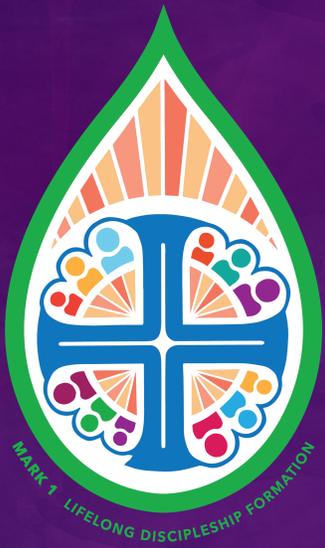


Vital Congregations Initiative Lenten 2023 Devotional



Lent

Complicated joy.

That is the way many of us approach Ash Wednesday, and the Easter Season in general. While we know that the season ends with hope, we begin with the recollection of despair that is both present and historical, both individual and collective.

The ritual of preparing and spreading ashes on our foreheads is sacramental in meaning. For biblical foundation, we recall Job covering his body with ashes when he mourned his fate (Job 2:8), or when Tamar covered her face with ashes when her brother cast her out (2 Sam 13:13).

In many traditions, Ash Wednesday is known to be a day of repentance. Yet, as seen in the aforementioned biblical examples, the day has also been lifted as a day of remembrance. Remembering the pain caused to ourselves and others due to our sinfulness. Remembering the grief caused to ourselves and others due to our neglect. Remembering the sorrow of our failure to address the systemic issues that limit others from living lives of happiness, peace and love.

What might we do to address these issues?

While, for some, the tradition of sacrificing or “giving up something” for the 40 days following Ash Wednesday (Lent) may provide time for personal reflection, I have adopted the practice of beginning or “picking up something”. When I engaged the traditional practice, I focused on myself. In my newly adopted practice, I focus on others. My practice allows me to center the needs of others rather than my own.

The emphasis on sharing is one of the reasons I appreciate this Lenten Devotional. Beyond good eating, these beautiful devotions and soup recipes provide space for relationship building. Building Caring Relationships is one of the 7 marks highlighted in the Vital Congregations Initiative. Through these marks, congregations are encouraged to reimagine themselves according to the life and deeds of Jesus. If you have not engaged the VCI, I invite you to do so soon!

May this resource fill the hearts, minds, and bellies of your family and your community during this sacred season.



Rev. Carlton David Johnson

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Introduction



One of the ways we talk about The Vital Congregations Initiative (VCI) is by saying it's a "multi-year discipleship journey". The initiative is about growing deeper in our relationship with God, with one another, and with the community around us. Lent is also a discipleship journey. It began as a way to connect with Christ's time in the desert, and over the years, became a period of instruction for new believers in the early Church. Today the journey of discipleship that is Lent, can become laden with "giving up" or "fasting" as a way to help us become closer to God. The struggle I've always had with "giving up" or "fasting" is that it didn't help me feel any closer with God or those around me. That's why, when I moved to Minnesota and was greeted with a new tradition (it could be tradition in other places, but I first experienced it in MN) for the season of Lent, I was surprised with the way soup helped me feel closer to God.

Many of the churches in MN will not only have a Wednesday night Lenten worship, but they also have a Lenten soup supper! At first this unique tradition was seemingly odd, but I've grown to look forward to it and to even love it with the fellowship it brings during this unique discipleship journey.

It also helps that I love soup! In particular, I love

Chicken and Wild Rice soup and Baked Potato soup, but really I enjoy just about any soup. There's something about a warm bowl of soup, chowder, chili, or bisque on a cold night that just feels right. But it's more than just warming up on a cold winter night during Lent; yes, it's still winter in MN all through Lent. Soup suppers and their fellowship during Lent warm and nourish my soul!



This Lent, VCI takes the Lenten discipleship journey with you by offering a weekly devotion on one of the seven marks of vitality. Each week, one mark will be highlighted by a member of the VCI community. In addition to the devotion, which can be done individually, or as a group, there will also be a soup recipe. If you want, you can make a soup that others will be making; it's a way for us to share a meal together as we journey through Lent together. May you be nourished in body, mind, and soul this Lent!

