



SALT & LIGHT

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OUR FAITH

Hope Church is called by God and equipped by the Holy Spirit to be a witness to the unity, reconciliation, and justice given in the saving grace of Jesus Christ. These touchstones drawn from the Belhar Confession give voice to the historic Christian faith in our time and place.



See how you can join us at
[HopeChurchRCA.org](https://www.HopeChurchRCA.org)

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Tending the Web of Connections

On the evening of August 29 there will be a gathering of the “Great Consistory” at Hope Church. The Great Consistory is a wonderful quirk of RCA polity (not found in other denominations that I know of), designating all who have served a congregation as Deacon or Elder to be part of the Great Consistory; at Hope Church that’s around 150 people! This group can be assembled as an advisory group to Consistory to consider “matters of special importance relating to the welfare of the church.” But it’s a wonderful quirk that is seldom utilized in congregations, and that was also true at Hope Church for its initial 150 years or so! Starting in 2017, the Consistory has called annual gatherings of the Great Consistory (disrupted for a few years by COVID), realizing that this was a great resource of faithful wisdom to engage with important issues in our congregation, denomination, community, and world. Great Consistory gatherings have focused on the future path of the RCA and on commitments by Hope Church to issues of justice and mercy, and the Spirit has blessed these gatherings with insight and guidance for our shared ministry. And it’s been a wonderful time of fellowship, as we give thanks to God for the many gifts present in the people of Hope Church.

This August, the topic is a bit more humble but just as important: How can we nurture and strengthen the web of connections that bind together the Hope Church community in fellowship, service, and care? It seems clear that in coming out of the painful disruptions of the COVID pandemic, in many aspects of life including the church there is both a desire for reconnection and some rethinking of how meaningful and enduring connection happens. That’s important for the leadership group of the Great Consistory to ponder, and I’m hopeful this event will inspire and challenge each one who attends to commit in some intentional way to strengthening connections at Hope Church. And as I’ve thought about it, clearly this is important for the “Great Congregation” of Hope Church also—which is all of you!—and you are indeed a great congregation. As we come into this fall season, I encourage and challenge you to listen for how God is inspiring you to strengthen the web of Hope Church connections, in ways that are new or tried-and-true.

Grace and Peace – Pastor Gordon



Jemar Tisby, Simmons College of Kentucky, who offers a definition of and historical context for white Christian nationalism



Krisin Kobes Du Mez, professor at Calvin University and author of Jesus and John Wayne, which reconstructs the path of evangelicalism



Peter Wehner, senior fellow at the Trinity Forum and contributing writer for the New York Times and The Atlantic Monthly

Facing Christian Nationalism: Struggle for the Soul of the Church

Hope Church has a long history of speaking to important issues in our community and world, seeking to be a faithful voice that reflects the call of Micah 6:8: *Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.* The Justice and Reconciliation Ministry is working within Hope Church to face the church's role in racism in order to equip us to be a community that pursues racial justice as one of its core commitments. Through that anti-racism work, and through extensive reading, we've become increasingly aware of the harmful role that Christian Nationalism is playing in the Church and in our society,

with much of the harmful impact of Christian Nationalism played out as a force counter to racial justice. We believe it is important as a faith community for Hope Church to understand the historic roots and current dynamics of Christian Nationalism. This understanding can equip us to face its harmful impacts and advocate for an expression of Christian faith that helps to build the Beloved Community given in Christ. In this Adult Ed series, we are turning to national leaders to educate and lead us, trusting that the Spirit will nurture us and guide us forward in faithfulness. We invite you to

exploration, conversation, and possibilities for action together.

The Adult Ed series is largely based on the work of the Governance Studies at Brookings and the Public Religion Research Institute (PPRI), which hosted the release of a new groundbreaking national survey on February 8. A panel of experts discussed the survey results and what they reveal about Christian Nationalism, the state of American democracy, and the health of our society. The video can be found [here](#). Note that coffee and pastries will be served at 9:30 am prior to each session.

Christian Nationalism, Cont'd

October 8

What is White Christian Nationalism?



The recently released PPRI Christian Nationalism Survey reveals that 1 in 10 Americans identify to some degree with the extremism, white supremacy, and even political violence associated with Christian Nationalism. In this session we will explore what defines Christian Nationalism and the roots of this ideology. This introduction will prepare us for future sessions delving into the impact of Christian nationalism on the American Church and the future of democracy.

October 15

White Christian Nationalism: Racism and Sexism

For this session, our panel of experts from Brookings will feature **Jemar Tisby**, Simmons College of Kentucky, who offers a definition of and an historical context for white Christian nationalism, and proclaims it as the greatest threat to both democracy and to the witness of the church today.



