



# INLAND STREAM

INLAND WEST USA MISSION CENTER NEWS

Inland Stream Spring 2021

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## A Resurrection People by John VanDerWalker

Easter is in the rear-view mirror for another year. The build-up to Jesus' entry into the city on the back of a colt and his week of intense interaction with his disciples and the public is fading from our thinking as we focus on summer, which in normal years would involve reunions, youth camps, family trips and back yard entertaining. But these are not normal times.



As disciples of Jesus, though, we can never let the significance of the trial, death and resurrection of Jesus fade into the past. The resurrection, however you interpret the story, is foundational to our faith and it is a reality that has shaped us in the past and can continue to shape us in the future. We are a Resurrection People.

In my life time my understanding of the resurrection has transitioned from a self-centered concept of me getting to live on a cloud playing a harp to a way to live in the here and now with a faith that God's purposes, while being only understood in a limited way by me, will not be thwarted. I am beginning to understand that no matter how many times God's work of Peace and Justice are crucified by us, the work will continue through those who are faithful and open to new understanding and reformed behavior.

With that in mind we come to our current situation: emerging from a pandemic. Congregations and congregational leaders have, over the past year and a quarter, approached the closure of church facilities differently. There have been wonderful ministries emerge at all levels of the church. Congregations in the global church have been a wonderful blessing to all as they have leveraged technological knowledge to produce music and graphics that are free for us to use in our worship experiences. Congregations in the mission center have ventured into the world of Zoom and other platforms to keep people connected and others have utilized phone calls and email to keep the congregation in touch. The mission center has had more people participate in mission center activities in the past year than ever.

We have created a new normal, but now we are being challenged by the question: "Do we want to go back to the old normal?" Some congregations are having conversations about this wondering what they will become in the next years. Others have come to a consensus about a return to the old way and the answer is: NO. I look at this activity as a matter of repentance, a time of self-reflection to discern what are the most important things that we do as a community and what are the things that we see that need

*(Continued on page 3)*

## Listening Tour

John VanDerWalker

The past year has brought a lot of challenges to members and member leaders of the congregations through out the church. Congregations have responded in various and creative ways to help establish a new normal during the past year. Even with the best faithful efforts by all, some things have been left out of our daily-weekly-monthly lives, one of the most significant is the opportunity to have access and intimate conversation as a congregation and with mission center leaders.

As Sandy Decker, JoAnn Fisher and I have talked about how to best serve the congregations of the mission center we decided that it would be important to visit each congregation for a conversation around two questions: 1) What is on your heart? and 2) What is on your mind?

We recognize that the stresses of the past year on the lives of everyone has the potential to be a significant factor in what we see as being important and what life together means. Our hope is that by opening ourselves to each other in meaningful conversation we can move into the future that God imagines for us. One of the beautiful understandings of the restoration movement is that God continues to reveal Godself to us and that in our engagement with each other we can sense God's idea of the future; that is what we mean when we say we are a prophetic people. As a church we recognize the uniqueness of each congregation and the gifts that they bring to bear on the mission of Christ. While we hold in common Enduring Principles we also know that those principles are lived out in diverse and creative ways in the local congregation. Our hope is that through these conversations we may learn how your congregation is doing and how we can support you in mission.

Our schedule looks like this

June 11-13 Montana Congregations (Deer Lodge, Whitehall and Billings)

June 18-20 Southern Idaho Congregations (New Plymouth, Boise, Hagerman)

July 9-11 Utah and Southeast Idaho (Pocatello, Ogden, Salt Lake City, including seeker groups)

August 6-9 Spokane/North Idaho Congregations (Spokane Valley, Sagle, Coeur d'Alene)

August 13-15 Southeast Washington Congregations (Lewis-Clark, Walla Walla, Richland)

As a staff we would like to invite you to attend the Listening time that is associated with your congregation or the congregation that is closest to you. Your pastor will make you aware of the specific time and place for these conversations to occur. We ask that you bring masks, an open mind and heart and a willingness to engage in sharing and listening. Children will be provided an opportunity to share as well, through conversation and activity. We expect these casual conversations to take no more than three hours, probably two and we will exercise Covid protocols as per church guidelines current at the time of meeting.