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Devotion Authors



#1 Lifelong Discipleship Formation

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#5 Spirit-Inspired Worship

Rev. Mario A. Bolivar
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#2 Intentional Authentic Evangelism

Rev. Katie Day
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#6 Caring Relationship

Rev. Amy Delaney
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#3 Outward Incarnational Focus

Rev. Jennie Sankey
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#7 Ecclesial Health

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#4 Empower Servant Leadership

Rev. Dr. Flo Barbee-Watkins
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Presbytery of the James



Lifelong Discipleship Formation

John 21:21-22, NRSV

When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about him?”

Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!”

“But Lord,” said Peter, “I’m kind of worried about *him*. Like, I always thought I was sort of your favorite. But then, at our Passover Seder you were all cozy with John. Now everybody says you love him the most.”

“Ah,” said Jesus. “Sounds like you’re jealous. Follow me.”

Peter thought about it for a minute. “Well, yeah, I guess I am jealous. You said I was the ‘Rock’ and all that. You were going to build the church on my faith.”

“Ah,” said Jesus. “Now it sounds more like you’re ambitious. Here’s what you do: follow me.”

“But-- But--,” sputtered Peter.

“What’s the problem, Simon?” asked Jesus. “Go ahead and tell me.”

“It’s just -- you know -- that’s what you said at the beginning. You said, ‘Follow me,’ so I left my career and followed you. Don’t get me wrong, I’m grateful. I’ve learned a ton. I’ve made great friends. But now you say you’re leaving. I’m thinking I need some new instructions. Like, for the next phase of the mission.”

“Um, Peter,” said Jesus, “I just gave you your new instructions: follow me.”

“But I already did that!”

“It’s a new day, my friend. Follow me. Again. That’s the whole plan.”

- I wonder how following Jesus is different now from when you first started?
- I wonder when in your day, and in your week, you most want to think consciously about following Jesus?

Gary Neal Hansen, Ph.D.

Speaker, and Author of *“Kneeling with Giants: Learning to Pray with History’s Best Teachers”*

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Gary's Chicken Noodle Soup

Ingredients

- 1 whole chicken
- 2 carrots, peeled and cut into 2-inch pieces
- 2 stalks celery cut into 2-inch pieces
- 1 onion, peeled and cut into quarters at the stem so the pieces hold together
- 4 whole cloves
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled
- 3 sprigs thyme (or 1 tsp. dry)
- 1 whole star anise
- 2 bay leaves
- 6 peppercorns
- 1 tsp salt (not iodized)
- 1 cup frozen petite peas
- 1 batch of homemade egg noodles (see below)
- Freshly grated parmesan cheese for garnish (optional)

Instructions

1. Remove any packaged or loose giblets from inside the chicken. Place the chicken in a soup pot with the carrots and celery.
2. Pierce each quarter onion with one whole clove and add them to the pot.
3. Make a sachet (cheesecloth or a disposable tea bag for loose tea will work well) with the bay leaves, garlic, star anise, peppercorns, and thyme, and add the sachet to the pot.
4. Add the salt, and enough water to cover the chicken. Put the pot on the burner and bring it to a simmer -- just little bubbles very slowly rising, not a boil.
5. Simmer for two hours. Skim off any scummy foam that rises to the surface. If you want to put on the lid, leave the lid ajar, so heat escapes and the soup doesn't rise to a boil. (The partial covering of the lid will allow water from the steam to condense and return to the pot.)
6. Turn off the heat. Carefully remove the chicken, putting it in a bowl to cool. Remove and discard the onions, celery and sachet. If the carrots are still fairly firm, remove them and chop into dice and return them to the pot. If the carrots are mushy, discard them.
7. When the chicken has cooled enough to handle it, take it apart. Discard the skin and the bones. Chop the meat into bite-sized pieces and return it to the pot.
8. Half an hour before you are ready to serve the soup, turn the heat back on, to return the soup to a simmer, and make the noodles.

