



INLAND STREAM

INLAND WEST USA MISSION CENTER NEWS

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Holiday Greetings John VanDerWalker Mission Center President



As the year 2020 comes to an end we face the future with some relief and some caution.

I remember in 1970 my family moved over the Christmas holiday from Alderwood Manor Washington to Silver Spring Maryland. We drove from the Seattle area to my grandparent's house in Buhl for a short stay, then to my grandparent's house in Pueblo Colorado for a short stay and then on across the prairies of the mid-west to our new home in the east.

During classes at school in 1969 the turn of the decade from the sixties to the seventies was a big topic, and being the first decade change for me I was pretty excited. I was sure that everything would be different. I remember learning all about the census and how important it was to democracy, which we were learning about in monthly class elections and I was so excited that I was going to be counted. Of course, I was counted ten years earlier but I was only one and did not know it.

So, we are traveling across Indiana and Illinois in horrible weather, trucks were off the road everywhere, I counted 21 jack knifed trucks in just a little way, probably less than a mile. On New Year's Eve we were in a motel south of Chicago and the storm was coming out of the north, and I could smell the city, it was cold and snowing when we heard a few fireworks being shot off to celebrate the new year. 1970 did not start as I had anticipated.

That was a while ago, half a century, and even though I am in my seventh decade (just barely) the new year always raises a sense of anticipation for me. When I became aware of and began paying attention to the Liturgical calendar I was struck by the deep meaning of the holidays and how the holy days are placed at times that we need them. I am keenly aware of the weeks of Christmas now and the weeks of Epiphany, the coming of the Light. In the midst of the darkest season of the northern hemisphere (where all of this was invented) a celebration of the coming of the Light of the World seems quite appropriate. After a year like 2020 we are certainly looking for light.

And the light always comes. 2020 started with great promise and then we hit a snag. As a church we stepped back, took stock and began doing some new things. We keep in touch with each other in new ways. We have found meaning in sacraments that are celebrated through video conferencing, and we continue to live in hope. As we celebrate the coming of Mary's baby into the world, we should remember the desperate longing for light that she and her family, and community were longing for. Palestine was under brutal political and military occupation with no relief in sight, only darkness.

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Discipleship During Covid

The following question was posed: As frontline healthcare providers who are influenced by Community of Christ and are disciples of Jesus what would you like to share with the mission center about your experience, or how has this affected your discipleship, your understanding of the enduring principles, your understanding of loving your neighbor?

Here is the response from Mary Beth Hunter, Whitehall Congregation.

I have been pondering your question and have been pondering my role in my congregation, community, and at work for a while. What I see in this time is differences. Just in deciding whether to go out to a social event or not, or to a friend's house or not, wearing a mask or not. By making these choices we are making a statement. Some people might say it is not, and I can't say I don't agree, but for many people, we do. No matter the side you stand on. This allows the world to judge us before knowing us. Again no matter the side.

I was much more relaxed during the summer. The weather was nice, outside was normal, cases low. But as the weather gets colder, the days shorter, cases increasing. The reality of more indoor socializing becomes more real. My personal anxiety heightened.

When I feel this anxiety, tension, frustration, bias, I try to do what I call a spiritual practice of thinking beyond one's self. I stop. Take a breath, and ask myself: why am I feeling so much about this? What if I was this person or that person? Why would I feel opposite of what I am feeling?

I begin to see why those different than me are frustrated, hopeless, angry. I begin to see why they see me, with a mask, not socializing, a threat. And I begin to understand that as much as I want to change their choice what I really need to do is change my initial reaction from trying to correct them or inform them, to kindness.

My child recently told me a story of a kid in his class choosing to write his name on his paper after he does his work, not before. My child then told the other kid, he should do it the other way. The other kid refused. So small of a choice, but still we see the same initial reactions, frustrations. We can't make people do what we think is right if they don't believe it.

Just like Jesus we cannot making people do anything, we cannot make their choices for them, but we can continue to try and be like Jesus, to just love them no matter what they choose. Because as much as we think we are doing the right thing, so do they. It is extremely hard to watch the world in so much pain, so angry, so convinced they are the most correct. But I guess we can understand a little of what God feels about us everyday.

I do not see myself as brave, I am doing what I am educated to do. I do not see myself as smarter, just different personal experiences.

I realize I cannot make people choose the same choices as me because they are feeling very different anxiety and risks than me.

What I can do is stop. Take a breath and see people. See they are living in their own reality. And the only way for me to get into their reality is to start with kindness. Start by listening.