(Continued from page 1) - A Resurrection People

to be done that we are not doing? Most Christians cringe at the word repentance, but in fact it is a word that means to “turn from” and we have a prime opportunity at this point in history to turn from the past and move into the future as a resurrected and empowered community.

When Jesus began to appear to the disciples after his resurrection the men and women he appeared to were confused and disbelieving. Have you ever noticed that there are no stories about Jesus appearing to children? This is probably because they would have responded with, “Hi Jesus. Did your boo-boos get better? Want to play?” Alas, I digress. When with his adult disciples Jesus invites them to feel his wounds, he eats with them and serves them to prove that it is him. He shows them the familiar. But there is something significantly different about the risen Jesus, his authority, once re-established is never questioned again. He moves about time and space with no limitations, it is clear that he is now an eternal being, and by not only his words but his actions it is established that we are too.

We emerge from this time of reflecting on our pandemic experience with some significant questions in front of us. If the life death and resurrection teaches the Community of Christ anything it should teach us that God will not let this end. As a global community we have been established in the world for a purpose, and our congregations have been established for a purpose too, and not all of them are the same. Worship is not the purpose of the church. The purpose of the church is to serve and empower others to serve, providing opportunity, learning and resources to build community, and from this community will come a more relevant iteration of the church. It will be a community that serves the world in the cause of peace and justice in our homes and neighborhoods. From that effort and the successes we will have, we experience a worshipping community that will be authentic and life giving and true to the Living Christ.

## Women’s Gathering

On two Saturday mornings a month, a group a women gather on Zoom to share in a spiritual practice or devotion and talk about a question that was posed for that week’s discussion. During the months that we have been gathering we laugh a little, cry a little, sharing authentically the thoughts and feelings that we have. Wonderful connections and new friendships are being developed during this time together. All women are invited to join us, watch for the weekly NewsBrief for meeting information.

In a recent gathering two questions were asked and the answers are below.

### What has this gathering meant to you?

- Meeting new friends
- Fellowship
- Laughter & good tears
- Nurturing
- Hearing other people’s stories
- Become acquainted with new people
- Comfortable to be honest
- Appreciated being able to connections with people she knew when in young adulthood
- Safe place to be who we are

### Why do you keep coming?

- Love you all
- Enjoyable being with everyone
- Sense of humor

- Like-minded people
- Supported by this group and want to support others
- Shared experiences
- Share new ideas



## Why Am I Community of Christ?

By Gil Martell, Billings Montana

During the Lenten season, preparing to receive Christ's Resurrection of Peace, the title question has become one of my Lenten meditations for re-discovering the "Why?" Perhaps like me, you too have asked and struggled with questioning your affiliation with Community of Christ.

I have a simple answer. However, because it has been a reoccurring question, the answer has been manifested through many spiritual experiences.

Pondering the question, my simple answer goes back to two promises. At the age of seven I made a promise to find, love, and serve God and Jesus. For about a year, I repeatedly asked my dad to take me to church with no results. During that time, we had moved and my paternal grandmother offered to pick up my two younger siblings and me for church. My dad said, "No." And, my mom had no interest.

Then something happened! Dad took us to church, fulfilling his promise. We walked past many churches, finally coming to a building that did not look like a church. It was an American Legion Hall rented by a handful of people who gathered for worship. I will never forget my feelings when entering that building. I was "home" and could begin my promise to God and Jesus. That community of devoted disciples of Jesus Christ loved and nurtured me, instilling a thirst to grow in my spiritual relationships with others beyond my religious birth community.

From Rhode Island to Iowa to Missouri and to Montana I experienced new communities of disciples sharing their giftedness through Community of Christ congregations. The nuances of theology, identity, and administrative fields made it difficult at times. However, these expressions assisted my transformation and sharing of the Peaceful One, Jesus.

