

Covenant Call

May 2020 Newsletter

Dear Friends,

The last ten days have been filled with wonder for me. The cool snap we experienced was all the motivation I needed to get out on long walks in the green belt about a half-mile north of our house. Walking alone with Ari (our dog) through a field and along the length of an earthen dam in the brisk morning air energized me. With the joy of Easter in my heart and the app “Seek” by iNaturalist on my phone, I began identifying and logging each species of wildflower I saw.

Having grown up and spent long hours wandering in the post oak savannas of East-Central Texas and

having taken an upper-level Ecology class at TAMU with a fantastic lab, I had come to feel very rooted on the land there, in part, because I knew what I was seeing and at least a bit about how the ecosystem all fit together. The last 25 years, though, have been



marked by moves to the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico, Atlanta, GA, Columbia, SC, and Tulsa, OK. Along the way, I’ve failed to learn many of the unique species in the places where I’ve lived, the idea of “home” has become spread among several places, and I’ve begun to feel unrooted and disconnected from the natural world.

Learning the flora and fauna of the Hill Country has thus been a goal of mine for about five years, but I’ve made little progress along the way. The use of the “Seek” app has done at least two things for me over the last week. First, it has allowed me to log over 45 species of wildflowers and learn to call most of them by name. The second creation story in Genesis holds an interesting observation. It states, “So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name” (Gen. 2:19). Naming things connects us to them more deeply. The

land already is beginning to look different in my eyes, as I walk along the path and mentally greet the radiant flowers by name. They are no longer simply mysteries. They are known. The Texas sage and mealy sage share the name of a spice in our kitchen and a relatedness I had missed until I knew their names.

Second, and more importantly, logging and learning the names of over 45 species of wildflowers in one large field has filled me with a sense of wonder. I’m only logging those flowers that are in bloom now, even as I note that some of the wildflowers have gone to seed and grasses, bushes, cacti, and trees are beyond

the scope of my focus at this point. The biodiversity of this one plot is amazing for me to try to imagine. How many species inhabit this little slice of wilderness when you add in spiders, insects, birds, mammals, and reptiles? What species appear (birds? amphibians? Insects?) after a flash flood

when the dam creates a temporary lake? Over the course of a single year, how many species inhabit this little Eden? How do they interact? What have the human impacts on the system been over the last few years? What about environmental impacts?

A quick internet search led to the discovery that there are about 5,000 species of wildflowers and about 35,000 species of insects in Texas. My initial guess that maybe 500 species of plants and animals inhabit that small green belt now seems laughably small as an estimate. It’s as though God is announcing to me, “Pay attention! Be amazed at my creativity! Notice how I care for ‘the lilies of the field.’ Let yourself be filled with wonder and awe!”

And wonder, it seems to me, leads to joy...and hope...and trust. The God who is this creative and attends to this much detail will surely lead us forward in the midst of every challenge we face.

Grace & Peace, Pastor Dan



Worship

One of the ways we mark time and order our lives is through weekly worship. We continue to hold worship each Sunday morning, streaming it on Facebook Live. More information is available on our website, and past worship services can be viewed there under "Sermons" or through our Facebook page under "Videos". Many thanks to our worship team and AV "gurus" who have helped us keep moving forward with worship, improving the production quality each week as we go.



We will have communion through our live-streamed service on Sunday, May 3, at 10:30 a.m. As a result, we encourage you each to obtain either bread or crackers and either wine or grape juice to use as the elements in the service as you take communion at home. We will include the liturgy for communion in the worship service that day and guide you into receiving the elements on your own. While we look forward to the day when we can share in this holy meal together in the sanctuary, we are grateful to be able to hear the words of institution, be reminded of the depth of God's love for us, and be drawn virtually into a deeper sense of the community we share with one another and the communion we share with Christ.