I do not feel I can go to church for my own personal gratification, because I increase other's risk. That is my reality, no one else's. I cannot tell everyone to stop going to church because their mental health/faith experience is very different than mine. I have chosen, personally, not to attend church. To decrease my risk to others and allow those with lower risk factors to serve our congregation. Instead, I have chosen to throw myself into my community. Give gift, be grateful, and be at risk to help those who serve. Be at risk to help those who believe different than me. Be at risk for those just

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The promise of a peaceful transfer of political power after a very raucous and divisive campaign should bring hope and thanksgiving while considering first century Palestine. The promise of vaccines becoming available to our frontline caregivers and first responders who selflessly serve those in need should bring a little glimmer of hope. And hope should be bursting from all of us because of how effective these vaccines appear to be, and there is not one but three and possibly four different ones, which will help with how quickly those vaccines can be distributed to the vulnerable and the general public.

None of us have seen a year like 2020, until we lived it. The effects of an invisible entity in our environment has wreaked havoc on our society, on our world. But there is another invisible entity at work here too. It is in you and me and permeates all of creation, it is what binds us, heals our wounds and drops us to our knees in prayer and awe and when it bursts forth from us it is the light that the world longs for and does not know. Shine that light into the dark corners you encounter.

Merry Christmas and may 2021 be filled with light and life.

(Continued from page 2) - Discipleship..

trying to survive. We are the body, right? Let our differences in choices, risk factors, sacrifices, move the body. Not judge one another for our choices.

What I have chosen to do is be present in my jobs that can help my communities. Not just with my knowledge, but kindness. There are many people that I work with at the school or hospital who disagree with me, have no resources to help them, or are just extremely frustrated, but instead of pushing my opinion on them, I choose to try and understand them. See their risk, their challenge, their sacrifice. I acknowledge what they are forced to miss, who they are asked to give up, or resources they will have to forfeit. And be grateful to them. I cannot change their choice but I can see them, really see. No matter who we are, we are all making sacrifices. Forced to change some part of our life. We need to really see that in one another. This acknowledgement allows our hearts to open, our hardness to soften.

My hope for all of us is to choose kindness, even when it is hard. Because when we choose to think outside ourselves. We can, very slowly, change the world, one very difficult situation at a time.

Again, writing this as my personal experience. Not to push this on someone else having very different anxieties than me. Understanding those on this email maybe experience something very different in their situation and want you to know: YOU are seen. Thank you for being there for your communities, being present in your job, and being a piece of the body of Christ.

Calendar 2020: The Dilemma

As I sit in my home office, the one I have been in since March, it is gently snowing in our neighborhood. I spent a few minutes sitting outside with Sandi and a cup of tea to enjoy the accumulation of white and the quiet. 5 quail flew by and lit at our neighbor's home and began softly talking to each other. It was quite peaceful.

As the snow falls, I am thinking about summer months, not because I want to shorten winter, but because summer activities planning begins in mid-winter.

We are in a very different situation this year for several reasons: 1) the Coronavirus pandemic, 2) availability of campgrounds, 3) availability of camp leaders. All of these factors impact our summer camping and retreats. As I write one of our campgrounds—Camp Cascade—is for sale, one—Camp Red Cliffe—will soon be transferring to new owners, and one—Camp Echo Valley—is in a bind for labor and funds. Usually camp directors are quite anxious to get started planning, but this year we are in the position because of the pandemic that we do not know what our ability to gather will be like in 2021.

There is a great deal of hope that the vaccines that are rolling out now will be widely available in time for everyone to be inoculated before the camping season.

That being said, here is what we have planned for 2021:

- **MC Worship Zoom: January 31**
- **Spring Zoom Gathering (Conference): February 27**
- **MC Worship Zoom: February 28**
- **Samish Reunion: July 26-July 2 Bow WA**
- **Spectacular, Independence/Graceland: July 14-24**
- **MC Women's Retreat, Boise, ID: August 27-29**

LET GOD USE US ANEW By Gil Martell

When COVID-19 disrupted our lives and church gatherings needed to be suspended, I was wondering how to continue as a 'Seventy' inviting people to Jesus. I discussed it with my pastor, my wife Linda, that we needed to stay in contact with the congregation. We developed a worship outline from World Church themes and scriptures that included a sermon to e-mail. We starting in March.

What started as a way to stay in touch and share ministry with the Billings Congregation grew to include friends and relatives across the country. Invitations were extended to persons to write prayers and testimonies. For some it was the only contact of God's message of hope and peace. People have been continually added to the e-mail worship.