...continued

Gary's Chicken Noodle Soup

...continued

Homemade Egg Noodles

Ingredients

- 1 large egg
- 1/2 Cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 tsp. non-iodized salt

Instructions

1. In a small bowl, mix the flour and the salt.
2. Add the egg, and stir with a fork to combine.
3. Turn the dough onto a lightly-floured surface and knead a few times to make it a coherent ball. (Do not knead more than a few times.)
4. Using a rolling pin, roll the dough on the floured surface, dusting it with flour and flipping as needed. Roll it quite thin, about 4 inches wide and 12 to 18 inches long. (You may need to run a bench scraper or knife underneath to free it from the surface now and again.)
5. Using a bench scraper or knife, slice into noodles 4 inches long and 1/2 inch wide. As you cut each noodle, scoot it onto the floured surface.

Serving

1. Five minutes before serving, carefully scoop up the noodles a few at a time, and add them one by one to the simmering soup. Don't try to scoop or add them all at once or they will glob together.
2. When the noodles are in, add the cup of frozen peas. Simmer 3 minutes.
3. Ladle into bowls, topping each bowl with fresh grated parmesan cheese.

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Source
gary neal hansen
GaryNealHansen.com

Intentional Authentic Evangelism

Acts 8:26-40, NLT

²⁶ As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, “Go south^[a] down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ²⁷ So he started out, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the Kandake, the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

²⁹ The Holy Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and walk along beside the carriage.”

³⁰ Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

³¹ The man replied, “How can I, unless someone instructs me?” And he urged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him.

³² The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter.

And as a lamb is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth.

³³ He was humiliated and received no justice. Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth.”^[b]

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?” ³⁵ So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus.

³⁶ As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look! There’s some water! Why can’t I be baptized?”^[c] ³⁸ He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Philip found himself farther north at the town of Azotus. He preached the Good News there and in every town along the way until he came to Caesarea.

Intentional Authentic Evangelism

Scripture reading on previous page...

When I think of evangelism, I think of Philip. Philip of Acts 8, of the wilderness road. Philip, who rode in a chariot with an open-hearted court official from Ethiopia.

As I imagine that story playing out, Philip was a reluctant apostle, resentful that he had been sent by the Spirit to a wilderness road after all his success in Samaria, where he had preached and healed and did miracles, and led the whole city to faith. And when prompted by the Spirit to approach an unlikely chariot on that road, I imagine him frustrated, even petulant, muttering under his breath his only quotation in all of scripture, perhaps the very essence of how many Presbyterians practice evangelism, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

Intentional, authentic evangelism isn't just about

- **Have you ever intentionally shared the good news of God's love with someone? What was it like?**
- **Has someone unexpected ever shared God's good news with you? How did you receive it?**
- **Tell someone in your life what you believe is so good about God.**

what we do, but also what is done for and to and through and despite us. It's Philip the brilliant apostle flung by the Spirit to the margins and into an encounter with someone who has no future (literally and figuratively) who disciples *him* by inviting Philip to witness and participate in a remarkable journey of faith.

In *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch writes, "God is a fountain of sending love," inviting us "to participate in the movement of God's love toward people." Intentional, authentic evangelism is our (re)discovery that living and sharing the good news is always an uncovering of an already-present, already-sovereign "I-Will-Be-There-Howsoever-I-Will-Be-There" God. God loves us and sends us out and invites us into what God is already doing

Rev. Katie Day
Senior Pastor
Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church

Slow Cooker Chicken Wild Rice Soup

Ingredients

- 1 cup uncooked wild rice
- 1 pound chicken breasts
- 1 cup chopped white onion
- 1/2 cup chopped celery
- 1/2 cup chopped carrot
- 6 cups chicken broth
- 1 teaspoon poultry seasoning
- 1/2 cup butter
- 3/4 cup flour
- 2 cups whole milk
- a few tablespoons white wine (optional)
- up to 2 cups additional milk or water

Instructions

1. Rinse the wild rice. Place the uncooked wild rice, raw chicken, mirepoix (onion, celery, & carrot), chicken broth, and poultry seasoning in a crockpot. Cover and cook on low for 7-8 hours. The chicken should be cooked through and the rice should be soft. There will be extra liquid in the crockpot; do not drain.
2. Remove the chicken breasts from the crockpot and allow to cool slightly. Using two forks, shred the chicken. Return the shredded chicken to the crockpot.
3. When rice and chicken are done cooking, melt the butter in a saucepan. Add the flour and let the mixture bubble for 1 minute. Slowly whisk in the whole milk until a thick, creamy mixture forms. Stir in the wine.
4. Add this to the rice and chicken in the crockpot and stir to combine. Add extra water or milk to adjust the consistency as you like it. Season with additional salt and pepper.