Fellowship—Brown Bag Zoom Lunches

The week of April 20 began Brown Bag Zoom Lunches. Pastor Dan is hosting this relaxed gathering time each Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday at noon for coffee and lunch conversations. A Zoom call will be open for us each of those days to simply connect with one another, hear about each others' joys and challenges, and encourage each other through these strange times. Find the link posted on our website, and make plans to join! Let's look forward to staying socially connected while we are physically distanced from one another.

Donations during the Pandemic

For the foreseeable future, we will make deposits of checks received at the church office once a month. Ismael (our custodian who lives on the corner of our church property) brings the mail into Bethany's locked office daily, so checks are kept safe until they can be deposited. During this phase of the pandemic, we plan to make deposits on the fourth Wednesday of each month.



If you are able to use Zelle for your giving to the church during the next few months, know that will be the most helpful way for the church to be able to receive your giving and continue using your gifts for the ministry of our church.



Zelle can be downloaded as an app or may be available through your online banking. On Zelle, you can find us through our linked email: finance@covenantcares.org to be sure you get the right Covenant Presbyterian Church. In making your donation, when it asks "What's this for?" please enter "Operations," "Missions," or whatever designation that you wish it to go towards.



Self-Care During this Time

As the days of “social distancing” have turned to weeks and now have extended to a month, the toll that the isolation can take on us is growing. Finding hope, focus, joy, and normalcy in the midst of a pandemic is a new trick for most of us to have to learn. Perhaps the great little one-page guide written by Michael McMains slipped right past you a few weeks ago. It may be more timely now.

Dr. Michael McMains, a new member of Covenant and our Beautiful Minds Coalition, wrote an extremely helpful one-page guide on how we can care for ourselves and one another as we go through this challenging time. I then forwarded it to three entities:

- to the Presbyterian Mental Health Network Steering Committee,
- to Rev. Ann Helmke, the Faith Liaison for the City of San Antonio’s Human Services, and
- to Shannon Royce, Director of The Partnership Center, Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in Washington, D.C.

Each of these entities has lauded the value of the simple but deeply helpful document. Dr. McMains’ work has been formatted and tweaked and has now been shared throughout the PCUSA nationally, throughout the ecumenical and interfaith community in San Antonio and nationally through the Dept. of Health & Human Services. You can also find it on page 6 of this newsletter.



Did you see that picture or video of ten thousand cars lined up to receive food at the San Antonio Food Bank? See below. There are so many local families harshly impacted by the economic slowdown due to the Coronavirus stay-at-home order.

As Christians, it is our duty to help take care of our neighbors when we can. That's why the Covenant Mission Team donated \$1000 to the SA Food Bank last week---yet it's not nearly enough. The SA Food Bank normally serves about 58,000 people each week (each week!) but they had to ramp up fast during their first week of the Coronavirus Response and serve closer to 80,000 people. That's a 75% spike. And it's only going to get worse in coming months as the economic impact deepens. The SA Food Bank is projecting they will need to serve double their usual amount, so approximately 120,000 people.

If you are doing okay financially at this time, please consider donating to the SA Food Bank. You can donate directly to the SA Food Bank at their website SAFoodBank.org or you can send a check to **SA Food Bank, 52100 Enrique M. Barrera Parkway, San Antonio, TX 78227**



Christian Education Opportunities

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

– Matthew 28:16-20

He is risen! Alleluia!

Easter Sunday is a joyous occasion in which we, as disciples, proclaim boldly that Christ is risen! And yet—we also know that this is not the end of the story. We understand that God continued and continues to work in the world.

This week, we enter our second month of social distancing. Though our campus remains closed, we are reminded of Jesus' words in Matthew 28 to continue to strengthen our faith and then to share the gospel message.

Covenant's Christian Education Team would like to let you know about several opportunities for you to connect and grow during this time. Our hope is that you might join us for one or more of these opportunities to focus and strengthen your faith during this period of social distancing.