From the age of 8 and until now 75, I've been affirmed repeatedly, Community of Christ is the faith movement God called me to grow and service in as a disciple.

That is my simple answer. My experiences of "home," love, and spiritual nurturing from many communities of Christ is an inspiring testimony that continues with me when the question "Why?" still challenges.

There is not space in this brief testimonial to share all my life struggles and spiritual encounters that assisted my willingness to continue to respond to the faith body that loved me, nurtured me, embraced me, and empowered me to follow Jesus.

Along my journey there have been times when I wanted to bail. But God's Spirit, reassures me and renews my courage to continue my ministry in this faith movement I was called to as a child. I have continually responded, others have been blessed, and I have been blessed.

Looking back at the many disruptions, uncertainties, and changes, it was definitely challenging to grow with God's calling. Without God's Spirit, I could not have overcome the times of my selfishness, fear, doubt, anger, and wanting to leave my faith and calling. God kept me to my

promise, blessing and using me to be a blessing of love and peace, sharing the Peaceable Kingdom.

This past year, and even now not being able to attend church activities, has challenged me to experience the Divine Presence in new ways. Online Zoom gatherings have provided worships, religious education, and social gatherings with new perspectives of God's Mysterious Presence. My fear to write has brought me closer to looking through God's eyes and to feel God's love and pain for humanity. The year 2020, even with its disruptions, has been an opportunity for me to grow and walk closer with the Peaceable One, Jesus.

Yes, I had to let go of my expectations. But, by not being able to experience God in the former typical Sunday physical worship, moved me towards encountering God along a fresh path, discovering God in the diversity of new existence and experience.

More and more I have been experiencing peace and daily affirmations that the community of faithful followers, Community of Christ, is where I have been called. I may not understand and be able to answer all of my uncertainties and questions regarding "Why am I Community of Christ?" But, letting go of the hurt and pain and trusting God, I am being resurrected into a new person in Christ Jesus.

My dear sisters and brothers of Community of Christ, who pray for me and uphold me, you have touched me to continue a journey with God's vision of joy, hope, love, and peace. Thank you for keeping me in your hearts and prayers, as I do you!

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### **Please Welcome Tyler Marz**

We are pleased to announce that Tyler Marz is the new Latter-day Seeker Expansion Minister in Utah.

Tyler was born and raised in Washington State. He joined Community of Christ while living in Salt Lake City and from 2014 to 2018 served on the congregation Building Committee, Worship Planning Team, and as a Sunday School instructor. He moved to Seattle in 2018 where he served on the Crystal Springs congregation Welcoming Committee (LGBTQIA2S) and Pastorate Team.



Tyler was part of the Spiritual Formation and Companionship Program, a founding member of Community Elevated: Inland West Young Adult online ministries (currently team lead), and also served as the Young Adult Pastoral Companion for the northern Seattle area. Tyler has served on the Harmony Board since September 2018.

A graduate of Brigham Young University-Idaho where he studied Spanish, Culinary Arts, Education, and ESL, Tyler is currently enrolled in the Master of Arts: Christian Theology program at Graceland University and will graduate this year.

Tyler enjoys nature, all things food, and is a phenomenal cook and baker.

## Readjusting by JoAnn Fisher

Recently, I had an opportunity to see the movie *Nomadland* on Netflix. The movie is based on the 2017 non-fiction book by the same title, written by Jessica Bruder.

It is the story of Fern, a woman in her sixties, whose husband dies, and after losing everything in the Great Recession, embarks on a journey through the American West, living as a van-dwelling modern-day nomad.



One scene in the movie has had a particular impact on me. Fern is new to the lifestyle and one of the characters she meets is Swankie, a woman in her 70's whom she discovers has metastatic lung cancer and only has months to live. Swankie has decided she does not want to die in the hospital. And has a goal to revisit a few meaningful places of her life.