Outward Incarnational Focus

Romans 12:9-18, NLT

⁹ Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. ¹⁰ Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. ¹¹ Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. ¹² Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. ¹³ When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. ¹⁵ Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

¹⁷ Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. ¹⁸ Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

Romans 12:9-18 is a popular wedding ceremony text because meaning can be found in these words by all, regardless of their faith. No one is going to disagree that we shouldn't try to let love be genuine. At the same time, these words are uniquely Christian,

because these words are embodied in the life of Jesus. Jesus genuinely loved. Jesus persevered in prayer. Jesus offered hospitality to strangers. Jesus celebrated with guests at weddings and wept alongside mourners at funerals. Jesus associated with the vulnerable and did not exact revenge on those who sought to harm him. It seems unfair that Jesus had the advantage of God's incarnation while he lived among us. Being fully human and fully God surely makes it easier to live with an Outward Incarnational Focus. But as members of the body of Christ, we who are simply fully human are called to do the same. As far as it depends on us, we are asked to embody these Christian qualities.

The youth group I work with was recently looking for some service opportunities in our congregation. I called a few of our homebound members, asking if they had any household tasks we could help them out with, imagining yard work, house cleaning, and perhaps delivering some food. But when I asked Judy what she might need done in her apartment, she asked me, "do any of them know how to play Rummikub?" They did help her clean a closet out. But then they played Rummikub. Author Madeleine L'Engle wrote, "There is nothing so secular that it cannot be sacred, and that is one of the deepest messages of the incarnation."¹ Sometimes Christ's incarnation is lived out through healing and hard work. And sometimes through Rummikub.

- Which characteristic of Christian community from Romans 12:9-18 have you experienced?
- Which is most natural for you to live out? Which is most challenging?
- Choose one of the qualities of community from Roman's 12 to focus on this week. Write down 3 ways you will intentionally try and live out this quality. At the end of the week, reflect on how you may have received this quality through the Outward Incarnational Focus of others as well.

Jennie Sankey
Associate Pastor

Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church

¹"Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art," Madeleine L'Engle

Slow Cooker Chicken Chili

Ingredients

- 1 can black beans (rinsed)
- 1 can corn, undrained
- 1 can Rotel, undrained
- 1 package ranch dressing mix
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 Tbsp chili powder
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 1 8 oz package light cream cheese
- 2 chicken breasts
- ¼ teaspoon of cayenne pepper
- ½ teaspoon of garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon of pepper
- 1 cup of diced onion
- 1 Tablespoon of Olive Oil
- 2 Garlic cloves minced

Instructions

1. In a large skillet – heat oil and cook onions for 8 minutes than add garlic and cook for one minute.
2. Set your crock pot to low and add chicken, "cooked" onions and garlic, black beans, corn, rotel, all the seasonings, ranch mix.
3. Stir
4. Add cream cheese on top and cover and cook for 6 - 8 hours.
5. Before serving shred chicken using two forks.

Source:
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Empower Servant Leadership

Philippians 2:3-8, NRSV

³ *Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,*

⁶ *who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped,*

⁷ *but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human,*

⁸ *he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.*

This Scripture represents the nature and attitude that we should focus on cultivating as followers of Jesus. As the Amplified version puts it in verse 3, "Don't act from selfishness or pride, but instead, through humility, consider each other as better than yourselves". I believe that if we are attempting to

possess the perspective of Christ, we need to demonstrate His humility. But if we are honest with ourselves, we have been unable to differentiate humility from servitude. Too often, people of color have been warned that there will be serious repercussions if they do not remain in "their place". Similarly, women have often been belittled and expected to be obedient to their husbands. Thus, this Lenten season, the real question that comes to mind is how do we self-reflect on our own intentions? How do we put into perspective the humility of Christ?