Adult Sunday Morning Class

9:30am beginning April 22nd

Renegade Gospel: The Rebel Jesus by Mike Slaughter

Led by Karl Hays

Central to the Christian faith is a man who denies all our pre-conceived notions about what God should look like. Joining his movement will mean coming to terms with the real Jesus, the rebel Jesus.

Jesus didn't come to start a religion. The rebel Jesus came with a renegade gospel to start a revolution. You and I are invited to be a part. In Renegade Gospel, pastor and author Mike Slaughter presents Jesus and his challenging message to inspire us during Lent, Easter, and through the year. Read the red letters and discover Jesus all over again.

We invite you to join us as we walk with Jesus on the "Radical Road to the Cross".

Join us each Sunday morning by going to our website www.covenantcares.org and clicking on the zoom link for this class.

Meeting ID: 912 3591 2696

Password: 723266



Children Sunday Morning Class

9:30am (2years – 5th Grade)

Growing in Grace & Gratitude

This class features the curriculum, "Growing in Grace & Gratitude", which helps transform the lives of children and those who love them, shaped by grace and gratitude. Each session shares a Bible story that reveals God's grace for us. Through fun, age-appropriate activities, prayer, and singing, children will celebrate the meaning of this grace in their lives as they encounter a living God.

We continue this Spring by helping children understand how Easter is not just one day, but a season of celebration and good news as we move toward Pentecost. We hope that your child will join us on Sunday morning to learn about God's grace and love for all through Jesus Christ!

Join us each Sunday morning. Contact Chad Bosse at Chad@covenantcares.org for the information to login into the kids Zoom Sunday School Class. All Children are welcome.

Lectio Divina Bible Study Groups

Lectio Divina Bible Study Groups

Throughout most of the last century or more, Christian formation in the Presbyterian Church has been focused on Sunday school and, at times, mid-week Bible studies that focused on informational learning, personal interpretation, and life application (almost always using a curriculum and a teacher considered to have a great deal of knowledge). Unfortunately, the impact of this has included making the Bible feel less accessible to most people in the pew—especially in terms of making them feel equipped to help lead other people into reading and studying it.

Lectio Divina (“Divine Reading”) is a form of biblical reading that is distinct from the academic study of a text. It is a devotional approach in which the reader seeks to let God speak through the text into their lives in order to continue the Spirit’s work of transformation. Throughout this process, our guiding question is “What do you want me to hear today, God?”

We invite our whole congregation to join one of the following Lectio Divina Bible Study Groups. Over the next 8 weeks, we will be focusing on the book of Philippians where we read about Paul experiencing joy while he is imprisoned. Several groups are forming and will begin April 22.

To participate, please go to our webpage and click on the appropriate Zoom link for the group below. Visit us at www.covenantcares.org for links.

Tuesday afternoon (1:00 p.m.)

Cathy Monkman

Meeting ID: 933 2043 7735, Password: 881541

Tuesday evening (6:30 p.m.)

Chad Bosse

Meeting ID: 961 6414 3935, Password: covenant

Tuesday evening (7:00 p.m.)

Dan Milford & Martha Wright

Meeting ID: 996 6469 8221, Password: 584332

Wednesday morning (10:00 a.m.)

Denise Haley

Meeting ID: 956 2656 8717, Password: 672332

Thursday evening (7:00 p.m.)

