connection so high, what is the point of reaching for it?**

In Philippians 2, Paul, then imprisoned by Rome, writes to the church in Philippi, sending love and prayers, and urging them to live out their duties in the faith. In chapter 2, he gives the example of Christ's life.

*"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." (NIV).*

Paul isn't urging the Philippians to connect. Perhaps he knew some bonding would be inevitable. The point Paul stresses when exemplifying Christ's life is the answer to our question: **The urge, beloved, is to reach.**

Reach far, just as, out of God's glory Christ became flesh and reached out toward humankind. So, reach across racial and cultural barriers.

So must we reach out — over redlined neighborhoods and food deserts — from the silent generation all the way to generation alpha. Reach with the intention of becoming one like Mother, Child, and Breath of God.

**Natalie Harvey**

Director of Family Ministries

# REACHING

**T**he title of our Lenten Devotional starts with a powerful active word, “reaching.” Reaching out is what we do when there is something we **need from** others, but it’s also what we do when we’re **giving to** others.

God faithfully and unconditionally reaches out to us whatever the circumstances of the day.

When we’re cruising along, top down, through a good stretch in life, God taps us on the shoulder with a warm sunbeam and tussles our hair with a gust of wind. We might not even notice these gentle loving nudges. But when the ‘check engine’ light comes on, or we find ourselves on the shoulder of the road with a flat tire, His hands are right there to comfort us, mend us, and get us back on our way.

The neat thing about God is how He uses us to reach out to one another.

That sunny tap on the shoulder might be encouraging us to send a text message to check in with a friend. That hair tussle might be a “good morning” you exchange with someone you pass on the sidewalk, causing you both to smile and continue on with a new confidence.

And most definitely, God uses us to be there during one another’s rough patches. Maybe you just sit with a friend on the floor, just where they are, until they’re ready to stand up again. And maybe God uses your voice to speak or sing words of hope and love that someone needs to hear.

This season, I aim to be mindful of where and how I sense God reaching out to me—and how I might be called to reach out to others.

**David Rice**

# THE RISKY BUSINESS OF REACHING OUT

**T**he Gospel of Luke tells two stories that exemplify how reaching for connection transforms lives and situations, conquers obstacles and fears, and gives us full access to God's love, healing, and grace.

In Chapter 8, a woman reached for connection with Jesus, touching the edge of his cloak amid a crushing crowd. Her individual risk taking was two-fold: first, daring to touch Jesus and second, confessing that she had. Jesus honored these risks, acknowledging her faith, granting healing, and assuring peace for her life journey.

The power and reward of corporate risk taking is described in Chapter 5.

*"And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick. Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowds, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus." Jesus commanded the paralyzed man to get up, take his mat and go home.*

These parables prompted me to reflect on the countless times when I or my community of cherished friends and family have lifted my cares and concerns up to the Lord through prayer, faith, and love.

Reaching for connection is not always easy or without risk, but the rewards are always fulfilling and life-changing, knowing that our lives are in the heart and hands of God, the greatest risk taker who is our rock, our strength, and our deliverer.

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way.*

Psalm 46: 1-2

**Cheryl Gibbs**

# SOULFUL CONNECTIONS

**I** long for evidence of spiritual connection that informs my life, connects my soul to the Universal source of love, and links my humanity and my divinity. This is especially important given the turbulence of our times. Most recently, I have turned to the Bible for muscle material to inform my actions and thoughts.

One such scriptural treasure comes from Romans 12:12 (ESV): *Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.* These words imply our interconnectedness and an unbreakable linkage to our God source.

My life's journey began simply in a small town in Kansas. My parents were working class people with a strong sense of justice and commitment to family and church. They had clear impressions of how children should act, how adults should demonstrate responsibility, and the power of the Almighty to make the rough places smooth. These convictions were carried out in loving ways to family and community.

Now that I occupy a seat on the 'senior' bench, unencumbered by work or career, I view my life's landscape differently. Children are our gift to the world, and they act as independent agents seeking their own path toward light and love. We hope to identify the gifts and graces to our grandchildren, who inherit all that we know and a bushel of unconditional love. Perhaps unconditional love is the ultimate gift. Humanity continues to launch wars and spiteful actions against a peaceful coexistence with our neighbors. But we are divinely made and connected through our humanity.

So much sinewy, muscle wisdom is available through scripture, study, and prayer. My entreating reflection is: Holy Spirit, bless us with a clearer understanding of what we are ordained to do and be in your name. Let your words, spoken - whispered - felt, resonate within our souls. Amen.

**Paula Blair**



# FIRST CONTACT

*Jesus reached out his hand and touched him, saying,  
"I do want to. Become clean." Instantly his skin  
disease was cleansed.*

Matthew 8:3 Common English Bible

One of my favorite movies is ***Star Trek: First Contact***. It's the story of Earth connecting with neighbors beyond the stars, forming what would become the Federation of Planets central to the plot of all things Trek.

First Contact occurs when Earthlings build a spaceship capable of traveling faster than the speed of light. The launch and test are successful, with a surprise byproduct. The Vulcans, a race of logical space-faring people, notice the test flight. They are shocked: Vulcans had thought the people of Earth were so primitive that contact would do more harm than good.

Yet when they see Earthlings reach to the stars, they realize they are wrong. They make contact. This moment sets up a central point for the story universe that has impacted pop culture for over 60 years and continues to march forward.

I think about the man with leprosy touched in Matthew 8. The law dictates he be shunned and go untouched. How often was he passed over because people thought he was less than them? How long had it been since he felt the touch of another human? Had he reached out to others?

When Jesus responds he does not just heal a physical condition. He makes contact and dismantles societal boundaries. He contacted, physically and spiritually, with someone passed over and looked down upon. He destroyed a societal wall.

Jesus completed first contact with this man and that connection changed the world.

Who is reaching out to us? Who are we trying to pass by thinking we are better than them? Who do we need to make first contact with and set off a world-changing connection?

**Jonathan Brown**

Associate Pastor | Director of Discipleship

# WHEN SORROWS LIKE SEA BILLOWS ROLL

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to know  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*  
Horatio G. Spafford

“Faith brings [connects] the person to God, love brings [connects] the person to people.” Martin Luther

**H**oratio and Anna Spafford lived in 19th century Chicago. They worked to help survivors of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, giving comfort and aid to the grief-stricken and homeless.

In 1873, four daughters set sail with Anna to England, but a collision with a cargo ship caused their ship to go down. All four girls, aged 2 to 11, drowned. Anna Spafford, who miraculously survived, clung to her faith in God and His everlasting love. God told her she had survived the shipwreck for a purpose.

The Spaffords eventually had three more children, two daughters and a son. An older son died of scarlet fever. They eventually relocated to Jerusalem, where they helped those in need. Their faith in God and love for others were the bedrock of their commitment to serve. Horatio Spafford died of malaria in Israel, which was common, leaving his wife widowed for 35 years. Their second son also died of scarlet fever.

Nothing shall separate us from the love of God, wrote the Apostle Paul. And so did Horatio Spafford, by penning the great hymn, “It Is Well with My Soul.” We do not receive that love passively, but we must reach out to receive it, no matter how many “sorrows like sea billows roll.”

**Ruth Brown**

# ECHOES OF CONVICTION

*For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Romans 8:38-39 KJV

**C**onvince me, oh God, that nothing can separate us from you  
Make me sure and make me certain  
Help me feel your connection and  
Ignore those who say your love isn't for me  
Allow me to live authentically and true  
And break down barriers that even I put in place.

Let your love shine through me  
So that others can see your love too  
Or at least prevent me from being an obstacle  
That separates us from you.

I am open to being persuaded and to be certain, I think? I pray  
Let me put aside my pride and all manner of things that distract

Help me feel confident in your love  
And respond by connecting with others so they might  
sense your love too.