In addition, **Kristin Kobes Du Mez**, Calvin University, will speak to the patriarchy, misogyny, and authoritarianism within the White Christian Nationalist movement.



October 22

White Christian Nationalism Close to Home: Struggle for the Heart of Democracy

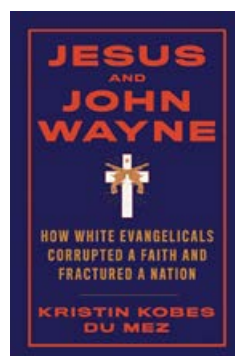


Our final Brookings expert is **Peter Wehner**, Senior Fellow at the Trinity Forum, who calls out the disproportionate influence of the Christian right within the Republican Party. His suggestion that, for many Christians, culture and politics drive thinking and faith is subordinate, offers a window into our county's Ottawa Impact. He concludes by saying the church must lead the work against White Christian Nationalism, making its involvement in politics a moral obligation.

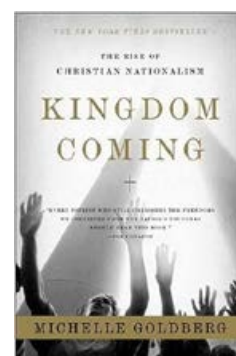
Recommended Readings



Gerson, M. (2022, September 1). "Trump Should Fill Christians with Rage. How Come He Doesn't?" The Washington Post.



Du Mez, K. (2021). *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*. Liveright Publishing Company.



Goldberg, M. (2006). *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism*. W.W. Norton.



Raising Our Voices in Song

Cindy Veldheer DeYoung, Worship Ministry

“Every Time I Feel the Spirit Moving in My Heart, I Will Pray” is a compelling song to keep us mindful of God’s invigorating liveliness in each of us. It’s a song and sentiment that would benefit our every morning wake up routines, and could be paired with another Negro spiritual song, “Woke Up This Mornin’,” a song I learned very recently during a Calvin Institute for Christian Worship seminar on African American Religious Autobiographies.

While I’m not, truthfully, a morning start-the-day-singing kind of person, I am awakening to the history and meaning of Negro spirituals.

The Hope Church Worship Ministry started discussing reparations for the use of Negro Spirituals about a year ago. We were anticipating a process of including a line item in our committee’s budget for royalties for using songs that were never copyrighted. However, the conversation shifted to having the line item in the community partners budget. Here is one perspective on the use of negro spirituals and paying royalties or reparations for the use of these songs.

Lisa Sharon Harper’s book, *Fortune*, was the focus of study with a Hope Church group a couple of years ago. She wrote of the idea of reparations as “repair.” The word “repair” has a lot of hope in it, as well as attentiveness to the nature of what is broken.

Even using the term, “Negro spirituals” causes some ambivalence. I wince because it so sharply links our white congregation to racism and the history of enslavement of black people. That ambivalence and wincing can serve as jabs to our consciences, which can be instructive for remembering the period of enslavement that not only caused suffering, humiliation and damage to black people, but continues to create economic advantages for white people.

Negro spirituals were forms of expression of the incredible suffering, oppression, and lack of control experienced during enslavement. The songs voiced the frustration, pain, and lament that was not permitted in conversation, because talking about the burden of the deplorable conditions of enslavement was grounds for horrendous punishment.

Besides the language of suffering, though, Negro spirituals often include “coded” language used to signify community events, particularly as slaves sought escape from enslavement to find freedom. “I Want Jesus to Walk With Me” could have been a reference to someone seeking freedom. Using references like “Moses” could refer to an abolitionist or other helper on the Underground Railroad, and “Canaan” refers to Canada (or the North, more generally).

As we know from singing negro spirituals like “This Little Light of Mine,” and “There is a Balm in Gilead,” there are also strong tones of hopefulness and glimpses of glory. Understanding the background of negro spirituals, arising from their complex sources, offers richer meaning to our singing and our worship.

There are, of course, varying opinions about using Negro spirituals in worship. Some of the reluctance to use Negro spirituals is from a sense of respect and concern for cultural appropriation. There are also different opinions about reparations or royalties. Center for Congregational Song director [Brian Hehn](#) said in an NPR interview that this “is not about alleviating our guilt. Rather, it’s about inspiring our communities to build deeper relationships with people who look, think, act differently than we do and have different historical realities than we do.” This makes offering royalties less transactional, and more of an effort to build

relationships and encourage black musicians. We are paying a debt in a creative way.