Humility is a characteristic of empowered servant leadership which involves recognizing that one does not have all the answers or power, and that others may possess more knowledge and aptitude. By admitting one's own fallibility and recognizing the boundaries of one's knowledge, the servant leader helps to create a learning environment in which colleagues, and folks within the congregation can gain knowledge through their own attempts and from others.

We are not called to be Jesus, but to have the same motivation for our actions. The attribute of humility comes out of a wellspring of knowing oneself and allowing others to be themselves. Humility is other-centered, rather than self-centered. We learn a lot more when as we seek to live out our calling in partnership with others rather than alone.

Rev. Dr. Flo Barbee-Watkins
Lead Presbyter for Vision and Collaboration
Presbytery of the James

Basic + Awesome Creamy Potato Soup

Ingredients

6 slices bacon
4 tablespoons butter
1 cup minced white onion
1/2 cup minced celery
1/2 cup minced carrot
3 cloves garlic, minced
1/2 teaspoon salt and/or seasoning (to taste, see notes)
1/4 cup all purpose flour
3 cups whole milk
1–2 cups chicken broth
2 russet potatoes, peeled and cubed

Instructions

1. **Bacon Prep:** Bake the bacon on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper at 400 degrees for 20 minutes. Crumble or cut into pieces.
2. **Soup Base:** Melt the butter in a soup pot. Add the onion, celery, & carrot (mirepoix), garlic, salt, and seasoning and sauté until nice and soft. Add flour and stir with the vegetables for a few minutes to cook off any floury taste. Add milk, just a little bit at a time, stirring after each addition until smooth and creamy. The soup should start out very thick and eventually thin out as you add milk. Add the potatoes, and add chicken broth as needed to achieve the right consistency. For a thicker soup, you may not need as much of the broth.
3. **Simmer Time:** Let the soup simmer for 30-40 minutes. The potato soup will thicken as it simmers, and even more as it cools down. I like to wait until the potatoes are almost melty, with their edges softened just a bit, before removing from heat. When ready to serve, crumble the bacon and stir it into the soup.

Notes

Seasoning can kind of be whatever you want it to be. I (*recipe's author*) like to use a little bit of sage, and I've also used a basic chicken seasoning mix which has thyme, rosemary, oregano, etc.

Spirit-Inspired Worship

Psalm 47: 1-2, NLT

¹ *Come, everyone! Clap your hands!
Shout to God with joyful praise!*

² *For the LORD Most High is awesome.
He is the great King of all the earth.*

1 Corinthians 2:10, NLT

¹⁰ *But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets.*

What spurs people to action? Whether making a purchasing decision or motivating a team of people on a project. Some call it a switch, others a shift, whichever there is something that prompts individuals to action. One thing is for sure, good leadership never leaves it to chance.

Simon Sinek, leadership specialist, claims when a leader leads with "Why," there is an appearance of a highway or even bridge between the heart and mind

- **Who is the leader of Worship in your Church?**
- **Have you ever felt that something or someone has gotten in the way of Worship?**
- **In what way would your Worship improve if you considered the Holy Spirit as the "Why" of Worship?**

that allows resources and priorities to be aligned. So, the "Why" from the leader is the switch, the shift. If this is true about work, can it also be true for Worship? I believe so.

The Holy Spirit is not the "What" or the "How" of Spirit-Inspired Worship; it is the "Why!"

See Psalm 47:1-2 *"Come, everyone! Clap your hands! Shout to God with joyful praise! For the Lord Most High is awesome. He is the great King of all the earth."* Did you see it? It is simple to miss. One word—"for"—captures why we worship. (The Hebrew word, *kî*, which means "for," is even shorter.) So, we do not worship God because we understand or arrive at that conclusion. We worship because we are prompted to it, we are made "For" Worship, and God did not leave it to chance.

We worship God because God invites us, sustains us, and allows us to worship God. See 1 Corinthians 2:10 (NLT) *"But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. His Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets."* So, in this season of Lent, may you remember not to obfuscate things or, worst, try to control them; keep it simple. May you allow the Holy Spirit to prompt God's people into Worship.