Sustain my conviction when I have doubts  
Persuaded in every moment to open my heart anew  
To marvel in this promise that is your fellowship and love.

**Prayer:**

*God, we praise you for sending Jesus to be your connection with us and each other. Amen.*

**Shawn Steffy**

# CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

**I**t is winter and snowing. It rarely snows lately. I close my eyes. Alone within these walls, the snow piling high behind my eyelids, I surrender space for the holy — a realm where infinite darkness and infinite light fuse, a divine domain in conversation with God.

Rejuvenation, a renaissance — I can touch the exquisite joy of ambient suspension in embryonic fluids, kicking against the waves to affirm my presence to God. I bathe in the renewed warmth of baptism, cuddling as the Spirit blankets my heart with passion and knowledge, mercy and empathy, wisdom and understanding. I hear the silent song.

And yet there are distracting moments derailing total surrender to the holy. Light and darkness diverge, and my thoughts tumble through mines and caverns, lost in tunnels, looking for an exit. But the exits fool me, one after another, beaming with hollow applause full of empty promises or shining with insults and venom.

Secret thoughts hiss from these exits — “I am better than you.” I hear the gavel of injustice justified, overtly, covertly, amplified by small voices making grand pronouncements, their pretense at power preserved to hibernate for future conversations.

But in the vastness of the holy, God has gifted us with the inner strength to swim free of the human currents that separate us, to discern where forgiveness casts an infinite line of acceptance and where charity blooms. Self and ego disappear into a pitcher of hope and restoration.

Like a snow shovel, God clears the way for me to shake off my worldly focus and return for a renewed conversation, a promise of infinite certainty even as seasons change.

I am thankful.

**Audrey MillerHallett**

# i AM HIS!

*But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. Isaiah 43:1-2 KJV*

**A**s I grocery shopped, I looked at all of the people shopping, laughing, drinking coffee – seemingly having a lovely time. During the cab ride home, I passed many people that I saw enjoying the day with their pets (even the pets were happy, playing, running around and having a good time).

People seemed to be everywhere enjoying life. Could it be that I was the only person feeling weary? Weary of the loneliness since COVID, weary of thinking, trying to figure out life, weary of being weary. Four years of weariness.

I forced myself to pause, shaking my head as if this feeling could be shaken out of my head. Then, I recalled the words from Isaiah “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.” I thought “Okay, Lord, you are with me, you and I are still connected.

Through all of the past four years and whatever is to come, I am yours.”

I smiled.

**AC**

# CONNECTING PAST AND FUTURE

I have long desired a connection to the indigenous, spiritual practices of my Filipina ancestors. This past year intensified that yearning as I welcomed my first grandchild and was graciously given the ancestral title of Lola.

This new season, coupled with my doctoral work at Boston University, has guided me to the original understanding of the spiritual practice of *Kapwa*. In its most spiritual form, *Kapwa* is defined by Filipino author and psychologist Carl Lorenz Cervantes “as realizing you are part of a breathing ecology of nature (*Kalikasan*), community (*Kapwa-tao*), and spirit (*Kaluluwa*),...[It] becomes an action that emerges from your truest, innermost self.”

*Kapwa* speaks to the part of my post-colonial, post-imperial, deconstructed evangelical self and feels both restorative and invigorating. *Kapwa* reminds me that I can find inclusion, comfort, and connection in ways that are divine and interstitial. As I grow to embrace this understanding of shared identity, I am encouraged to engage in spiritual connection with others regardless of caste, status, faith practice, or physical proximity.

By reclaiming my *Kapwa*, I am reaching for a connection to my ancestors, my children, and my grandchildren. I desire for us all to reimagine *Kapwa* as we journey together toward full connection with one another.

**Rev. Kealani Nunes Willbanks**

Executive Director of Operations and Impact

# MY ENDURING PERSONAL CONNECTION

*... neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, ...shall be able to separate us from the love of God...*

Romans 8:38-39 KJV

**G**od's love entered the world through the light of Christ's life 2,000 years ago. It has survived, captured in inspired scripture, music, art, and literature. More personally, my true understanding of God's love passed best to me in direct transmission from another person — a parent, grandparent, friend, teacher or mentor, someone who had received it earlier from another person.

Just as congregants at candlelight Christmas Eve service pass the light from the one Christ Candle flame to another neighbor's candle until the whole sanctuary becomes lit, I feel a direct personal connection to God's love.

However, dark times in Christian history have threatened the passing of the light of God's love. Think about the persecutions and heresies, the crusades and inquisitions, church schisms, and imperial and colonial abuses. Yet, none of this horrific history separated me from God's love. The light persisted, passed on by direct personal transmission even in the darkest times.

This gives me strength and courage to live ever more fully in the light of God's love. And I in gratitude must do the same as I meet someone needing a spark to light or to keep their candle lit.

So, threats, currently the world's authoritarian leaders, political violence, extremism, and conspiracy theories, will not separate me from God's love. History shows God's love at work. Making a difference one person at a time has tremendous merit.

**Meditate** on Gerald H. Kennedy's words from 1939:

*God of love and God of power, Thou hast called us for this hour.*

Refrain from United Methodist Hymnal 578

**Joe Steller**

# TRANSCENDING THE RESTRICTED “I”

*John 17: (22) I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one. (23) I in them and you in me — so that they may be brought to complete unity. NIV*

*We are more than one, but not two. (Buddhist koan)*

**M**y father left us when I was ten, leaving only his name to connect me to his family. In my thirties, vacationing in another country, I got lost and offered a hitchhiker a ride to help find my way. No luck. He was another tourist, but we had the same last name, and when I mentioned my dad’s name, he knew him. We were first cousins.

The love I have since shared with my newly known family has been a timeless expansion of my being, no less profound than the relationships with my maternal family.

Twenty years later, visiting my father, now 89, he asked about members of my mother’s family. Because he was almost completely deaf and blind, I communicated by shouting, and with only one exception, my response was, “Dead!” A crestfallen sadness stole the light from his eyes. “I am the only one left, why am I still here?” he asked. The report after was that he stopped eating and six weeks later he died. The irony was there was enmity with all about whom he inquired.

This taught me the importance of connection even with those we consider our enemy. As light is known in relationship to darkness, so is experience of self known in relationship to those around us.

Christ’s indwelling peace abides in all. The egoic delusion of separation from each other separates us also from God. Resurrection is unity; connection to the divine within by experiencing it in the other without.

**Karl Marshall**



# CONNECTING WITH DISCOMFORT

I was scrolling through Instagram when I saw a post from a fellow Georgian, Reverend Danté Stewart: “The greatest threat to Christian faith is not people who are not Christians. The greatest threat is those who say they are Christians but fail to live in love like Jesus.”

On first thought, this post resonated with me. I recognized exactly what he is talking about because I've seen it in others. Growing up, I encountered faith leaders who “talked the talk” without “walking the walk.” In my experience, this was done usually by cherry-picking verses to reinforce some veiled nationalistic or bigoted agenda. Over the past years, I've pursued deconstructing my faith, and have identified the messages — helpful and harmful — that I learned at church. This process comes with a lot of baggage.

But on second thought, this post resonated because I see in myself what he's talking about. I've spent a lot of time talking and thinking about my faith, trying to unpack the anger and judgment that I still hold. While this process has been important and therapeutic, I realized that somewhere along the way of learning, reading, and researching about Christianity, I got lost.

I realized I was trying to build my “perfect” version of Christianity, one where I felt comfortable and above reproach. In doing so, I was consistently prioritizing my comfort and judgment over the needs of others.

