

Counting our Blessings in the Midst of Crisis

A Stewardship Reflection

On March 6th, the staff of Fauntleroy Church gathered for an emergency meeting. The Church Council had just approved my request to suspend all in-person worships, meetings, practices, and events and to send staff members most vulnerable to COVID-19 to work from home. Suddenly, everything was turned upside-down as we figured out what needed to happen in the next 24 hours, the next 96 hours, the next three weeks. We were thrown into crisis mode where everything felt suddenly unstable.

And then three weeks became two months, and two months became four months, and now, we're having conversation about whether we'll even *consider* worshipping together again before January as we look at all the hurdles we need to leap in doing our due diligence to keep our congregants and building visitors as safe as possible. COVID-19 crisis mode has stretched on-and-on, as it has for all our churches.

And yet, amid this odd and destabilizing time, God is working. At my church, we've felt it in the ways our move to go online has provided an opportunity for some members and former members to join us from far-flung places, and the way that number is growing. We've felt it in the ways our creativity has been stretched and nurtured. We've felt it in new and renewed pledges as we begin our new fiscal year in July, despite the challenges we know some are facing. We've felt it in the ways our people are picking up the phone and reaching out to one another with intention in this time that is proving lonely and even traumatic for many. We've felt it in the ways our predominantly white congregation has leaned into the pain of the black community, recognizing in long overdue ways that we've used our privilege as a cloak to hide or retreat behind when others' cries for justice become too raw, real and overwhelming for our fragile, toe-dipping, on-and-off justice ventures. Congregants' eyes are opening to see how sentimental gestures like singing "We will overcome" are easy-outs on the wings of hope for white people, performative allyship isn't true allyship, and routine actions of charity anchoring our outreach are lackluster in a world where Christ is calling for our advocacy and walking-beside. In so many ways, we are being undone and reformed, like a caterpillar in a chrysalis, my Fauntleroy colleague, Pastor Karyn Frazier, has said.

It's hard, but necessary work – this work of becoming caterpillar stew on the path to becoming the butterflies God intends. Each day, my to-do list grows faster than I'm able to shrink it, and the intricacies and challenges of many of those to-do's are overwhelming. **I don't know if I could do this hard work if I thought my church was doing it alone.**

That's why I give thanks for our conference of churches here in the Pacific Northwest Conference of the UCC. I give thanks for the ways in which Mike, Courtney, our board, our camp directors and all of you have faced this challenging time head-on, with determination and belief that hand-in-hand, we will get through to the other side. I give thanks for the

ways in which our forced embrace of technology has connected our spatially large conference in ways that are introducing me to more of you now than I have been since coming to this conference five years ago. I give thanks for the similarities of our shared challenges and the gifts and insights I can lean on in my colleagues and sister churches to avoid reinventing the wheel on every front my church and I are facing. But most of all, I give thanks for the ways in which all of you remind me that I'm not alone; the Spirit of the Divine is close and dynamic in all of you – in all of us together!

I'm determined that my thanks and my church's thanks will not be merely performative. That's why my church has committed, amid some financial challenges we're facing, to continue supporting our conference through maintained OCWM levels for the coming year, and we're inviting our congregants to consider how they might participate in our conference camp campaign too.

We are all stewards of something greater than ourselves, whether we are talking about ourselves as individuals or individual churches. And the body of Christ is only as strong as we are determined to make it. We need each other, and the world needs who we can be together. May that larger vision drive us forward through all challenges.

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