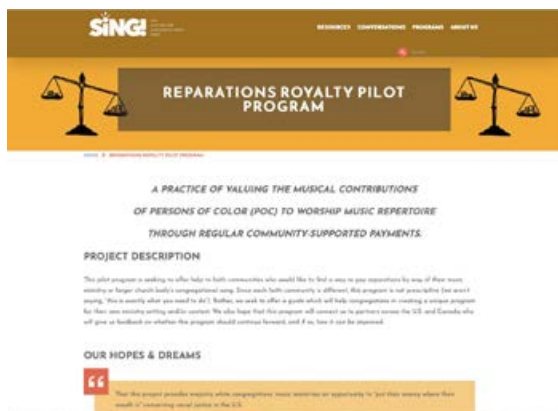
The [Center for Congregational Song](#) (operated by The Hymn Society) offers a process for a reparations royalty project, in case you would like other methods of considering reparations. One congregation's [specific work is described here](#).

As Hope Church considers ways to heighten awareness of the our debt to musicians who were never compensated for their music, we are adding \$1500 to the Community Partners budget for allocation to the [Lift Music Fund](#), as a way to engage in reparations and make

real our commitment to raising up voices and songs from communities where people of color may be more respectfully acknowledged and affirmed. This effort can be one component of our work towards anti-racism, so that our conversations and actions can be multifaceted.

Negro spirituals engage us in expressions of suffering, lament, and faith, and spur us to participate in the work of making hope more real. This is solidarity in song as we all stand in the need of prayer and seek peace (like a river).

If you're interested, [here's a link to a YouTube presentation on royalties for spirituals](#).



Hope Church Reads!

By Pat Bloem

The Justice & Reconciliation Ministry is continuing to work out the plans for our Big Read. We have enjoyed putting together what we think will be a creative and inspiring, challenging and collaborative, fun and engaging experience for our congregation to share in.

Our goal is to provide a conversational starting point for all of us, no matter our age—from 12 to 102—about racial justice and reconciliation. In order to inspire and entice as many Hope Church readers and discussants as possible, we are including choices of genres: nonfiction, fiction, graphic histories, and artistic explorations. We hope that all of us will find a book that inspires us, provokes us to mull over important ideas, and challenges us to think about our faith in new ways.

Here's the schedule:

- Sign up for the book(s) of your choice **through September 10**. Watch for a Sign-Up Genius link in the bulletin.
- Books will be available by **mid-September** at the cost of \$3 each, thanks to a generous donor.
- **In early October**, start talking to friends and strangers at Hope Church, asking: "What book did you read? Tell me about it!"
- Attend the **October 29** adult education session for in-depth conversation with people who have read the same book. Also, let us know if you'd like to host a book discussion with a small group in your home.
- From **October 29 through November 12**, add your thoughts on sticky notes to the large post-its for each book in the Gathering Area. Take time to read the comments of others.

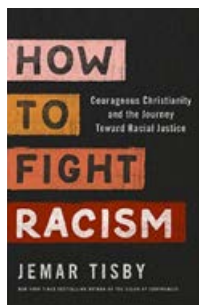


For those of you who like to take time with your reading, or plan to read more than one book, below is a reminder of our reading list.

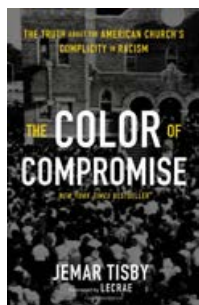
Note that all the book groups will be given a one-page handout of Tisby's main points (from *How to Fight Racism*), so that we have common language as we enter into conversation with each other. Books will be available for

\$3 each in the fall; however, feel free to order them from libraries or bookstores now.

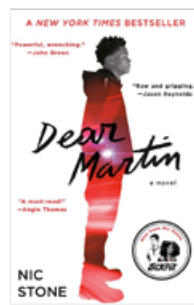
Our hope is that all of us are willing to explore what it means to live a Christian life in our fractured and racist world, and that, by the close of this Hope Church Reads project, will understand more fully what it means to love mercy and walk humbly with our God.



Jemar Tisby's **How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity and the Journey Toward Racial Justice**, 2021. This is the anchor book that will serve as the center hub in our wheel of texts. You do not have to read this one, however, to appreciate his main points and to enter into our joint conversations.



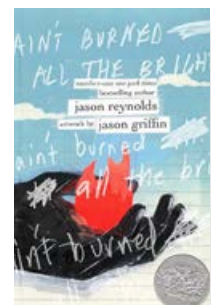
Jemar Tisby's **The Color of Compromise**, 2019. In another nonfiction text, Tisby's central question is this: why should we become an anti-racist congregation?