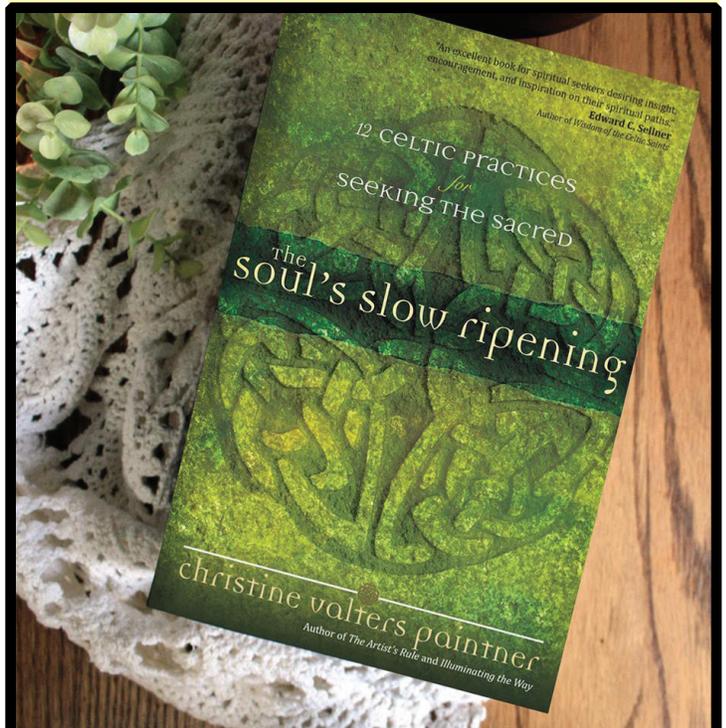
Jay Pitcher & Scott Simpson

Meeting ID: 933 6556 7445, Password: 495046

Saturday morning (6:30 a.m.)

Al Kissling & Jay Pitcher

Meeting ID: 998 7565 1984, Password: 659935



Adult Book Discussion

The Soul's Slow Ripening:
12 Celtic Practices for Seeking the Sacred by
Christine Valters Paintner

Sundays, 11:45am beginning April 22nd

Several people met on Palm Sunday to discuss this book by Christine Valters Paintner. At the end of the discussion, they decided to reconvene the group discussion, focusing on one chapter each week. This is to give everyone an opportunity to practice the spiritual exercise during the week and to give plenty of time to share those experiences with one another.

We invite you to join us each week by going to our webpage at www.covenantcares.org and clicking on the class link.

Meeting ID: 957 3622 4609

Password: 543967



Presbyterian Mental Health Network

Mental Well-Being during a Pandemic

For many of us these are unprecedented times. We're being asked to do new things, relate in new ways, and care for one another in different and sometimes uncomfortable ways. For many, this is a time of great fear, stress, and anxiety. The [Presbyterian Mental Health Network](#) offers the following resource for congregations, clergy, and communities.

Stress, Fear, and Panic

- Fear is a normal response to real and potential threats. It's okay to be afraid. However, fear is designed to be a brief emotional state.
- Persistent fear and panic are detrimental to our physical, mental, and emotional health. Persistent fear and panic stresses our immune systems and hinders our ability to respond and plan accordingly.
- [Caregivers can honor the importance of being afraid without giving permission to live in fear.](#)
 - Listen to people who are afraid without dismissing their fears.
 - Limit your exposure to news and especially commentary on the pandemic. Be informed, not an expert.
- Learn to listen to your integrated self:
 - If you are physically tense, get up and walk around.
 - If you are emotionally spent, rest, relax, meditate, initiate important spiritual practices.
 - If you run into a mental wall, step back, turn off things that are stimulating the stress, reach out to others.

Mental Well-Being

- Maintain positive thoughts. It is too easy for our thoughts to cascade into catastrophe. Though this crisis will bring about changes, not everything is permanent, pervasive, or personal. [Balance the reality of the situation with gratitude.](#)
- Be imaginative and creative. Imagination can be both a terrible and terrific human feature. It can convince the worst is upon us, it can also save us from depression and anxiety. [When you feel overwhelmed, use your imagination to draw upon meaningful, peaceful, safe, carefree, experiences.](#)
- [As you are able, when stressed, change your physical surroundings.](#) Our minds often try and predict what is coming next. Physical spaces can become associated with emotional states. [When stress or panic hits, change your physical space, what you view or see, or who is in front of you.](#)
- We are in uncharted territory, and that can feel tenuous. Predictability is difficult. Therefore, make a routine that honors this new normal. [Create a daily schedule: bathing, eating, sleeping, working, relating, exercise, social interaction.](#)
- [Relate, relate, relate.](#) Reach out to friends, family, and members of your church and other communities. Invent creative social interactions. [Physical distance does not have to equate to social isolation.](#) We can teach and embody and embolden the people around us to create and be community.
- [Seek professional help.](#) When you need it, access professional help. Share with your community that you are seeking help. Break down the stigma of seeking counseling and coaching. Virtual counseling and coaching is normal now.