The lines from the Mission Prayer, 'risk something new' and 'to be a blessing of love and peace,' filled me with a sense of God's inspiration.

A couple of weeks ago when the weather was bad, I walked around the local mall. Matt, the manager of an electronic-game store, was standing at the opening. I had my mask on and keeping social distance, I stopped and said hello to him. He recognized me. Matt's wife is a church member and I had performed their wedding and blessed their son. As I prepared to leave, Matt said, "I have been reading your e-mails." God works in mysterious ways.

Unfortunately, Linda and I were infected with Covid-19 in mid-September. I did not have the energy to continue with e-mail worships. I had to cancel October's. A lady from Oregon contacted me asking if I was still doing the e-mail worships. I felt a strong spiritual nudging to continue to do one a month. When I e-mailed a November worship I received many responses thanking me for the ministry.

I have received confirmations that the e-mail worships have been a blessing during this on-going time of social confinement. I have been blessed with new understandings. I must trust God. The Holy One is more than my/our perceptions and knowledge. I have been blessed. I must respond not for self-gratification but, because to love God with my total being is to follow the leadings of the Holy Spirit in 'New Ways.'

I feel a sense of awe and wonder in being blessed in this way, and the awareness that others received God's Grace through the e-mail worships. I am humbled that God is using me.



I've been filled with the Spirit that God is with us and in us. I challenge you to continue to trust God, knowing that God lives within the hearts and souls of all. I pray that you will discover 'Anew' ways to share Christ's Mission and develop relationships where God will bless and use us to bless others. Let God Use Us Anew!

If you would like to receive the e-mail worships please email me at Gilin70@peoplepc.com.

Creative Ways to be Invitational
JoAnn Fisher
Mission Center Invitation Support Minister

This year we have had to re-think what invitation means and we have had to be creative about meeting the needs of people during a pandemic.

We have had to ask ourselves, “How can we be the hands and feet of Jesus when we are masked and social distancing?”

One of the ways we have done this is through the Kids Online Book Club. We have offered children ages 4-8 an opportunity to form relationships with other children as well as exposing them to books that reflect our Enduring Principles.



This ministry has not only been an authentic reflection of responding to the needs of children who can no longer interact with their friends as they have in the past, or attend Sunday school, but it has also provided some unexpected benefits.

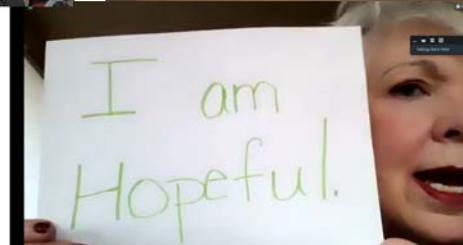
Because we observe the “best practices” of our Protect the Children protocols, we ask that a parent remain in the room with their child during our meetings.

Recently, I was part of a zoom gathering that was focused on Spiritual Formation for Women through Art. During the event, we were divided into small groups to share our drawings as well as our thoughts. One of the women in my small group said, I am happy to be in this small group because I know these two women and they would not judge me’. I had never actually met this woman...she had only seen me in Kids Online Book Club.

But that encounter helped me realize that there was overlapping ministry. By caring for people’s children in a compassionate and loving way, it also says to the parent’s “We value what you value.

We care about your children, and there is a place for you and your family here.”

As 2020 comes to a close and 2021 lies before us, may you and those you minister with be generously blessed as we strive to extend ourselves in ministry that is relevant, authentic, and far-reaching.



A Conversation with Scott

by Joelle Wight

At this year's Inland West Mission Center Conference, I had the unique opportunity to interview a member of the First Presidency, Scott Murphy, who insisted we just refer to him as Scott. Perhaps I shouldn't call it a unique opportunity. After all, our church leadership is very accessible and is committed to open dialogue with the community; an interview such as this isn't uncommon. However, the experience was still unique because of the circumstances surrounding it.

As you all know, this interview took place in the midst of a global pandemic and during a continuing movement for racial equality in our country. As I prepared to pose questions related to these two major situations, I have to admit, I was a bit nervous. However, with each question Scott answered, my nerves diminished. While the answers he gave were great, they weren't what calmed my nerves. Rather, it was the way Scott approached his answers that eased my tension. Rather than offering canned responses or pretending he had the perfect solutions, Scott acknowledge the extreme challenges present during these times. He recognized the work that was ahead of us and didn't disregard the weariness we all felt. Most importantly, his honest answers all contained a thread of hope and, because they were honest answers, I could trust that the hope evident in them was not unfounded.