Rev. Mario A. Bolivar

Pastor

First Presbyterian Church-Eustis

The Best Lentil Soup

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 medium carrots, peeled and chopped
- 2 celery ribs, chopped
- 14- ounce can crushed or diced tomatoes
- 2 cups dry green or brown lentils
- 7 cups vegetable broth
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon salt, or to taste
- 3 cups baby spinach, sliced into ribbons or kale
- 1 lemon, juiced (about 2 tablespoons)

Instructions

1. Heat the olive oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add the onions, garlic, carrots and celery. Cook, stirring frequently for about 4-5 minutes.
2. Now add the can of tomatoes (with juices), lentils, vegetable broth, cumin, coriander and smoked paprika. Stir to incorporate everything.
3. Bring to a boil, then lower heat to a simmer and cook for about 30 minutes, until the lentils are tender and the soup has thickened. For a creamier texture, use an immersion blender to blend a few times in the pot. Alternatively, add 1-2 cups of the soup to a regular blender, blend until smooth and then return to the pot.
4. Stir in the spinach and lemon juice. It will only take a minute for the spinach to wilt. Season with salt to taste.

Notes

1. For a thinner soup, simply add more water or vegetable broth until the desired consistency is reached.
2. Leftover soup will keep for up to 5 days in the refrigerator.
3. This soup freezes well. Either freeze in individual containers or a large container for quick future meals.
4. May substitute kale for the spinach, but you will need to cook the kale in the soup about 10 more minutes to get it tender.

Caring Relationship

Psalm 131

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

¹ *O Lord, my heart is not lifted up;
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.*

² *But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is
with me.*

³ *O Israel, hope in the Lord
from this time on and forevermore.*

How do you experience the season of Lent? For me, Lent is when I seek to dwell more closely with God. That takes different forms each year. Most years it includes a Saturday Lenten retreat away from the busy-ness of my ordinary life. This year I am also praying with the Psalms. In the Psalms of Ascent, psalms traditionally sung by worshipers on their way to Jerusalem, we find Psalm 131, a “Psalm of Quiet Trust.” I can imagine Jesus praying Psalm 131 as he ascended the road to Jerusalem with his disciples.

Psalm 131 offers this image of quiet trust: a weaned

child with its mother. I am both a mother and grandmother, so I know first-hand that nursing infants are demanding. A newborn can nurse every two hours- even overnight. But when the young child is finally weaned, the bids for connection are less about food and more about presence. The child seeks to be held, comforted, reassured – or just to be *with* its mother.

“But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.” Psalm 131:2

Lent is a time be *with* God.

One Sunday as worship was ending, I stood at the church door. The congregation was doing what it did best - caring for one another. Circles had formed around the people who had shared prayer requests, or with those for whom the passing of the peace just wasn't sufficient to share updates on their lives. No one was checking their phones, disinterested, or in a hurry. Even visitors were noticed and included. The congregation was nurturing and growing their caring relationships by choosing to be *with* one another.

- **This week, take a few minutes to just sit with God in prayer – no agenda, no demands – just to sit and be with God. Perhaps you could share a psalm together.**
- **And on Sunday, I invite you to notice your congregation. Where do you see circles of caring relationships? How might you “be with” others in your community? How might you encourage others to do the same?**