Dear Martin, by Nic Stone, 2017. Fiction. This slim, compelling novel invites Hope adults into a young adult world of discrimination and despair. Note that the characters at times have dialogue that includes cursing and explicit language, but the story connects beautifully with Tisby's ideas and does not back away from the complicity that we as a church are trying to confront.



March: Book One, John Lewis, 2013. This graphic novel, written by the recently deceased civil rights hero, allows you to feel and see the embodiment of Tisby's ideas. This is the first in a trilogy, so feel free to feed your inner history buff and read all three to experience the time period from Birmingham Sunday to Obama's inauguration.



Ain't Burned All the Bright, by Jason Reynolds, with art by Jason Griffin, 2022. This choice may be especially popular with the Hope Church artists and lovers of art.



Intentionality Is Essential to Accessibility

By Terry DeYoung

Second in a series on accessibility

For many people with disabilities, church is one of the least accessible places they go. It's not because churches intentionally try to keep disabled people out by erecting countless barriers to participation. Removing the barriers simply is not a high enough priority—if there's even awareness such barriers exist. Even churches with old buildings and limited financial resources can be more welcoming to people with disabilities—if they're intentional about it and are willing to think beyond such obvious features as ramps and elevators.

Churches can become more accessible one small step at a time.

In the months leading up to my retirement last April, the Disability Concerns ministry met with disability advocates across the RCA and CRC, in the United States and Canada, and assembled a list of "30 indicators of an anti-ableist, fully accessible church." After presenting

that list to Hope Church's Accessibility Ministry, I was invited to share them in *Salt & Light*.

For the purposes of this series, I've divided the list into four basic categories. Here's the category I'm calling "mindset/intentionality," including a few of my own comments describing how I benefit from them personally:

I am assured there is a plan for my escape in the event of a fire.

I don't worry about how the communion elements are distributed or what's in them. As the movement of my joints has diminished over the years, communion celebrations have become a source of growing anxiety for me because of my increasingly limited movement and reach. I've always preferred intinction because dipping bread into a chalice has been more manageable than dealing with thimble-sized cups in a tray, provided

I could pull my own (large) piece of bread from the loaf. When Hope Church moved to pre-cutting the bread, I requested pieces larger than small cubes—Hope Church leaders did their best to honor that—but even those have become problematic for me in the past five years or so. With COVID, when Hope Church switched to thimble cups in trays, my wife Cindi often would assist me so I wouldn't dribble juice on my shirt. Thanks to further conversation with the pastors, most servers now know to place the bread on my tongue and serve me the cup. I feel vulnerable, humbled, and a little embarrassed by being hand-fed in this way, but I prefer it over anxiously fretting how things will work—or skipping worship altogether. None of this would have happened without pastors and elders who have been sensitive, respectful, and intentional in their follow-through.

I know I can safely eat at potlucks, coffee time, and other gatherings because food is labeled, options are provided, and utensils are available.

Because eating without utensils has become nearly impossible for me in the last 10 years, the regular inclusion of utensils when food is served has saved me from having to sneak into the kitchen to find my own, or always requesting them from those who are serving (and feeling like I need to explain why I need them for “finger food”). Easy access to utensils allows me the dignity to participate as fully as I wish.

My church prints large-print bulletins and has large print Bibles. If I need other accommodations for visual impairments I can just ask and I know my needs will be met without anyone acting like I'm a nuisance. I've worn bifocals or progressive lenses for decades and find that sharing a hymnbook or Bible with someone is a challenge. But what I appreciate most about large-print bulletins is not having to fumble with books and page numbers, especially when needing to juggle a book while rising to a standing position. Providing hymns with musical scores and the text of Scripture readings printed in the order of worship is a big convenience for people who find that holding books and flipping through pages, all while standing, is a challenge. I also appreciate large print more and more as I age.

Leaders at my church describe important visual aids and images on screens for blind people, and verbal cues and directions are spoken as well as printed.

If I want to attend a Bible study or educational class, I know I'll be able to access the materials

because they are compatible with screen readers and are available in accessible formats such as audio. My church also emails church bulletins and worship liturgies in advance.

There's much I could say about how these accommodations benefit people who are blind or have low vision, and they are not difficult to provide, but they require intentionality. Personally, I'm one of those who regularly reads through a church bulletin and worship order before Sunday morning, so I know what to expect. It's a simple, gracious expression of hospitality.

People don't wear perfume or cologne at my church and the air is adequately filtered and circulated for those with compromised immune systems or asthma.