Jesus doesn't call us to be comfortable. **In fact, when we align our actions with His words, it often means seeking discomfort.**

## Prayer:

*Help me identify beliefs I may subconsciously hold because they are comfortable and serve me. Empower me with the self-awareness to notice where my claims and actions are misaligned. Help me connect my actions to Your words.*

**Anne Hardin**

# STRUGGLING TO FIND BALANCE

*In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. Mark 1:35 NSRV*

**D**uring Lent we are called to be more fully connected to God and each other. I admit that both these areas of my life need attention. Daily tasks consume most of my time; “connectedness” rarely makes it to the top of the list.

Just as Jesus took time to pray alone, I crave quiet time with God. While I try to start my day with prayer and devotion, I too often let my mind wander to how I am going to accomplish what needs to be done. How much more balanced I feel when my day starts by looking at the beautiful sunrise or the clouds against a blue sky. If I am more intentional about spending time every day in prayer, it would help me feel more connected to the goodness and beauty of God’s world.

As an introvert, making “connectedness” to others a priority doesn’t come easily. Jesus demonstrates the need to balance quiet time with God and time sharing God’s love with others. To develop lasting connections requires a commitment to nurturing relationships. How often has a friend’s quick note or a loved one’s caring act helped me get through a day? How much more balanced would life feel if I did the same?

As part of the FUMC Family this Lenten season, may we ask God to help us achieve a better sense of balance, spending increased time with God and developing a more intentional focus on nurturing our relationships.

**Prayer:**

*Dear Mother/Father God, help us make time to be more connected to you so we might share your love with those around us.*

**Sara Eakes**

# CONNECTING OUTSIDE YOUR COMFORT ZONE

**W**hen Jesus called for a tax collector named Matthew to join his disciples (Matthew 9:9) it must have been a shock to the men who were already his disciples. They were all fishermen from the same village and probably grew up together. Suddenly, Jesus is inviting this guy from a completely different place in society, and not a good place either: a tax collector.

I am sure that these fishermen had to answer a lot of questions from friends and family about why they were hanging around such a person and they probably didn't have good answers. In fact, they were probably asking themselves the same questions.

I wonder if we are all called to build connections with people that our friends and family might question. These are connections that might make us feel uncomfortable. They might be unpleasant people, or people who don't fit in, or people who have made life choices that are just very different from our own. They might have very different views on morality or politics, or they might just have a very different sense of humor. These are people who leave us feeling awkward and unsure how to respond.

I think about Mark Miller's song "Draw the Circle Wide." I feel that is what Jesus did when he invited Matthew in. The Message translates Matthew 9:13 as Jesus saying, "I'm here to invite outsiders, not coddle insiders."

What can we do at Foundry to invite people who challenge our comfortable community? I would like to try this Lent to build a connection with at least one person who doesn't fit the mold of my current friends; I want to hear the question "Why did you invite them?" at least once.

**Joanne Garlow**

# DISRUPTED CONNECTIONS

**M**any of us have felt despair when politics, religion or societal disagreements lead to the loss of someone dear to us. Help with such losses is coming from an unlikely source: a California group that sought passage of a bill to protect the rights of non-heterosexual people.

The group realized that their traditional campaign methods were not only failing, but backfiring. They began to experiment with compassionate listening and caring conversation practices.

In dialog with voters, they never argued or got angry. They first established a trusting relationship. Only then did they share a personal story and ask thoughtful questions to encourage the person to share their experiences with the issue. The group recorded their conversations. They studied the tapes and used them to improve the way they talked with voters. Their bill passed .

The key to having this kind of conversation is respect and a genuine desire to help the other person feel cared about. To do that, we must find it within ourselves to want connection more than we want to express all the logical points or rebuttals that spring to mind.

When we catch our thoughts headed toward how wrong or stupid or mean someone's statements are, let that be our cue to refocus on empathy. Not voicing judgmental thoughts helps the other person feel safe in a conversation. Providing a good conversation experience can prevent the anger and misunderstanding that disrupts connections.

Of the organizations and individuals working to teach peaceful communication, I have benefitted from joining SmartPolitics, started by Karin Tamerius, a political psychiatrist, on Facebook. That would be a great place to learn about other helpful resources.

Blessings and peace in your peacemaking journey.

**Patricia Wood**

# HOW IS YOUR SPIRIT?

I have a colleague who begins each of our one-on-one meetings by asking, “How is it with your spirit?”

The first time I heard the question, I felt uncomfortable. I ignored the question about my spirit and instead focused my mind on the audacity to ask. I wanted my state — positive or negative, beautiful or ugly, burning aflame or simmering — to be known to myself and myself alone. This inquisition, not just once but every time we met, left me feeling uneasy.

That is, until I got over myself. Hiding from the question allowed me to hide from being open and vulnerable with my colleague.

As I came to know this person as a person of faith — one different from my own — I understood the authentic desire to connect and to know that I cared on a deeper level than what a superficial icebreaker might reveal. Over time, my vigilance eased and I slowly began to share less guarded responses.

With greater openness, I divulged joys and successes as well as the weight of the work and moral responsibility to the communities we serve. Regardless of the state of my spirit, I now anticipate the question and prepare myself to be in community with the people in my presence -- not just the broader community of saints, people who share my political values, or people who share my immutable identity.

My spirit can be in different states, but, even at work, it is never alone.

*Where can I go from **your Spirit**?  
Where can I flee from your presence?  
Psalm 139:7 NIV*

**Oni Blair**

# THE INVITATION

I still have the invitation. It came in the mail 15 years ago with travel instructions. It was the event of the year, and people desperately wanted to attend, including me. I worked so hard to get an invite. The lead up to the event was one of great anticipation. It was held outdoors on a frigid January day for President Obama's inauguration. What a glorious day! We instantly felt connected to those around us who shared our hope and joy.

There was an invitation I didn't receive. It was from a childhood friend's wedding. It, too, was the must-go-to event of the year. Nearly everyone I knew was going to that wedding, but me. Being purposefully excluded by an unforgiving friend hurt terribly. It was one of the longest, loneliest nights of my young life.

An invitation is a powerful thing. I am not good at planning events or extending invitations. This Lent, though, I'm going to try to break out of my comfort zone and invite others to my humble abode. With the epidemic of loneliness, I can't help but think it could be mitigated if we just invited others to join us. It doesn't have to be a gala affair. Perhaps just a cup of tea and a game of Scrabble.

My thoughts drift off to how incredibly inclusive and generous God's invitation is to us. We don't have to write our senators or be sinless to be invited. What is God inviting you to do this Lent? My prayer for us all is that we be open to invitations that connect us more deeply to God and each other.

**Suzie Colbert**

# SILVER AND GOLD

*Make new friends but keep the old:  
one is silver and the other is gold.*

I learned this song in my Girl Scout troop. I assumed it meant I was supposed to be open to new friendships, especially since the other girls in my troop were not my school or neighborhood friends.

Now I think of that little refrain often.

From my childhood to young adult years, connections came easily. Our whole extended family lived in the Baltimore area so grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins were a regular part of my life. Friends came from school and the neighborhood. Then college brought an amazing set of new friends, and the best of those lingered long after graduation — even to this day. Later, work colleagues sometimes became friends, as did neighbors and other parents.

Now in my 70s I've learned that the silver and gold friendships require tending and nurturing. Research tells us that belonging to a community and having close personal connections is the most significant key to happiness and living longer.

Old friends can slip away if we don't make an effort to keep in touch. If I'm missing someone I haven't connected with for a while I reach out with a simple message like "It's been too long. Can we get together or chat soon?" Years ago I started making "four season" pacts with dear friends: we promise to see each other or at least have a long phone chat at least once each season. (I'm usually the initiator, but who cares? It works!)

It can be a challenge to make new friends as we age. But I've pushed myself to engage in deeper conversations with people I meet at Foundry and to say "I'd like to know you better. Can we do lunch sometime?"