Rev. Amy Delaney
Acting Executive Presbyter
Northwest Coast Presbytery

Mark Delaney's Siege Stew

Ingredients

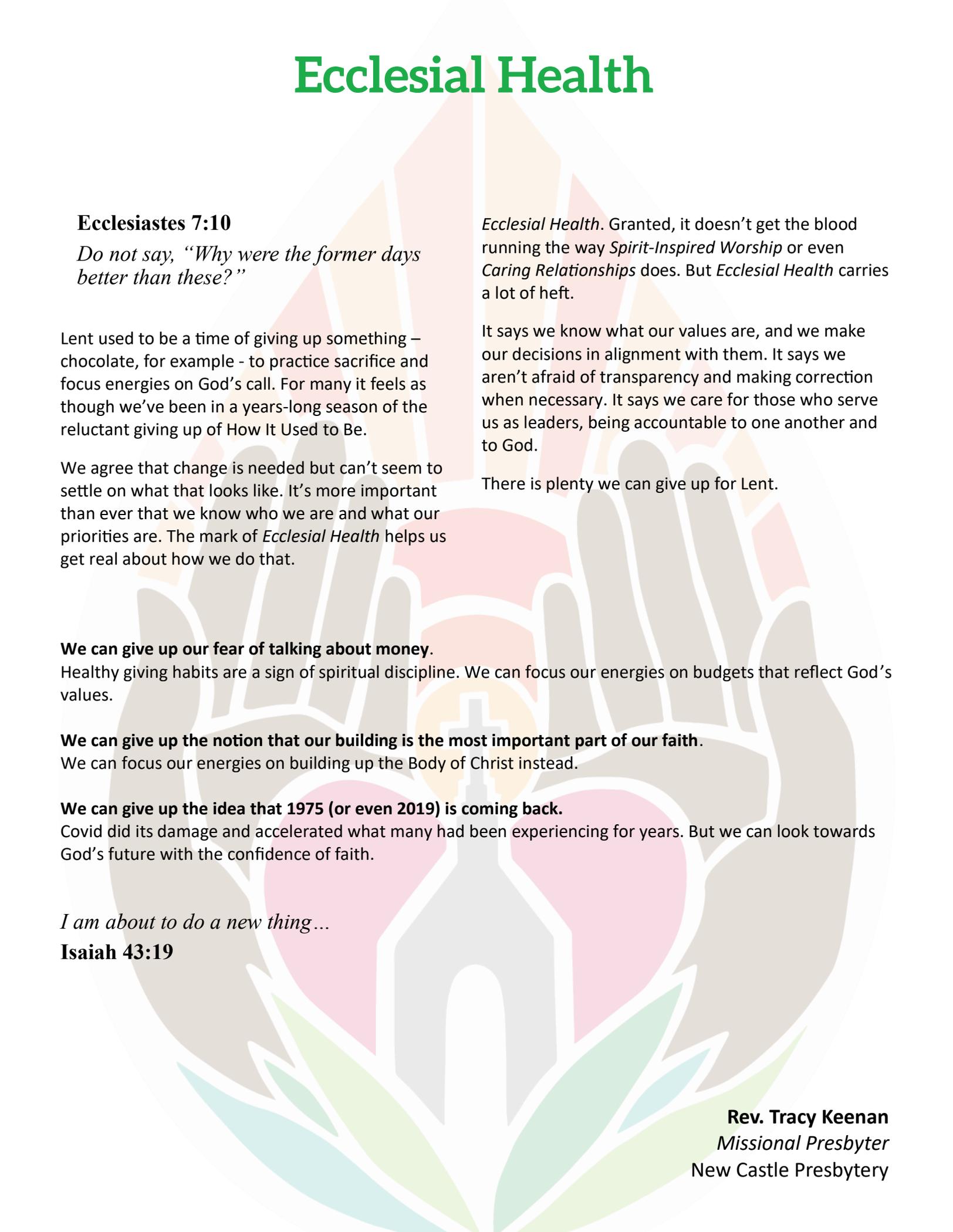
- 1-2 lbs of stewing beef, roast beef, or chicken breast
- 1 lbs bacon
- 4 carrots,
- 4 stalks of celery
- 1 onion
- 10 mushrooms (Cremini, Baby Bella, or White)
- 1-3 leeks (or 1-3 Zucchini or 6-8 cubed potatoes with skin on)
- 2/3 cup lentils (green or brown preferred)
- 2/3 cup barley
- 1 cup red wine (optional)
- 48oz Low Sodium Chicken Broth
- 1tbs Balsamic vinegar
- Sage, thyme, black pepper, celery salt, basil, garlic (to taste)

Instructions

Begin chopping at 1 pm. Dine at 6:30 – 7:00 pm. *Optional, cook bacon for Sunday breakfast, being sure to reserve and refrigerate drippings.*

1. Cook bacon and reserve drippings.
2. Cube and brown the meat in bacon fat. Add balsamic vinegar.
3. Add broth to slow cooker.
4. Add the browned meat. Chop onion in half and add to slow cooker. Sprinkle any dry herbs.
5. Wash and chop all the vegetables. Sauté vegetables in the bacon fat and meat drippings until soft. *Add optional red wine to vegetables while sauteing.*
6. Mince garlic and finely chop fresh herbs. Add to garlic, herbs, and vegetables to slow cooker.
7. Add barley and lentils using water as directed on package.
8. Cook on low for 4 hours.