Spiritual Well-Being

- This is not just a physical and mental crisis. [It is also a spiritual crisis for many people.](#) As spiritual leaders - clergy, youth leaders, sessions, deacons - we have a distinct perspective and interpretation to offer others.
- Provide a spiritual frame that serves your church communities with energy and imagination. Spend time in community thinking, reflecting, and learning about how we theologically understand what is happening.
- Think about social distancing as a spiritual practice of care of neighbor.
- Reframe fears with empathy. Help people worried about their survival expand this to the community's survival.
- Access your spiritual practices and create new ones that frame this new reality of life and community.

Financial *Update*

As we walk through this time of the COVID-19 pandemic that has led to the closure of our church campus, many members have asked questions about how we're doing financially through this time. In some ways, it's too early to tell. Our accountant has been extremely busy helping his clients apply for the Paycheck Protection Program and has not been able to provide us finalized contribution statements yet. Additionally, we moved away from weekly deposits in favor of a monthly deposit of checks (4th Wednesdays) and donations through Zelle.

Here are several items of good news on the financial front:

- Thanks to Richard Galloway (treasurer) and Perry Deckard (accountant), we have applied for and received a loan (at 1%) for \$58,000 from the Paycheck Protection Program, the majority of which will become a grant after we supply documentation two months from now for how the funds were spent. That will be a tremendous help.
- Over the last month, we've received \$10,708 in contributions through Zelle and \$21,695 in checks for a total of \$32,403. That compares to an average of \$32,387/month of anticipated giving.
- Church utilities and maintenance needs are anticipated to be lower through this time where the buildings are getting little use.
- Our congregation is continuing to give generously during this time even as we juggle new ways to do that and new ways to handle the deposits.
- Our bank balance is high enough at this time that we should not have cash flow problems any time soon.

Several items to continue to watch:

- We actually budgeted to use \$81,144 over and above anticipated contributions for 2020. That represents:
 - Funds from our permanent funds ministry that are invested in a balanced fund that has decreased substantially in value since late February.
 - Funds from rental of our gymnasium to outside groups that have now been cancelled.
 - Operating reserve, a portion of which is also invested in a balanced fund and has decreased in value.
- The last 30 days of contributions included Holy Week, when we would ordinarily have more visitors and a higher than average giving of non-pledged income. We undoubtedly simply lost some of what we would have received had we been able to worship in the sanctuary.

In short, our cash flow is in great shape, thanks to the PPP loan and consistent giving over the last month. Still, all of us working together will be needed to support the church through this interesting time. Please remember that you can give through Zelle or through check mailed to the church office. If by check, know that the mail is put on Bethany's desk every day, and envelopes that appear to have contributions are regularly (at least weekly) put into our safe until they are deposited on fourth Wednesdays.

Covenant Presbyterian Church
211 Roletto Drive
San Antonio, Texas 78213

Website: www.covenantcares.org
Email: office@covenantcares.org
Phone: 210-342-5253

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS
PERMIT NO. 1091

Return service requested



GET CONNECTED

- **Church News by Email** – We send an email several times a month to inform members and friends on church news and events. Email office@covenantcares.org to have your email added to the list.
- **Website:** www.covenantcares.org - See recorded videos of sermons/ worship services and access links to Zoom Bible Studies
- **Watch Live Worship Services on Facebook**
<https://www.facebook.com/covenant.satx/>
- **Prayer Chain** – send an email to covenantprayerchain211@gmail.com