There is a quiet place I can go if I am overstimulated or need to move.

I know what to expect because pictures and descriptions on websites, social stories, or other aids are available to help reduce my anxiety about things that are new and unknown. This is a benefit also for first-time visitors or those who are new. Over the years I've provided a link to the Hope Church website to several people I've invited to worship with us so they know something about us and our worship style when they visit.

Support is provided for me if I need it so that my family members can fully participate in church activities.

When I advocate for myself or ask for an accommodation, people will listen and act, instead of dismissing my needs as not being a priority. I have personally experienced the opposite of this dozens of times over the years (but *never* at Hope Church). Believe it or not, I've spoken with dozens of people with disabilities who have shared their own frustration and weariness at being ignored, doubted, humiliated, and even shamed by people in their own church.

Some churches are better than others at practicing these 11 indicators, and for those that practice them well, it's not by accident. Intentional follow-through and a mindset that these gestures of hospitality and welcome matter make all the difference in becoming an anti-ableist, fully accessible church.

In the next issue of *Salt & Light*, I'll introduce the “attitude” category of indicators.

Sailing through Changing Weather

Jean McAlister denHerder, Creation Care Ministry



Ossineke MI Lake Huron. All photos by Jean McAlister denHerder

When I was five years old, I went to camp in Vermont, where my mom was a counselor. Being from New Jersey, this was very different from our dairy farm. There was a large lake with a roped-off swimming area next to another area of rowboats all lined up on the edge of the water. It didn't take me long before I bravely climbed into one of those boats with oars in hand. I had never been in a rowboat before so I'm not sure how I even knew where to sit or what to do but I did and off I went: the beginning of my life-long love for water, boating and nature. It didn't take long for the adult arms on shore to start waving me back to safety, confirming my first epic ride on water. I'm not the only one. Many other people enjoy our rivers, lakes, and oceans from paddle boats, canoes, kayaks, fishing boats, pontoon boats, electric-powered boats, motor boats, ridiculously expensive yachts, sail boats, working boats, and ships—all sharing earth's waters.

The delicate balance of nature's waterways affects us all. We need water to live and yet we are polluting it faster than we can clean up our mess. The Industrial Revolution changed so much of how we use our natural resources, leading eventually to acid rain in the 70s and 80s. There are good things happening, but it seems not fast enough. Global warming is real, and we all need to be educated on what direction we are moving. Learning how to be mindful of the ways we live our lives and working together are both musts in order to move forward. It's vital to educate our youth, exposing them to nature; Nature Schools have become a new phenomenon. We need to unplug children from screens and plug them into the natural world. Exposing our youth to the benefits of nature gives them life skills they will always use. There is so much work to be done, but I hold hope that little by little, time can slow us

down and more people and countries will join together in order to save this world we all share.

Water is a purifier, from the very start of our lives when we are held within the womb. Water can heal: we need to drink it every day. We are baptized with water into the arms of our faith, holding us close to God.

When I am on water, hiking in the woods, camping, or even watering my garden, I feel a closeness to the earth that in so many ways helps me feel the presence of God. There are many gifts from God when we open our hearts and become aware to the world we live in. It can be exciting to plan a new adventure or return to a familiar spot. Every time we get outside, the weather is different, the clouds in the sky change; we become situationally aware of our surroundings, encouraging us to live in the moment. I think we can all benefit from Mother Nature if we just “Stop, Look and Listen.”

Here are a just a few trip ideas in Michigan for all different levels of adventure:

Hiking

- Saugatuck State Park
- Hemlock Crossing
- Nordhouse Dunes Recreational Area (just north of Ludington)

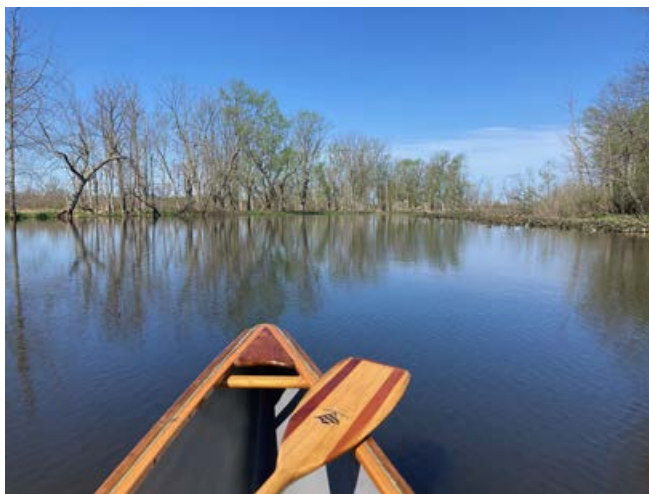
Rivers to paddle

- Kalamazoo River putting in at New Richmond Bridge
- Platte River, Sleeping Bear Dunes National lakeshore
- Au Sable River

Camping

- Nordhouse Dunes Recreational Area
- Platte River Campground
- Sylvania Wilderness Area, upper peninsula

These are all places I have been, so please reach out if you have any questions. You can also get involved with the Creation Care Ministry here at Hope Church.