Fern (in a vulnerable moment) tells Swankie that she had been thinking a lot about her husband, Bob. He was on a morphine pump when he passed away and he was in a lot of pain. She confessed that she wished she had held the button on the pump down longer so that her husband could die. She regretted not ending his suffering. I thought I was in total agreement with Fern. But Swankie's response has caused me to reconsider a few things. What Swankie said was simply this, "But what if his goal was to stay with you for as long as he could." "I am sure that you took good care of him, Fern."

Readjusting. No one will know for sure what Fern's husband; Bob's desires were at the end. There is no clear answer to this question. But Swankie's answer to Fern absolved her guilt and allowed for a different perspective. Swankie wasn't judgmental of her friend, rather she was standing with her with compassion and her own yet different perspective.

The older I get, the more I have come to understand that just a different perspective can make a huge difference in how we see the world. It may or may not change our minds, but if our hearts are open and our intentions are pure, there is hope to at least understand each other with compassion.

There can be so many barriers that threaten to come between us... such as religion, age, race, politics gender, and economic status.

We can assume so much about one another. We are often too busy to allow ourselves to speak from our hearts and to listen with compassion. We can see one another (even pray for one another) without saving space for moments of true intimacy and trust.

Perhaps instead of saying to those we have contact with, "How's it going?" We could be asking "What's on your heart?"



We are at the threshold of a new journey. What will it be like to re-open? What will my part in this look like? Where am I on my own faith journey? What have I learned? What will I want to keep? What will I want to let go of?

Just like Fern there is a continual readjusting to the situations we find ourselves in. Life has a way of challenging us as well as inspiring us. Will we move ahead with

*(Continued on page 7)*

## **Time with a friend by Lavera Wade**

(from the Mission Center Blog)

We have during this pandemic had the opportunity during quiet times alone to reflect on how precious our time with friends and loved ones can be.

Spiritual practices are time spent with our Loving friend. This time can be spent reflecting on a scripture, a Psalm, a tree, a prayer, or silence. A few minutes or an hour, sitting or kneeling while weeding. God will be delighted to spend time with you.

I offer an adaptation of the Spiritual practice Welcoming Prayer

Welcome Peace

Heavenly Parent, we praise you, the beauty and wonder of your creation assures us of your power, as you comfort us with your tender love.

I hide my face in wonder that you seek my love, for only your love fills my heart. Help me my Lord, to trust that I am your beloved, that the love and esteem of other's can never bring the joy I seek and find in your loving care.

Send your Spirit to teach me again that my needs are as simple as mana, water, and faith in your love and strength. May I always remember that I am safe and secure in your love.

Remind me Oh Lord, that power and control are an illusion of the human condition, and only come from you. Help me remember that Jesus came with all power, and walked this earth as a teacher and servant. Please grant me the grace to follow Jesus' example.

Help me, Oh Lord, to surrender the thought that I might control any situation. Bless me with the peace and faith that you will provide the courage and strength to trust and follow you.

Oh Lord when I am in the dark valley, and fear what is before me. Help me to remember all the blessings you have provided. Comfort me, that I might be assured that you will always be with me, and your Love and grace will be waiting for me where ever you might lead me.

### **Mission Center Blog**

Check out the Mission 'Center  
blog at: [cofchrist-  
inlandwest.blogspot.com/](http://cofchrist-inlandwest.blogspot.com/)

*(Continued from page 6) - Readjusting*

courage and compassion? Will we commit to relationships we have forged and take solace in knowing that we belong to each other?

I hope that I will be someone who shows up courageously, listens compassionately, shares authentically, and shares love generously.

Because, Dear Friends, you are my people. I have been the recipient of your many blessings. We have laughed and cried together (sometimes in the same conversation). When I am weary, you have made the load lighter, and when I am dancing with joy, you have made the celebration sweeter.

May we never forget to allow for readjustments. In our thinking, in our living and in our loving.

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**Mark Your Calendar!**  
**Inland West Mission Center Conference**  
**will be held on September 25-26, 2021 in**  
**Salt Lake City, UT.**

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