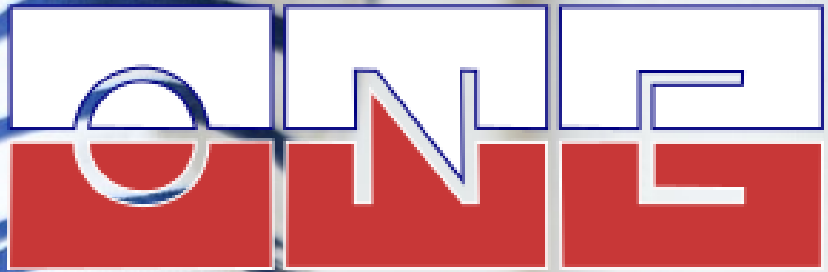


# **INSIDE:**

**+ One Year of  
Pandemic: Lessons  
and Reflections**



**A Publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance  
March 2021**





ONE is the official publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance (ECMA) which guides its mission, content, and theme. The ECMA encourage submissions from ECMA congregations. Photographs, stories, testimonies, and other submissions should be directed toward your church leaders or sent via email to [one@ourecma.com](mailto:one@ourecma.com).

The ECMA ONE Advisory Board will choose appropriate and timely submissions for publication. The columns in ONE represent the views of the author.

Volume 14, Issue 12 • [ourecma.com](http://ourecma.com) • Copyright 2021 individual authors and ECMA

### Advisory Board

Linn Ann Huntington  
lhunting@fhsu.edu

### Editor

Pastor Kevin Daniels  
kevin@hayschristianchurch.org

## *I Will Pencil You In*

**Becky Rogowski**

**First Presbyterian Church**

My planner and I have historically been inseparable. As the technology-era has advanced, my planner has not. I have not adapted to an electronic calendar/planner. I continue to be attached to a paper planner. If you see me, my planner likely isn't far away.

In the past, I have prided myself on being so certain of my plans that I have told friends and family, "I will PEN you into my planner." I challenged myself to stick with pencil in my planner when 2020 began...I'm not sure why. It ended up being one of the greatest lessons learned as a result of the 2020 Pandemic. My eraser sure got a lot of use.

Mid-March 2020. You know what I'm referring to. I suspect you always will. It started as the cancelling of immediate plans. Spring Break; a spring conference; the NCAA Basketball Tournament; the opening

concert to a favorite musician's tour in Texas with my oldest daughter and some friends; Easter. HOLD ON.

The pandemic was supposed to end in a few weeks? Months? We are almost to mark a year. Has it changed the way we relate to one another? It definitely has! Trips not taken, events not held, restaurant meals not shared with friends/family/strangers, friends not seen, family members' deaths not "properly" handled/mourned/celebrated. The list goes on and on.

A year ago, most did not know, or use, Zoom. Virtual meetings were for "some" workers. "Some" people worked from home. "Some" people used grocery delivery and pick-up services. "Some" people relied on restaurant delivery and pick-up. Few wore medical masks in public as a health precaution. Our society is vastly changed in a year. We are vastly changed. "Most" of us have been

resilient, creative, adaptive, etc.

Our need to connect with others is strong. We are designed to be social. We need it. We have found ways to stay connected. For me, personally, it has taken different forms in different aspects of my life.

In my work at the First Presbyterian Church as the Generations in Faith Together coordinator, it changed the very essence of how I needed to do my job. The easy part was increasing my use of technology with our members who use technology. But we have many elderly and "non-tech" users. I needed a new way to keep in touch with them. Many live at assisted living facilities and are now considered "high-risk." I started to realize we may not be seeing them in person for a while. I have been able to send DVD's of our worship services and a packet of printed materials on a weekly basis to them. I remind them

## ***I Will Pencil You In (Continued)***

how much they are missed and that we are available to assist in whatever way we can. I've tossed in adult coloring pages on a regular basis to help them pass the time.

Our worship service had to quickly make a move to an online format. We had not ventured into this area prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. I have been told we should go back and watch those early services to see how far we've come. Personally, I cannot. I want to believe they were "good enough." I fear that watching it will show otherwise!