Moving Together through Grief

Tammi Griswold, Congregational Care and Health Ministry

Grief.... If I were to take a survey, I believe I would find most of us have experienced some sort of grief over the past year. We tend to think of grief as it relates to the loss of a loved one, but there are many things we may grieve: loss of job, health, a dream, a home, lifestyle... the list goes on.

When we are in a period of grief, there are those who would try to steer us away from grieving. This is understandable, as we do not like to see others hurting; we often do not know how to help others in their grief. It is important, however, for us to grieve, and to grieve well, so that we, as much as possible, can move on from our grief and not get stuck in it or have it be a way of life.

We all certainly have our own way of grieving, just as we are unique in how we do anything else. There are the well-known five stages of grief as described by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: anger, denial, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Even with these it is accepted that one may go through them in a different order, stay in each stage for a different length of time, go through some stages and not others, or go back to a stage already experienced. If you were to look at your Bible glossary (as I did), you would not find many passages that include the word “grief” or that provide clear examples of how to weather such an emotion. However, there are many stories in the Bible of those who were grieving, including how they experienced grief and God’s response. Some I think of are Job, David, Mary and Martha, and all those who grieved Jesus’ death.

The question at our Congregational Care and Health Ministry meeting that prompted this

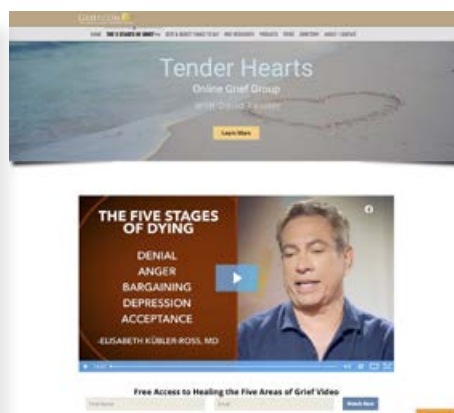
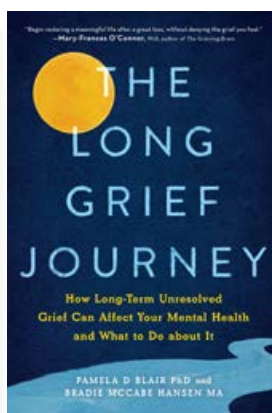
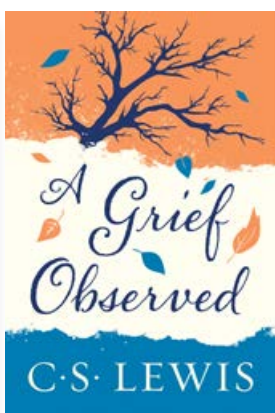
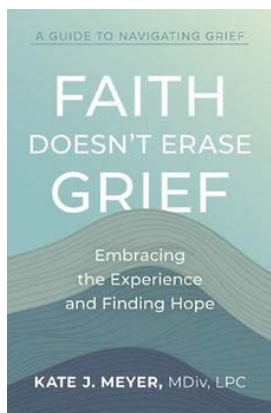
article was “What does one say to someone who is grieving the loss of a loved one by suicide?” Often our question is, “What do I say?” But perhaps it is not what we say, but what we do: Just be there; be present.

I am not by any means an expert on this topic, but I know that grieving, and grieving well, is important. No one wants to live in grief. If you feel you are stuck in grief or one of its stages, I implore you to seek help from a counselor or therapist, a community support group, or a friend or pastor.

My hope here is to point you to resources that could help you in your grief, help you help another grieve, or help you perhaps understand someone’s grief process. My go-to in grief is the Psalms; for a friend of mine it is Isaiah. For others it may be Job or something in the New Testament. For Christians, the Bible is certainly a logical place to go, for it is there that we find light, hope, and peace. In many instances however, other help may be needed.

Grief.com is a website that seems promising to explore; it offers, among other resources, the “best and worst things to say.” Recently out is [Faith Doesn’t Erase Grief: Embracing the Experience and Finding Hope](#), by Kate Meyer. Herrick District Library has *A Grief Observed*, by C.S. Lewis, and *The Long Grief Journey: How Long-Term Unresolved Grief Can Affect Your Mental Health and What to Do About It*, by Pamela Blair.

