



THE VINE

A NEWSLETTER OF THE CATAWBA CLERGY NETWORK

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

By The Rev. Betty Morton, PCC – Leadership, Life and Spiritual Coach and Consultant to the Catawba Clergy Network

*Arise, shine, for your light has come...
For darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you (Isa 60:1-2).*

“Happy New Year!” I value this greeting! This year, I need it. When someone says, “Happy New Year” to me, they don’t know it, but I take it as a blessing. They encourage me to be happy. They remind me to trust that winter’s darkness will yield to Spring.

I must admit, I’ve struggled with faith and happiness for the last few years -- not faith in God, but faith in humankind. I find myself heartbroken in what seems like endless winter – a lifetime of social injustice and divisions, years of pandemic and deaths, nights of loneliness and waiting. I long to see the goodness of God in the land of the living (Ps 27:13). I want to be happy. Don’t you?

I truly believe you and I can be happy in 2022 -- *despite whatever comes our way* -- and our scriptures offer us a roadmap. In 1 Thess 5:15-18, St. Paul encourages the faithful to do three things, saying, “*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*”

1. Rejoice always: Always? Really? Yes, really! Though the winters of our souls are harsh, good things are happening below the surface that we cannot see. Winter offers rest, re-nourishment and renewal to both the earth and to our souls. As Christian educator and author, Christine Valters Paintner, notes, winter is like a womb nurturing new life, and we will see Spring again. Because of this, and despite all, we can rejoice -- always.

2. Pray without ceasing: Again, really? Yes, really. Think of your entire life as a prayer with the ever-present Spirit within, praying for you and guiding you. But it’s hard to listen when always on the go, so we must slow down. I am continually amazed at how many pastors tell me they don’t have time for prayer. And I’m equally amazed at what the simple act of pausing in prayer does for the soul. Through prayer, you remember who you truly are in Christ; re-member and restore your soul; and even find yourself truly listening to and attending to others, more than worrying about their church attendance.

3. Give thanks: Gratitude is a choice, a stance of the heart that you can choose for everything, though this seems ridiculous. Circumstances can shake you, but they cannot destroy you. In gratitude, you can take the hand of faith, until you see hope made real.

Happiness, too, is a choice grounded in faith. This year, if you prioritize your soul health, strengthening your soul with joy, prayer and gratitude, you just might find it.

Epiphany Prayer: *Though cold and darkness cover the earth and thick darkness cover the hearts of many, may Light always shine in your soul. This God’s gift in Christ for us.*

SAVE THE DATE:
CATAWBA CLERGY DAYS
OCTOBER 20-21, 2022



Clergy Days 2021 in person Participants on October 29, 2021

To read about 2021's event please [click here](#).



Above photos from L to R: A Clergy Network COP group gathers for a photo after Clergy Days 2021; The Rev. Beth Kennett shows her artwork completed in the final session; the table of art created in a session facilitated by Cely Chicurel; the Catawba Clergy Days Planning Team: Hannah McNeely, The Rev. Dian Jackson Davis, Shannon Axtell Martin, and the Rev. Dr. Luci Fleming.

**Congratulations to
The Rev. C. L Stumb,
the recipient of the
2021 Church College
Award!**



Rev. Stumb and Catawba President, Dr. Nelson

Please [click here](#) to see the recording from the evening's program.

CLERGY THRIVING GRANT CORNER

REST, RESOURCES, RELATIONSHIPS, & REFLECTION

Clergy Thriving Grants can be up to \$2,500 to support Clergy Thriving. There is a competitive grant cycle, with applications due by May 15. These grants are separate from \$500 COP Grants, for which clergy are eligible upon successful completion of the Communities of Practice Year.

We will share stories in this space about how both COP and Clergy Thriving Grants have been used so that others may glean insights and inspiration from the experiences of others.

CLERGY THRIVING GRANT SPOTLIGHT: REST AND SABBATH ARE NOT OPTIONAL

The Reverend Ian McPherson



"I felt transformed by this experience of rest and roaming. In each of these moments of quiet, I was reminded of what Anne Lamott has written: 'I do not understand the mystery of grace -- only that it meets us where we are and does not leave us where it found us.'"

My grant project was a retreat to Savannah. This excursion came at the perfect time, as our congregation was gearing up for regathering in person. As demands began to ratchet up for yet another season of transition, after several rounds of innovation amidst the uncertainties of the pandemic, I desperately needed some quiet time to myself—and plenty of space to roam as I sought to cultivate spaciousness within. It was very hot, but the heat was in many ways a blessing. It forced me to slow my pace, be attentive to my body's needs, and seek shelter and shade wherever I could. Savannah is very walkable and very shaded; my time there was very restful.