**Lynn Smarte**

# RECONNECTING WITH FRIENDS



**D**uring the pandemic, I was pretty good at calling friends to chat just to keep in touch and to have a few laughs. Working at home got very comfortable minus the commute. Now texting seems to have obliterated the need to call anyone, but I intend to resurrect speaking soon.

Ten years ago, I set up a plan to meet with fellow grade school friends in Seattle after decades of just sending Christmas cards. What a trip! Elaine planned for three of us to tour Summit School now refurbished as an architectural firm and then a college prep school for East Asian girls. The library where I had shelved books was a chemistry lab!

Last August, Robin, Elaine and I again met in Seattle and had a magnificent tour of our old working class haunts: Pioneer Square, Pike Place Market and First Hill. The skyline view from Queen Anne was faint due to smoke from Canadian fires. Driving from Seattle to Montana was smooth in Robin's hybrid. Snacks kept the laughter going. I felt like a 70-year-old teen!

Robin drove us all around Glacier National Park, and we had the privilege of seeing nature's beautiful mountains, lakes and falls surrounded by green, love and gratitude.

I give thanks for God's world. Reconnecting gives breath to life.

## **Prayer:**

*Dear loving God,  
Give us the courage to be open to wonder and connection whether old or new. Remind us to reach out and share our amazement. Teach us how to pass your love around. Amen*

**Jeanette Barker**



# ENDURING FRIENDSHIP

*A friend loves at all times. Proverbs 17:17 NKJV*

I'm very grateful for an enduring friendship forged over 30 years. Jackie and I met when attending an evening class at the University of Maryland. I'd requested a ride into DC after class, and Jackie offered me one, thus beginning our friendship. We discovered we shared a strong faith in God, spirited conversations, and life-changing events.

One of those events was the hospitalization and passing of my husband Tom in 2017. Jackie was on vacation in town and learned that I was visiting him daily in the hospital. With his passing, Jackie immediately decided to extend her visit for a week, standing with me through my grieving process and difficult decisions ahead.

Jackie offered to drive me to a meeting with the funeral director. Decisions were made, details worked out. Discussions later followed with Foundry's Pastor Dawn about memorial service details, music choices, scripture and eulogies offered by family members and close friends. At the service, Jackie sat next to me in the front row.

A reception line and buffet lunch followed the service. I greeted and hugged family members, some of whom had driven in from another state. Work colleagues introduced themselves, offering accolades to Tom's humor and thoughtful deeds. The day seemed long and emotional, yet I could feel everyone's love surrounding me.

Jackie was there every step of the way with her love, support and encouragement. We continue to stay connected with frequent phone conversations, sharing our lives and challenges. I'm truly blessed to enjoy her steadfast friendship.

**Prayer:**

*God, thank you for enduring friendships.*

**Diane Seeger**

# STEWARDSHIP AND RECONNECTION



*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.*  
Genesis 2:15 NIV

**R**andy has deep connections to his childhood small town on the Nanticoke River in Delaware. His family owned the dairy where his grandfather, father, and uncle worked. His father was mayor and sang in the church choir. His mother was an educator and the high school librarian.

After high school, Randy went to college in Pennsylvania, grad school in Boston, and started his business career in New York City. He worked in Europe and in the U.S. But he always felt a strong bond to Delaware, visiting old friends and relatives and vacationing at the Delaware beaches whenever he could.

Over the years, his mother passed away and his father married my mother, who had been a widow for several years. The families lived a couple blocks apart and had been close for many years. Randy and I were best friends who became brothers.

Randy had been a CEO of several major corporations, and his post-retirement plans started with serving on boards of other companies. But he was concerned that the vigor of our town had declined since our childhood, and he turned to reconnecting to our hometown.

He focused his considerable talents and time on a collaboration with the Chesapeake Conservancy and town and state officials to establish a park on the bank of the river in downtown. He worked many hours with folks in town, the county, and state, some of whom knew his grandfather, father and mother. Some were classmates from high school.

I am privileged, as his brother and friend, to have witnessed this story of reconnection up close.

**Doug Smarte**

# THE GIFTS OF COMMUNITY

**W**hen I moved to DC twelve years ago, my father said, “The only way to make any new friends is if you find a church.” I assured him that I had plenty of friends here from college and camp.

But eighteen months later, I finally found myself one sweltering Sunday morning, without any excuse to not go to church, walking up Foundry’s steps.

For two years I rarely talked to anyone. Eventually, I dropped into coffee hour, then volunteered to make tacos at Christ House, and attended my first women’s retreat. I left that weekend thinking, I just made 75 new friends. In the eight years since, I have finally admitted that my father was right.

Fifty of us together in St. Louis at General Conference demonstrated how incredible this community of witnesses is, as we held up 300 rainbow-colored prayer flags lovingly made by all of you. Foundry friends showed up when I needed them one sad September night; my small group sang hymns on Zoom in 2020, linking us across all the miles; and a committee invitation brought new connections after pandemic isolation.

When asked, “How does your soul prosper?” my answer is so simple: it is being in community with all of you. It is singing the Foundry favorites with the pipe organ; it is reading with Project Transformation kids in summertime; it is decorating for Easter, making rainbows for Pride, and hanging greenery at Christmas.

It was Foundry clergy who noticed I’d disappeared for several Sundays and asked, “Everything ok?” It’s having an inter-generational community with whom to celebrate and grieve, to witness baptisms, weddings, and funerals. I am frequently reminded of our baptism liturgy, in which we promise to “surround these persons with a community of love and forgiveness.”

How true that really is!

**Parker Low**

## VISION

*All deeds are right in the sight of the doer,  
but the LORD weighs the heart  
Proverbs 21:2 NKJV*

As we begin 2024, I reflect on 2023 when connection and contentment were themes of my year. Feelings of love and gratitude from Foundry and my life caring for my father in the town where I was born shape the path to my focus for 2024, which is **vision**.

As a Foundry member from afar, I feel that it is important for me — and any of you who feel so inspired — to spread the message “Never Give Up!”

One of my main goals this year is to work with reviewers and a publisher in creating my first book for publication. It will share my story of faith, occasional accomplishments, and many disappointments. It ends with a significant moment in my life: the beginning of my years of Peace Corps service in September 2011. I initially recorded this story during my Peace Corps time in Morocco.

So, why write this now after almost 13 years? We all have a story, and returning to my small hometown in 2021 to care for my father has allowed me to see life — and the importance of persistence — from a new perspective. That’s the **vision** I want to inspire by telling my story.

2024 is important for each of us — whether for personal goals, our vision for Foundry, for the direction of the United Methodist Church at General Conference, or the nation as a whole with elections and other societal and social issues. We, as followers of Christ, need to display the image of God in our work and interaction with others by sharing kindness, pureness, honesty, and love.

I hope this message resonates with you. I wish you a rewarding Lenten Experience.

**Daniel Conklin**

# COMMUNITY IS REAL

**I**s community an organizing concept, or something more real at a personal level?

To me — it's real. I have cancer. I started treatment in September and will continue through March. I have a good prognosis, but the treatment still sucks.

Illness is a solitary experience. No one else feels what you feel. No one else is sick as you are. But the profound support I have received from my Foundry community, as well as family and friends, has helped me step outside myself to observe the experience. I can manage the schedule, the treatments, and the side effects, knowing I'm not alone.

The help I have received from the saints and angels around me includes very tangible things like rides to the hospital at the crack of dawn, brownies and soup and electric blankets and trashy beach novels to keep me entertained. It also includes receiving powerful prayers and scriptures that remind me God knows me and calls me by my name.

Also, I recall things I've learned from years of living in community, for example from many Women's Retreats and Bible study groups. I feel like God is my partner making decisions with me every day. And that "Lent" is a vision of transcendence.

I can be thankful for the many kindnesses I receive. I can be curious about cancer and treatment and a future managing the chronic possibility of recurrence, without being an anxious wreck. I can experience the "aloneness" of being sick without being lonely. My community keeps me surrounded by God's spirit in the present. I can lean on community for strength while being more vulnerable and open to God's tenderness.