Covid-19 and the fight for racial and social justice cannot be ignored. We as people of faith are uniquely poised to respond with the peace of Jesus Christ during these challenging times. We aren't expected to have all the answers or devise perfect solutions. We don't need to pretend nothing is wrong or act as though we aren't feeling weary. All we must do is persist in hope, take the next right step, and face the challenges as they come, knowing that we don't face them alone.

I'd like to close with one final reflection about the interview. Near the beginning, Scott outlined the decisions that led him to his current role. Throughout his life he was faced with uncertainty and didn't know exactly where his path would lead. However, he trusted God's guidance and expressed an indescribable presence of the Spirit in each decision he made. Although it didn't relate to any of the current events I mentioned above, this piece of the interview felt to me like the most relevant to our current situation. We face a lot of uncertainty right now and we don't know exactly where our path will lead us. However, if we trust in God and are open to the indescribable presence of the Spirit, I believe we will be amazed by where we end up.

May we persist on our journey in faith together and continue to be a blessing of God's love and peace. Amen.



Report on Covid in the Mission Center

You will find elsewhere in this edition of the Inland Stream an article by Mary Beth Hunter written during the early fall of this year. Mary Beth is a nurse and serves as a member of the pastoral team in Whitehall, Montana. She is bright, very intelligent and a committed servant to her community, and she has been touched by COVID-19 professionally and personally.

Like most people in the mission center we all have been touched by this pandemic in one way or another, but I am happy to say that not one person in the mission center has become ill because they attended a gathering at a church facility where they contracted the virus. Some folks think I have been over cautious and reactionary with my administration of policy concerning re-opening congregations during this pandemic. But I can read, and I know what happens when people gather, I see the aftermath reported in papers and on broadcast media. The willingness of people to flaunt safety protocols by not wearing masks and gathering in close spaces has and will cost this nation billions of dollars not to mention the broken lives, families, and communities that are left in grief.

In our mission center we have had people sick

with COVID-19 in these congregations:

Billings Montana
Hagerman Idaho
Lewis-Clark, Washington
Whitehall Montana
Deer Lodge Montana
New Plymouth, Idaho

These are only the ones we have been made aware of and there are many more who were probably infectious and were asymptomatic. The people in these congregations were being careful, but if they had been contagious and attending church the number of folks who are our brothers and sisters contracting the virus would be higher and we may be grieving some of their passing.

I will continue to watch the data and manage the policy to help congregations open when and where it is safe. Just so you know, opening soon looks doubtful at this time (November 24, 2020). But that does not mean that need stops or that ministry stops. This is a time to stretch your imagination and your ministry. We cannot meet together if it means we might be killing our brother or sister, but there are new ways emerging to bring ministry and form community. Pray about the new things in front of you, then do it.

From around the Mission Center in 2020

Blessings:

- Penelope Domire, Salt Lake City
- Judea Lee, Ogden, UT (October, 2019)
- Ethan Reeves, Billing, UT
- Ellie Taylor, Lewis-Clark, WA (October, 2019)
- Kaden Zitterkopf, Spokane Valley, WA

Confirmations:

- William Gardner, Salt Lake City, UT

Ordinations:

- Jason Eyre, Elder, Salt Lake City, UT
- Laura Pennock, Priest, Salt Lake City, UT
- Kathleen Strozyk, Priest, Spokane Valley, WA

Deaths:

- Lynn Axton, Spokane Valley, WA
- William Ball, Billings, MT
- Harold Barger, Missoula, MT

- Lynn Chapman, Spokane Valley, WA
- Don Clutter, Spokane Valley, WA
- Charles Ferdig, Baker City, OR
- Barbara Holst, Spokane Valley, WA
- Kermot Kindsfater, Billings, MT
- Adda Leigh, Ogden, UT (December, 2019)
- Pam Lucas, Lewis-Clark, WA
- Linda Nelson, Spokane Valley, WA
- Bernard Parton, New Plymouth, ID
- Theresa Walters, Deer Lodge, MT (October, 2019)
- Ellen Wang, Spokane Valley, WA
- Bea Warnock, Spokane Valley, WA

If there are life events or transitions happening in your congregation please send them to Sandy Decker at sdecker@cofchrist-iwest.org.

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**Mark Your Calendar!
Spring Zoom Gathering (Conference) will
beheld on February 27, 2021.**

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