But I struggled throughout the retreat to find a book that felt fitting for my time away. I had some personal books that I brought from home, and those kept me occupied, but I worried that I "had" to purchase the "right" book to set the "right" tone for my retreat. As time went on, and I could not find a book that spoke to me, I worried that I wasn't "doing" the retreat the "right" way. But I committed to remaining attentive to what was around me, and what brought me joy in the present moment.

On the way home, I stopped by a bookstore close to my house that I've always wanted to visit. On the shelf as I walked in was Ross Gay's *The Book of Delights*, a book that I've long wanted to read because of its attention to delight as a practice. It felt like such a fitting affirmation of the practice I had taken on during my time away, even without the "right" book to guide me while in Savannah. And if I needed any further affirmation that there was some divine timing at work, Gay's daily reflections on what delights him began on his birthday, August 1st, the same day I arrived back home from my trip and began to read it!

I have learned, yet again, that rest and sabbath are not optional. They are imperative to the work I do, and I must covenant to honor them and (by extension) the God who commands them. I have also relearned the significance of my connection to nature, especially water and trees. Even in an urban setting like Savannah, there was plenty of green space and water to rest by. These are essential parts of my own spiritual recharging. A final lesson is the importance of embracing adventure. With travel being so limited throughout the pandemic, I struggled to connect with my yearning for exploration. This retreat gave me permission to re-center that desire as a spiritual practice.

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

DISCOVER YOUTH THEOLOGY INSTITUTE

You know the youth in your congregations- who is curious, who is wrestling with their calling, who has big questions about what their faith means in their daily life.

If this brings a student to your mind, please nominate them to attend Discover, Catawba's Youth Theology Institute. We explore vocational discernment, theological reflection, and practical theology through tracks of Sport Management, Worship Music, and Service and Ministry Leadership. This on campus residential summer program is free after a deposit (which can be waived if it presents a hardship). More information can be found at www.catawba.edu/discover. Contact discover@catawba.edu to nominate a student or with any questions you may have.

If you are interested in sharing your call story with this group of young people, please contact Shannon at the address above.



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BRING DISCOVER TO YOUR CONGREGATION!

Catawba College's Youth Theology Institute, Discover, exists to equip middle and high school students with tools to explore their faith, discern their calling, and become a part of the ongoing conversation about what it means to live a faithful life. We approach Christian faith development through community building, time in creation, scriptural exploration, and theological reflection.

We love when your students join us at Discover in the summer, and we would also love the opportunity to bring Discover to you (whether virtually or in person)! Discover staff are available to come visit your group and facilitate activities or serve as guest speakers.

We can individualize the program to fit your group. Contact discover@catawba.edu to schedule and find out more.

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COP ROUNDTABLE

"I have learned as well as shared within my group. We have built an unshakable bond of love, trust, and respect. We have created a safe space to be authentically ourselves."

-Catawba Clergy Network COP Participant

 Interested in joining a
**CATAWBA CLERGY
NETWORK COP?**

"COPs" or "Communities of Practice" are small discussion groups for peer learning and support. Catawba Clergy Network offers COPs for SOC, Catawba alumni, and area ministers. COPs meet monthly and are designed to provide community and resources to help ministers thrive.



The next COP year will begin in September, but if you'd like to learn more in the meantime please contact The Rev. Betty Morton at: bjmorton19@catawba.edu.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY:

Are you or your congregation interested in serving the Rowan - Salisbury community alongside Catawba College? Volunteer Catawba has partnered with Habitat for Humanity, a US nonprofit organization helping provide affordable homes to people in our communities. They have an ongoing service project happening now through January. If you are interested in this service project, please contact Johnathon Boles (jcboles@catawba.edu), director of Volunteer Catawba.

JOIN THE DISCUSSION!

The Clergy Network "Discussion Hub" can be found within our private Facebook group. Through a simple application, you can apply to be a part of this group, which is only for current members of the Clergy Network. This is an informal space which offers a safe place for you to receive and share resources, rest, reflect, and meaningfully connect with fellow clergy as well as Catawba Clergy Network staff. We hope to see you all there! If you have any questions or have resources you would like shared through this Facebook group please contact, Hannah Hutchens McNeely, hhutchen18@catawba.edu.

[Follow this link if you are interested.](#)

**CATAWBA
COLLEGE**



Clergy Network

www.catawba.edu/clergy

clergynetwork@catawba.edu