It feels like community is the antidote for so many things that occur in everyday life, cancer or otherwise.

It's Real.

And it matters.

**Karin Berry**

# RECEIVING CONNECTION

*And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*  
Matthew 28:20(b) NRSV

**I**n October 2020, I was walking with my husband, Hal, taking photos, on a glorious day. The sky was a brilliant blue and the sun shone on brilliantly colored leaves. Spotting an especially beautiful tree, I pivoted quickly to call Hal's attention to it and fell hard on the paved parking lot.

Pain tore through my right leg and hip; I knew I was in trouble. After an ambulance ride to the ER and subsequent X-rays, it was determined that I had broken my right hip, and, in my surgeon's words, "smashed" my femur in two places.

Unfortunately, the hip and femur did not heal as hoped. Two years later, I once again found myself in agonizing pain as the hip and femur slipped out of place. This second round of surgeries, weeks in rehab, and dependency on others, brought another "dark night to my soul."

Family and friends were wonderful, but I felt useless and listless. I have always believed that we are put on this earth to try to make it a little better, and I certainly was not holding up my end of the bargain.

Gradually as I began to heal, I realized that at times like this, being the grateful recipient of caring connection with God and others is what we are meant to do. And, while I could no longer do all the things that I had done before my fall, there were still ways I could help make a difference.

Gradually life began to have meaning and to be fun again.

God speaks in different ways and that "still small voice" that I had heard before spoke in new ways this time.

**Janet Garman**

# SWEET REWARDS

*When a far-away voice sounds as close as you feel  
That's reach out and touch someone.  
That's AT&T- AT&T*

**D**o people recall the AT&T commercials from the 80s? It's amazing how a catchy jingle can take you back in time to sugar-sweet, tear-inducing images of families connecting over a (long-distance) call.

Apparently back then AT&T was looking to lessen the sting of long-distance charges, but in today's post-internet era there are less taxing ways to connect. What has not changed, however, are some of the benefits of reaching for connection but also some of the walls that keep us boxed in — fear, pride, ideology, habits and more.

For this young LGBTQ who felt burned by a conservative, evangelical culture and community over the years, the idea of reconnecting with a faith community was hard. But soon after moving into Dupont with my first job in '93, I confronted a lingering question. Something was missing.

It took work. It took time. But reaching for connection at the MCC Church of Washington at 4th and Ridge, I discovered a vibrant, lovable, and at times, over-the-top faith community that understood the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ was literally available to all, no matter whom you love. No matter what ails your body, heart, and soul.

Fast forward to today and I am grateful that far more congregations welcome the LGBTQ. I love and support the mission of Foundry that not only welcomes all but supports a greater rainbow of social justice ministries affecting the church, community, and the world at large.

## Prayer

*In this Lenten season, may we all reach for deeper connections and re-examine the walls that so often hold us captive. Reaching out over walls of fear, pride, ideology, or habits, may we find sweet rewards.*

**Chris Hong**

# WAITING FOR THE LORD

*Those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.* Isaiah 40:31 NRSV

**W**e find ourselves living in a tired time. We are tired and so are most of the people that we know. We see articles and media releases that inform us of how stressed and tired the world is. Even the environment seems tired. We are tired of the struggles that surround and threaten to engulf us and what we have believed in.

This passage from Isaiah is a good place for a fresh start in our quest for connections, lest we get discouraged and stop too soon or try to move too fast.

When I was appointed to University Church in Syracuse 43 years ago, there were many challenges and people were tired. I opened a Bible to Isaiah 40:31 and kept it in a conspicuous place in my office as a reminder for both the congregation and me to stay focused.

What happened in the next few years was truly amazing. People were inspired, energized and creative. They had let the spirit of the Lord reconnect and lead them forward, unleashing an explosion of LOVE and connections with God, each other, neighbors held back by poverty and racism and even a congregation on the other side of the “Iron Curtain.” Ideas and projects were bubbling up from within the congregation. *The United Methodist Reporter* came up from Dallas to investigate and called it “Bubble-up Theology.”

Waiting on the Lord enables us to envision a world where we are connected in Beloved Community, where LOVE overcomes greed and prejudice.

**Hal Garman**



# LAUNCH TO NEW CONNECTIONS

*Consider how we may spur one another toward love and good deeds... Hebrews 10:24 NIV*

**I**t's been four years since the pandemic started. Meaningful connections remain daunting. As I rethink how to make connections, I reflect on the challenge of landing a man on the moon. Imagine the scientists, engineers, administrators, astronauts, and many others who worked and failed many times before making that rocket successfully LAUNCH towards the moon!

Like those NASA folks who made space a new frontier, expanding and deepening connections requires WORK - It is a labor of love. How do we spur one another toward love in this new world? Here are some actions to LAUNCH into a new spiritual frontier:

**LEARN** - There are so many divisions in our society caused by different cultures, backgrounds, and beliefs. Making connections requires us to be open to learning about other people.

**ASK** - Even within our own faith, we must ask the tough questions. Engage with the other side and keep an open mind. This enables us to:

**UNDERSTAND** one another, key to deeper connections.

**NAVIGATE** - We navigate through the thorny issues of the day. Where do we find a response to these issues that is based in Christ's love? We can...

**COLLABORATE** with one another. The work of the church is a WE business! In collaboration, we find support, enlightenment, hope, friendship, and yes, uplifting hands when we fail. From here we will:

**HARVEST** the fruits of the spirit: faithfulness, gentleness, peace, goodness, self-control, joy, love, patience, and kindness.

## **Prayer:**

*God help me to remember that even in this new normal, you remain faithful. Give me the strength and wisdom to LAUNCH towards the light of Christ with my Christian friends.*

## **Wil Rumble**

# MOMENTARY CONNECTIONS

*There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.* - C.S. Lewis

A number of years ago, I observed that a couple of my close friends were quite skillful at speaking to strangers they encountered. They could establish a connection to someone they had never met, and were unlikely to meet again—in effect, making a momentary friend, who might carry into the future a warm memory of this chance encounter. How were my friends able to do that? How could I do that?

I think that my friends' gift of connection has to do with focusing on the other, not on themselves. It's not that they want to direct attention away from themselves, but rather that they are so comfortable with themselves, that they don't need to think about their own psychological security and can focus on another person in a way that makes the other person feel seen and recognized.

In more recent years, I've been pleasantly surprised to see this ability to connect with others in myself, as I've intentionally put myself into situations where I meet strangers. One factor is realizing that God's love for us and for others is eternal and unconditional, meeting each person where they are. We don't have to try to correct every flaw before being present to others. This is true even when the people we encounter aren't aware of this omnipresent unconditional love.

Through openness and engagement with others, we can brighten their lives as well as our own.

**Paul Keefer**

# WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

**W**hen asked what one must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus left no doubt.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself.”

So, who is my neighbor?

Gentrification changes neighborhoods. Older African Americans may become isolated; the sense of community may be lost. What happens if a new neighbor is of a different race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or income bracket? Is “hello” enough?

When I moved into my neighborhood more than 30 years ago, Mrs. Lewis carried in her purse the legal documents that enabled her and her husband to live in the redlined neighborhood. After they moved in, the block changed until all the residents were African American.

After Mr. Lewis died, Mrs. Lewis lived alone in her home. She had support from her family, her neighborhood and her church. Friends, family members and neighbors picked her up for Sunday services, medical appointments, community meetings, the grocery store and took her to vote. She was not isolated.

Now with gentrification, only three of the original African American families are homeowners in the 8-house block. At 77, I am the oldest.

Covid increased social isolation. Do fewer people still ask their neighbors, “Can I bring you something from the store? Can I carry that up the steps? Would you like me to change those light bulbs?”