Finally, “I measure every grief I meet (561)” is a poem by Emily Dickinson that may resonate with some individuals.





I measure every Grief I meet (561)
Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

I measure every Grief I meet
With narrow, probing, Eyes -
I wonder if It weighs like Mine -
Or has an Easier size.

I wonder if They bore it long -
Or did it just begin -
I could not tell the Date of Mine -
It feels so old a pain -

I wonder if it hurts to live -
And if They have to try -
And whether - could They choose between -
It would not be - to die -

I note that Some - gone patient long -
At length, renew their smile -
An imitation of a Light
That has so little Oil -

I wonder if when Years have piled -
Some Thousands - on the Harm -
That hurt them early - such a lapse
Could give them any Balm -

Or would they go on aching still
Through Centuries of Nerve -
Enlightened to a larger Pain -
In Contrast with the Love -

The Grieved - are many - I am told -
There is the various Cause -
Death - is but one - and comes but once -
And only nails the eyes -

There's Grief of Want - and Grief of Cold -
A sort they call 'Despair' -
There's Banishment from native Eyes -
In sight of Native Air -

And though I may not guess the kind -
Correctly - yet to me
A piercing Comfort it affords
In passing Calvary -

To note the fashions - of the Cross -
And how they're mostly worn -
Still fascinated to presume
That Some - are like My Own -

Waiting Requires Prayer—and a Friend

The Board of Deacons added Frontera de Gracia to those RCA global missions to which Hope Church provides financial support.



Seven minutes from the El Paso, Texas, and Mexico border, there is a place where strangers look each other in the eye, share a smile, and recognize the other's identity as a child of God. At *Frontera de Gracia*, guests find refuge and a place of worship on their migration journey, supported by U.S. churches that want to be the hands and feet of Jesus for sisters and brothers on the move.

Earlier this year, Mark Hiskes published an article on the *Reformed Journal* website: "[Do You Desire a New Church? Reflections after Visiting the Southern U.S. Border.](#)" He recounted his visit to *Frontera de Gracia* this way:

We landed in El Paso and took an Uber to the border. There, with my pastor and friend Reverend Angel Lopez [who grew up in Chiapas, Mexico, and currently lives in Holland] as our guide, our small group walked the half-mile bridge that spans the border wall to Juarez. At this part of the border,

"the wall" we northerners talk about is really a series of ten unbreachable barriers of one sort or another: several high, chain-link fences topped with razor wire; concrete block walls again topped with razor wire; the Rio Grande river forms two more, almost-natural barriers on either side of the main wall, running slowly through two man-made, cement canals. In Juarez, the massive "wall" itself stands at the middle of these lesser barriers, thick, vertical bars of rusted steel at least 25 feet high with horizontal steel plates at the top.

Looking down on this half-mile of inhuman obstacles, I felt what Robert Frost's uneasy New England farmer feels: "Something there is that doesn't love a wall, that wants it down." I wondered what it does to a kid growing up with a horizon of wall, day after day.

Unlike El Paso, the streets of Juarez are peppered with potholes. Food wrappers and trash mark every patch of grass, overwhelming the ditches along every street. Everywhere plastic bags sprout from bare trees and stick to chain-link fences. Dogs and feral cats roam almost every street. Homes are small condos, stucco sided, with a small, walled-in area in front and sometimes back. Every window and door has metal bars and locked metal gates for safety; razor wire glistens atop all fences and walls like December Christmas lights. No matter how run-down the house or store, razor wire curls above any possible entrance. It's as if the ghastly monster wall had spawned thousands of hideous mini-walls throughout the city. A city of walls upon walls and trash and brokenness and razor-sharp edges—and fear.

The outside of the church suggests nothing of the aura of grace that permeates the inside. A blue stucco, windowless building crowds the broken sidewalk. Telephone poles and wires and a fence topped with razor wire almost obscure the florescent sign on the roof: "*Iglesia Christiana, Frontera de Gracia.*" Inside, a young woman sweeps the floor, while another mops the bathroom. Since it is a Thursday, the sanctuary is covered with mattresses, snug with assorted blankets on top. Backpacks are neatly placed by each one. Several migrants notice us looking in, smile and wave to

us as Pastor Samuel tells them in Spanish where we are from. A wooden cross mounted on the far wall is all that distinguishes this room as a place of worship. For now, it's a bare-bones dormitory packed full. Suddenly the word "sanctuary" makes sense to me: a place of worship, a place of refuge.