Ecclesial Health



Ecclesiastes 7:10

Do not say, “Why were the former days better than these?”

Lent used to be a time of giving up something – chocolate, for example - to practice sacrifice and focus energies on God’s call. For many it feels as though we’ve been in a years-long season of the reluctant giving up of How It Used to Be.

We agree that change is needed but can’t seem to settle on what that looks like. It’s more important than ever that we know who we are and what our priorities are. The mark of *Ecclesial Health* helps us get real about how we do that.

We can give up our fear of talking about money.

Healthy giving habits are a sign of spiritual discipline. We can focus our energies on budgets that reflect God’s values.

We can give up the notion that our building is the most important part of our faith.

We can focus our energies on building up the Body of Christ instead.

We can give up the idea that 1975 (or even 2019) is coming back.

Covid did its damage and accelerated what many had been experiencing for years. But we can look towards God’s future with the confidence of faith.

I am about to do a new thing...

Isaiah 43:19

Ecclesial Health. Granted, it doesn’t get the blood running the way *Spirit-Inspired Worship* or even *Caring Relationships* does. But *Ecclesial Health* carries a lot of heft.

It says we know what our values are, and we make our decisions in alignment with them. It says we aren’t afraid of transparency and making correction when necessary. It says we care for those who serve us as leaders, being accountable to one another and to God.

There is plenty we can give up for Lent.

Rev. Tracy Keenan
Missional Presbyter
New Castle Presbytery

Hearty Homemade Corn Chowder

Ingredients

- 8 slices bacon, diced
- 2 Tbsp unsalted butter
- 1 medium yellow onion, diced
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 5 cups water (chicken broth or vegetable broth may be substituted)
- 8 ears yellow sweet corn (husks and silks removed)
- 1 lb. yukon gold or baby red potatoes , sliced into 1/2 inch pieces
- 1/4 tsp dried thyme
- 1/4 tsp smoked paprika
- salt and black pepper, to taste
- 1 cup half and half or heavy cream
- handful of chopped fresh chives

Instructions

1. Slice corn kernels off the cob and set aside. Take each ear of corn and hold it over a bowl. Use either the back of your knife or a spoon and scrape any remaining pulp and juice from the cobs.
2. Cook bacon pieces in large heavy bottomed pot (like a dutch oven) over MED heat. Cook about 5-8 minutes, or until bacon is crisp. Use a slotted spoon to remove to a paper towel lined plate and set aside.
3. Use a clean paper towel to absorb some of the bacon grease, reserving about 1 Tbsp of grease in the pot. Add butter and melt over MED heat.
4. Add diced onions and cook about 5 minutes, until soft and translucent. Add garlic and flour and cook about 1 minute, stirring often.
5. While whisking, pour in water and increase heat to MED-HIGH. Add in corn, potatoes, thyme, smoked paprika, and salt and pepper. Stir and bring to a low boil, then reduce heat to MED-LOW and simmer.
6. Simmer, stirring every so often, for 15-20 minutes, until potatoes are fork tender.
7. Use an immersion blender to blend about half the soup until smooth. Alternatively, remove about 3 cups of the soup to a blender and blend until smooth. Stir the blended soup back into the pot.
8. Add in half and half, reserved corn juice, and about half the chives. Stir in and heat through.
9. Serve sprinkled with remaining chives and cooked bacon pieces, if desired.

PC(USA) Links



PresbyterianMission.org/Matthew-25



PresbyterianMission.org/VitalCongregations



Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbyterian Mission

PresbyterianMission.org

Author Links



GaryNealHansen.com



NorthwestCoast.org



FPCeustis.com



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Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church
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Recipe Links



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