Who is your neighbor?

P. S. On the snowy day I write this, a neighbor has cleaned my car, my sidewalk, and my walkway and enjoyed a piece of pound cake I gave his family for Christmas.

**Catherine Hargrove**

# CONNECTING TO COMMUNITY

**M**aking friends as an adult can be really hard. It's not unlike romantic dating: there is a risk of rejection that can be paralyzing. "Will I like them? Will they like *me*? If they don't want to hang out with me, do I have to find a new coffee shop?"

I moved to DC in early 2022, newly engaged to my longtime boyfriend, a fully remote job lined up, knowing no one. A few months later, I was beginning to feel settled in DC and the concierge at our building left her job. Sobbing after her going-away party, I realized the concierge was the only person with whom I had really made friends in this new city. I was lonely, craving connection but anxious about being vulnerable.

Time for some faith, trusting that God would facilitate the right connections. I took a chance on a church, and braved "hello" to someone sitting nearby. I joined the friend-finding side of a dating app. I gambled on asking for phone numbers from other dog owners I met while walking my dog.

A couple of years later, I have friends to invite to my birthday celebration. I have people with whom I trade dog-sitting and invite to game night. I still chat with that concierge, and we get together for lunch sometimes. I have familiar faces to share smiles with at church. I have people who go with me to do things my now-husband isn't interested in doing. Not every connection has been the right fit, but I'm learning to allow God to make happen what is right. Through vulnerability, faith, and fortunately with more joy than pain, I've found some local community.

**Jamie M. Hunt**

# SISTERHOOD = CONNECTION AND SUPPORT

**I**t was the summer of 2018. I had just returned to DC after eight years working overseas. Soon after my return, my husband had bilateral knee surgery, then his sister passed soon after he was discharged from the hospital, and we traveled to Atlanta for her funeral.

After returning the feeling of disconnection hovered over me. I had a few friends in DC but depended on my closest friend to talk through events taking place in my life. We both felt disconnected and ached for new relationships.

I was away for so long and had few things to fill the void in my life after this “second retirement.” She was the Pastor of a small but vibrant church, and her relationships largely focused on supporting her congregation and collegial relationships with other ministers of faith — but few girlfriends.

We longed to be with other women who we could laugh with, go out and enjoy events with and together build a much-needed support system of like-minded women. We both had biological sisters who lived out of state.

Then she approached me with an idea. Her sisters-in-law were members of a sorority, why didn't we become members as well? At first, I scoffed at the idea. When we were both undergraduates — decades ago — the thought never crossed our minds. Why now?

Well, this sorority was purposeful and committed to volunteer service, civic involvement, as well as social and cultural activities with other Sisters. Sisterhood — this intrigued me. The term is not foreign to women today, but I had not previously been engaged in an organization dedicated to Sisterhood. As I reflected on what Sisterhood means to me — a support system, common value system, acceptance, sense of belonging, spirituality — this sorority should work for me.

And it has!

**Celeste Carr**

# EVERYTHING HAS ITS SEASON

*For everything there is a season,  
and a time for every matter under heaven.*  
Ecclesiastes 3.1 ESV

**T**his verse has been very helpful this past year as I entered a new season of my life. I had planned to retire from my career in public service, but the timing was not planned. I needed to reconfigure my way of life, my daily activities, and my connections. It became *a time to seek, and a time to lose* (Ecclesiastes 3.6 ESV).

In her book *Composing a Further Life: The Age of Active Wisdom*, Mary Catherine Bateson writes about what she calls “Adulthood II” — a challenge to thoughtful discernment and creativity as well as greater engagement and interconnectedness with others. This includes the ability to contribute new ideas and other contributions that have the potential to alter the shape of public and family life for future generations.

One of my new activities was reading with children through “Project Transformation” summer camp at Emory UMC in the Brightwood neighborhood of DC. This is a neighborhood of immigrants — Ethiopian and Nigerian. Through reading with the elementary school children, I created new connections with the children and their families.

Throughout the summer I read with a 5-year-old girl and an 11-year-old boy. At the end-of-summer camp event, I met and talked with their parents. I have formed relationships with the families to give the children books and guide them in their development. I continue to talk with the parents and children about their progress. These new connections are one form of greater engagement that allows me to offer “active wisdom” that has the potential to shape the lives of these families in this new season of my life.

**Amelia Shachoy**

# SECURE CONNECTIONS

*You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.*

Romans 8:9 NIV

**I**n today's world it is not always apparent who we can depend on. For a guy who bounced from city to city, the United Methodist Church has been the one place where I have felt secure.

Chicago was competitive, and Broadway UMC became my home away from home. Chicago in 2004 was nothing like Washington, DC, however, which is considerably more competitive. When I landed in the District, the first question people asked was, "What do you do?" I wanted them to ask about my concerns and passions. They were not particularly interested in getting acquainted, unless I could help them in one way or another. They seemed to be searching for a step up, and if I could provide it, they leaned in. If I could not, they did quick 180s.

Foundry UMC became my oasis in DC. When I entered the building, the Holy Spirit welcomed me with open arms. Those early years at Foundry provided a strong feeling of security for a guy new to the District. I felt connected, much like I had felt at Broadway. Yes, many people in the church asked me what I did, but most followed up with caring questions. A few welcomed my participation in activities. They made it clear that there was a chair at the table for me. My opinions mattered.

Being securely connected to the Holy Spirit allows believers to embrace the world *carte blanche*.

**Stephen Roberts**

# LONGING FOR CONNECTION

Last year I contemplated leaving Foundry.

The pandemic took many things, including the deep connection I felt to the community through my small group. I felt nearer to God through our meals together, fellowship and Bible study. It nurtured my soul, but it was no more. When I came back to Foundry after COVID, I felt like an outsider. Many friends had left. Others had recently had children, changing their schedules and priorities. For a long while, I **yearned for the connection** I once had felt to the community.

About the time I planned to leave Foundry, I found myself at Joe and Joanne Steller's table, chatting over a lovely meal. I shared my lack of connection to Foundry — even bitterness. How I wanted more in-person Bible study; how I had tried and failed to start a new group. I was seeking affirmation, of course. I was surprised when I did not get it.

Then, Joe challenged me not to give up. To **hold unswervingly to hope**. "But when is it time to let go?" I asked. How many times had I been back in the building and not even felt a hint of connection? Wasn't it time to quit? "Keep trying. Find a way." Joe was adamant. After I left, I thought about our conversation. I wanted to keep trying — but I had lost hope.

A few weeks later, I sat next to Joe and Joanne at the Foundry Sunday potluck. The food was great. I saw friends — new and old. I felt something I hadn't for a long time. A **spark! Connection. Hope**. I thought about how I almost hadn't come that day — and felt so grateful that God had led me back once more. I left determined to find my way again. I'm so grateful for Joe and his positive impact on my life. God used Joe to help me rediscover His hope.

**Hannah-Alise Rogers**



# CONNECTIONS

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens,  
but you are citizens with the saints and also members  
of the household of God.*

Ephesians 2:19 NRSV

**T**hank you, Foundry, for all the connections you have given me!

You gave me the women's retreat when I thought parenting two young children in the cold months of winter would overwhelm me.

You give me the wisdom of faith leaders and psychologists, the joy of dancing, the prayers of fellow members and friends in my darkest moments.

You give me the sweet sounds of the choir and congregation to lift my spirit in praise.

You give me the embrace and challenge of scripture and theological inquiry to inspire my faith walk.

You remind me that God is always at work in the world.

Some of these connections are because of deep friendships forged over many years. Others are part of a web of loose ties that connect us all as "members of the household of God."

Studies on the social theory of loose ties — casual connections and acquaintances — show that these micro-interactions are vital to people's wellbeing. They are sources of Information, ideas, support and opportunity.