Pastor Samuel, Angel's oldest brother, is the founder and leader of *Frontera de Gracia*. He has no office and likely wouldn't use one if he did, since his work keeps him in motion all day—back and forth in his car helping the migrants at *Frontera de Gracia*, stopping to meet the migrants he sees walking along city streets, meeting up with local NGOs for any available resources they can offer, and a host of other urgent tasks.

His wife teaches art and music at the school their daughters attend. In the ministry of *Frontera de Gracia*, she serves as musician and worship leader on Sunday mornings. Their two middle-school daughters help out with Sunday school each week. This family operation is filled with risk: each knows Dad's life has been threatened more than once for the work he does with migrants. After all, the cartels see the migrants as desperate people easy to exploit: some are charged thousands of dollars for a dubious chance at crossing the border, others are enlisted to smuggle drugs into the States for a promise of safety, and still others are exploited sexually. Pastor Samuel's ministry challenges all



this, offering shelter, food, spiritual nourishment, and a commitment to help each migrant cross the border legally, while asking nothing in return. It's a border of grace—*Frontera de Gracia*.

As we got to know each migrant by name, we heard their stories. They had passed on foot through as many as six countries and were waiting at *Frontera de Gracia* for legal passage into the U.S. Many left good jobs and family, fleeing extreme violence, exploitation, extortion. A young woman named Genesis touched us deeply: hearing impaired and eight months pregnant, she'd walked, like the others, over hundreds of miles that included jungles, rivers, and predators of all kinds. In fact, just days before we arrived, Pastor Samuel had performed her wedding to another young migrant. Although my terrible Spanish made her lip reading especially difficult, her bashful smile translated perfectly, and I gained a new appreciation for a familiar Bible story, but with a twist: there was room at this inn.

On Sunday morning we worshiped with the congregation of *Frontera de Gracia*. All the mattresses, blankets, pillows, and backpacks had been stacked in the adjoining room. Clean, straight rows of padded chairs were in their place. An elder introduced our group of four. Then he announced that this service would be in both Spanish and English. As the praise band led us through a rousing "Our God is an Awesome God," it occurred to me that this "English" version was for the one English-only speaker in the sanctuary: me.

It was hard to sing after that. Since that moment *Frontera de Gracia* has come to define for me what every Christian church ought to be: a *sanctuary without barriers* where any among "the least of these" are welcomed in Christ's love by what might be called "the most privileged of these."





Poetry Corner

Hosted by Rhonda Edgington

Randy Smit and I started the Hope Church Poetry Corner in January of 2018. I had to look through old emails to find that date, and was surprised. This endeavor of ours wouldn't have lasted this long, or been so much fun, without all the Hope Church and Holland folks who contributed (on our occasional Facebook posts, in the real-life Poetry Corner that hung in the Commons, and in the print/online version). Then there was also that silly Poetry Hat idea once, where many of you offered up favorite poems for us to read—what a ride. You can look up old issues on the [Hope Church website](#), if you'd like to go back.

I get a bit teary looking through old columns and feel honored to have been a part of it all. Since my good friend Randy has left us, it's taken the wind out of my sails a bit, and I feel ready to hang up the Poetry Corner Hat, so to say. Not that I'll stop writing, of course! But I want to take one last chance to thank all who have been involved (and I hope I haven't missed anyone), with a nod to the many non-local poets whose words we have invoked as well in our many columns. It's been a wonderful journey.

Dave Alexander	Lois Maassen
Sharon Arendshorst	Elena Munoz
Laurie Baron	Rachelle Oppenhuizen
Judith Boogaart	Judy Parr
Rhonda Sider Edgington	Jack Ridl
Francis Fike	Cyd Slone
Carole Hintz	Randy Smit
Audrienne Hill	Curt Tofteland
Curtis Gruenler	Trudy Vander Haar
Earl Laman	Kyle Vohlken
Karmen Kooyers	Gordon Wiersma

And to close, this isn't a poem, but it's a wonderful writing reminder for each of us, from Abigail Thomas' powerful memoir, *A Three Dog Life*:

I didn't start writing until I was forty-seven. I had always wanted to write but thought you needed a degree, or membership in a club nobody had asked me to join. I thought God had to touch you on the forehead, I thought you needed to have something specific to say, something important, and I thought you needed all that laid out from the git-go. It was a long time before I realized that you don't have to start right, you just have to start.

Sounds a bit like the rest of life too, doesn't it? We don't have to start right, we just have to start.

Thanks so much for reading and writing with us.