As a church we are uniquely able to build loose ties that embrace God's children. And, to quote Pastor Ginger at our Epiphany service, we have more fun too! Thank you for all these things, Foundry.

**Camilla Taft Hicks**

# FIERY CONNECTION

*And let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds.*

Hebrews 10:24, Common English Bible

**A**s I read this verse in Hebrews, *Pass It On*, sung at church youth group and camp, came to mind: “It only takes a spark to get a fire going, and soon all those around can warm up in its glowing. That’s how it is with God’s love, once you’ve experienced it; you spread his love to everyone; you want to pass it on.”

A spark is defined as the flow of unexpected electric current over an air gap that produces a glow. When we reach out to another person, we don’t know, at first, if there will be a spark. It may take several attempts to ignite a spark or a connection may never be made. But when one is with someone facing darkness, and it’s a spark of love, compassion, grace, and authenticity, it creates a fiery connection that opens us to newness and transformation. Imagine Christmas Eve: the first lit candle, and the next, and the next, “and soon all those around warm up in its glowing”— from one spark comes radiating light.

In the darkness of Holy Week, a spark of love in the greatest deed done for us awaits in the promise of Easter when we can sing, “What a wondrous time is spring when all the trees are budding. The birds begin to sing. The flowers start their blooming. That’s how it is with God’s love. Once you’ve experienced it, you want to sing, it’s fresh like spring. You want to pass it on.”

**Prayer:**

*Holy One, ignite a spark in me to be a beacon of radiating connection to others who can be warmed by your love.*

**Drew Williams**

# “HOME IS WHERE OUR STORY BEGINS.”

*For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.*

2 Corinthians 5:1 NIV

**I** saw this quote on a mug in the Dollar Plus Store as I shopped for my holiday wrappings. The holidays came and I was fortunate to be with my family, children and grandchildren. The noisy play and reminiscing of past get-togethers are always a part of the fun. Everyone has their own version.

It was clear that each of us carried much of “home” with us through the years. I began to think about the immigrants at the border and those scattered about so-called ‘sanctuary cities.’ My heart aches for the families who are separated from homes, from family members and friends.

I ache for families separated because of wars. Children who have lost parents, grandparents, siblings, and friends. All that is their “home” is lost. Will there be people to help them connect with their past?

## **Prayer:**

*Lord of the universe, show us how we may support those who are working to provide a sense of home and maintain connection for these your children. Amen*

**Fay Allen**

# SURROUNDED AND CONNECTED

*I am 'surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses'.  
Hebrews 12:1 NIV*

**T**hese witnesses, on earth and in heaven, have connected with the poor, the poor in spirit, the meek and the lowly, and have inspired me to do likewise.

## **Yesterday's Witnesses**

- Grandma Ella took people in during the Great Depression, fed them, and gave them beds.
- My father performed marriages for people of different faiths and for those who were divorced.
- Annie Belle taught me to pray and meditate.
- Adele offered insights from the scriptures.
- Bill developed housing for low-income people in Columbia Heights.

## **Today's Witnesses**

- Sunny inspires me to spend more quiet time with God.
- Camilla prays with me.
- Dave reads the psalms with me.
- Anne and Leigh deliver meals to home-bound folk.
- Kathy directs the making of sandwiches for the homeless.
- Luz, a high school student, makes the sandwiches.

## **The Ultimate Witness**

Jesus, the ultimate witness in this great cloud, found and cared for the poor and the poor in spirit, the meek, the lowly. If we are looking for Jesus, we need only to connect with them. Where can we find them?

Here's one way — Foundry is revitalizing the Stephen Ministry. We are currently training people to be Stephen Ministers, those who will provide care to those who are poor in spirit, meek, and lowly. Please connect with us.

## **Ella Cleveland**

*Contributor to all 30 Foundry Lenten Devotionals*

# CHANGE, CHALLENGES, GROWTH

*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another. . . .*

Hebrews 10:23-25 NIV

**T**he last several years have been a time of disconnection, renewal, and growth for all of us. We've had to say goodbye to loved ones and friends, to long-standing relationships, and ways of being and thinking.

I've spent the last few years working to address food insecurity in three county government-supported Service Consolidation Hubs. These places not only provide food to those in need, but also job training and social services. The pandemic also opened my eyes to an additional issue we often face: the need for connection, understanding, and empathy with the suffering of others. These qualities are vital to a very crucial fourth: service.

The verses above spur us to be something more than just believers. We are asked to encourage others to do good deeds, and to remain connected to those who are important in our lives.

While the pandemic did much to sever loving ties to family and friends, it is in the healing balm of service that we can bind up wounds of time, distance, and disconnection which can hinder our growth (if we let it).

Our Lord gave us His example of service when He walked and talked among his disciples, and His words challenged them (and now us) to do good deeds for one another. May we keep the spirit of these verses alive in our walk during Lent, and may we be better people because of it!

**Serge Thomas**

# A PLACE AT THE TABLE

*For everyone born, a place at the table,  
to live without Fear, and simply to be,  
to work, to speak out, to witness and worship,  
for everyone born, the right to be free.*  
*A Place at the Table, lyrics by Shirley Erena Murray*

**T**he first thing we volunteered for after settling in at Foundry was to be Communion servers. Holy Communion has always held a special place in my heart. I first related to the idea that Jesus fed his disciples with the bread and the cup so we would remember his giving himself for us. I came to understand that Communion connects us with everyone who ever has and ever will receive this sacrament before we feast together at our Lord's heavenly banquet. That's some powerful food.

Food is an important way to bring people together. "Food serves as one of our most important tools to build bridges, make connections, and deepen relationships," noted Ambassador Rufus Gifford at the launch of the State Department's Diplomatic Culinary Partnership. Studies by social scientists have shown the important role of sharing a meal in building connection, trust and cooperation.

Understanding these powerful relationship builders, imagine our chagrin when our Foundry holiday potluck was on a day we were away. Then, when we returned in time for our small group's holiday lunch, we were waylaid by an urgent vet visit. We were greatly disappointed to miss both opportunities to connect with our Foundry family.

Shared meals are not just shared meals, and Communion is not just bread and juice. They are ways of reaching out to connect deeply with the church family we know now and those we will meet. Consider who you can bring to share in these special feasts.

**Garey Eakes**

# DO I REALLY WANT TO CONNECT?

**I**n this time of growing strife — domestically and abroad — find myself reaching for two connections in particular. One I want to make; one I think I should make.

There seems to be little doubt that our country is emotionally torn apart. A Martin Luther King Day speech I heard touched on our unhealthy tribalism and a “responsibility to repair.” How many times have I told myself that I should find a way to connect with people on the other side of the political/social divide, to understand why they hold such drastically different views?

In my mind, connection and understanding go hand in hand if unhealthy divisions are to be healed. But how to even start doing my bit? And, if I am honest, connecting is more about convincing someone that my own point of view is correct. They are surely children of God, but very misguided ones.

Lord, help me deal with my hypocrisy and find genuine connections.

The connection I really do want to make is for people to understand what is happening in places such as Sudan and Palestine so that people will demand justice. To again recall Martin Luther King: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Our widespread tendency, through our choice of language, to dehumanize Sudanese and Palestinians and to humanize Israelis is mostly a result of ignorance, I think. We are often too busy living in our own present to take time to understand the context within which other people live.

Lord, help me to effectively share connecting knowledge I may have.

**Margie McKelvey**

# CALLED TO MEND THE SOCIAL FABRIC OF OUR NATION

**I**n a paper released on May 3, 2023, Surgeon General Vivek Murthy labeled social isolation and loneliness as a “public health crisis.”

Even before the pandemic, according to the Surgeon General, half of the adult population of the United States reported experiencing significant loneliness, which carries negative health outcomes. Consequently, the Surgeon General invites all Americans to “mend the social fabric of our nation.”

This invitation implies great urgency. How can I do my part?

Traditionally, as an introvert, I have sought refuge in my journal for connection. Through journaling, I have connected with myself, with God, even with others, reflecting on my relationships. In my journal, I have praised God, grieved losses, sought counsel, and grown in self-understanding. I have also been affirmed and restored. However, doing my part in mending the social fabric will mean leaving my comfort zone. This is a prime opportunity to be creative and dream big about ways that we, as a congregation, might become more caring. What could I do better?

First, I need to be intentional with caring for my whole self. Regular time in worship with my community of faith, daily time in prayer, regular walks, and time in nature, will help me be resilient.

Equally important will be care of neighbor. I will need to be very intentional about spending quality time with others. I can get to know Foundry friends better, seek out friends who no longer attend Foundry, send cards, make phone calls.

I can also invite others to become part of my faith community. All of this will mean blocking time on my calendar to make sure that I am faithful to my intention.

What is your vision for mending the social fabric of our nation?

**Josiane Blackman**



# WHAT WE FIND

**W**e reach for connection, not knowing what we'll find at the other end of our grasp.

A word from a friend that makes us feel seen.

A knowing look with a stranger, both of you thinking the same thing.

A hug from a loved one, the heat of their body warming you.

A space that feels welcoming, where our shoulders and guard can lower.

A small hand that reaches for yours, grasping you tight with love.

A sentence in a book (or post) that lands on a truth we didn't know others felt.

A heartbeat against our ear, sharing the noise of someone's life.

We reach, not knowing what we'll find.

And grab hold of what's reaching out to us.

**Beth Scott**

# JUST A POSTAGE STAMP AWAY



*Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 NIV*

**S** eeking connections with others? Never underestimate the power of greeting cards delivered to mailboxes by the USPS. They encourage, reassure, console, lift spirits and build others up. Nice to send; nicer to receive.

**Ta-Chen Wu**

# I'M NOT DONE YET!

*For I know the plans I have for you . . .*  
Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

One bright afternoon during COVID, I was sitting on my front step idly browsing *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, watching the squirrels and listening to the birds.

Suddenly, out of nowhere came a jolting realization. My life's main work — guiding my children, Elizabeth and David, to maturity — was largely accomplished. They had their own families and were deep into their careers and young-adult living.

I almost shouted to God, "But I'm not done yet! I'm not ready to die. Give me a new mission."

And did Christ ever answer!

A bit smug, I thought the Lord would assign me a task related to my old career or my resume, about which I could boast. Did I have another think coming?!

Instead, God gave me one of the most vital assignments I could imagine. I babysit Bennett, David and Morgan's younger daughter, who was born three months premature and weighing two pounds on June 30 of last year. She is now fourteen pounds and thriving. I also babysat her sister August, now four years old. I think I'm quite good at it (he said, modestly).

Holding Bennett while she dozes — and while August attends Virginia's fine Spanish immersion program — is a splendid time to pray. I pray for the two little girls, as well as their young cousins at home in St. Louis with Elizabeth and Ian.

I pray that they all will be healthy, bright and charming, of course. Above all else, I pray that they will be eternal members of God's loving family.

**Wesley G. Pippert**

# EARLY MORNING CONNECTIONS

**G**ood morning Holy One in whom I trust. Thank you for the arrangement of doves at my window and their velvety greeting. Thank you for the spirit of leisure when there is no leisure. For now, silence is my only need.

I think the Psalmist knows me by name – whether assisting my heart to praise or “Out of the depths I cry to you O Lord.” Many are the faces I place in your lap, as well as our troubled world, our beautiful world.

Winter trees showing gaunt ribs invite my gaze in the season of Lent, the symbolism not to be missed. I admire their patience, waiting for the greening of springtime.

Distractions seek to throw me off-center. May they ever be my growing edge to return to Presence. The tone of this day is sweet and warm.

I call my sick neighbor. I slip a check in the mail – A's cupboards are bare. Goodbye God. More listening, more chats with you as the day progresses.

**Prayer:**

*Dear God,*

*Thanks for the nourishment of this day with you.*

*May we grow to be a living breath to you. Amen.*

**Sunny Branner**

*Reprinted with permission from Foundry's 2015 Lenten Devotional*

## SUNSHINE

**W**e bonded in Sunday school class. This elegant woman created collages and wrote poetry steeped in her rural Mississippi upbringing and a life alongside Bill, the love of her life. Together, they raised a family, served their church, and created community everywhere they went.

When she shared in class, I heard the Bible illuminating my path. She made it sound like a walk with Jesus in a breathtaking garden.

She is a generation older than me — yet ageless — as capable of girlish giggles as profound observation. She became a friend, a spiritual mentor, the source of light as her name suggests.

One time I described a favorite willow tree in March as “spring breathing green.”

“Oh, I love that,” she said.

That, from the poet I loved, meant the world.

She lost her husband. Macular degeneration claimed her eyesight. Age and pain stifled her movement. She transitioned from her beloved home to a caring community. Her hearing diminished. Her memory slipped away.

Determined to stay connected, she braved METRO’s access bus for the 30-mile round trip to Foundry. Astoundingly, she rarely missed being with her Sunday classmates and pew-mates.

Then the pandemic cut us off from one another. Even with her family’s many hopeful trials, no technology was found — not even speed dial — that could connect her. I finally jerry-rigged a Zoom phone call so that she could attend class just by picking up the phone. We could at least hear her grace-filled wisdom, and she could be with us virtually. It worked for nearly a year, until our voices on her end became a painful noise.

A recent heart-to-heart with her daughter helped me refocus this cherished relationship. I cannot expect my friend to hear, or see me, to remember me, or that I came to see her. But I can be present with her in the safety of the apartment she loves, awaiting those moments of shared delight that inevitably come.

Behind the veil of aging’s lost facility, my dear friend’s light still shines brightly.

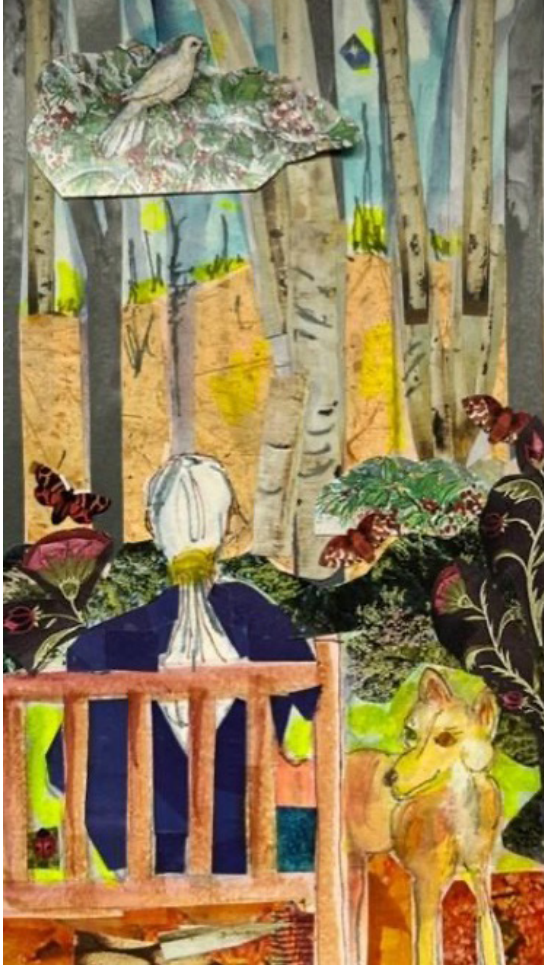
**Prayer:**

*Thank you, God, for allowing me to bask in Sunshine.*

**Joanne Steller**

*IN THE STILLNESS OF THE  
TREES I AM HOME*

Wendell Berry



Leigh Carter