Our meetings were forced to become virtual - and our homes became our offices. We definitely got the

opportunity to spend more time with our families. My teenagers became virtual learners. I can't say that we were "ready" for any of this - but we did it! If there was ever a time for a virtual high-five - it was 2020!

I miss my long-distance friends. I am thankful for email, texting, social media, and Zoom. I've had "social hours" with friends and strangers in place of the opening weekend of the music tour. Different yes, but still fun. I am definitely ready to physically see my friends again - to hear their voices in person, to feel their bodies in the embrace of hugs, to see the twinkles in their eyes, to see their laugh lines (without

being hidden by masks).

The relationships are unchanged. They are built on unconditional love for one another. The interactions are different. The pandemic has brought us changes, but it has not destroyed us. In many ways, we are doing things better. We were ready for this change. It may not have seemed as if that was the case as it started to unfold, but look how far we've come! It's "only" been a year, my friends! GO US! Virtual high-five to you!



*Becky Rogowski is the Generations in Faith Together Co-ordinator at Hays First Presbyterian Church.*

## ***In the Wake of Covid, What Remains?***

***Cheryl Glassman***

***St. Nicholas of Myra Catholic Church***

What a year we have seen! 2020 has surely created new avenues for us to travel. As we have woven through the effects of (hard to imagine) a pandemic, I am led to the following questions - how has Covid-19 changed our relationships with others? How well are we coping? Is there really hope?

I remember when we first heard the news about Covid-19. People were talking about it a little, but not overly concerned. Then the next thing I knew church services were being canceled. We couldn't go anywhere; schools were closed.

In the beginning, it seemed like a good rest period; however, as things progressed and we had cleaned or talked about just about everything and

anything, we started to realize it was serious! Air travel was canceled, families were unable to see one another, and hospitals and retirement homes were closed to visitors. That's when it hit me - when - or will I ever get to see some of my family again?

Social media has been quite an interesting device during the pandemic. Although it has truly been a mental lifesaver to be able to

## ***In the Wake of Covid, What Remains? (Continued)***

converse virtually and Facetime, I have witnessed many people expressing their anger and frustration. Some would be upset and think social media is not the place to air grievances. But when you are isolated, maybe all alone, no work, no income, there has to be an outlet. The problem is one person's frustration sometimes can lead to others ganging up on that person. Anger spills out. Friendships have been ended.

But, as pandemic existence has evolved, and we are slowly emerging from our Covid shell, it seems people have come to understand the importance of two things - hope and God. Have you looked on a social media site lately? People (including myself) are asking others to pray for one another. And guess what? They DO! Churches are livestreaming and people are watching - and talking about it! If someone puts something sad on a site like Facebook, people join together, offering condolences, prayers, financial support. If there is a positive statement about

someone, people also join together to congratulate and share virtual smiles and hugs!

Also - when I go to the grocery store to buy my or my dad's groceries - people say, "Excuse me," or "Sorry if I'm in the way," or "Thanks." And the really cool thing? I can see people smile even though they are wearing a mask!

So are we "coping?" To "cope" (I do love definitions) means to "deal with something difficult." As we move forward through the season of Lent (from the Latin Quadragesima, meaning "Fortieth") I think of how our Lord and Savior was coping with his situation. There were lepers and other illnesses. There were angry mobs and frightened, discouraged people, living in fear and frustration. It seems times have not really changed that much.

What HAS changed is what our loving God did for us - he gave us his only Son to love, guide, and teach us. Christ taught us how to be kind, and to pray. When times get tough, as they might be for a while, or will again, we must turn to our loving God.

As it says so simply in Psalm 145:18 "The Lord is near to all who call upon him." Yes! He is! In good times and in bad.

When we are separated from loved ones; When friendships falter and crumble; When we are frustrated and - when we experience joy; God is always near. So then - there is hope?

In the Bible, "hope" is the confident expectation of what God has promised and its strength is in His faithfulness. This leads to one of my favorite Bible verses of all: "For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not YET have, we wait for it patiently" (Romans 8:24-25).

We will continue to be tested. Relationships will change or be stronger; some will end. But through it all, God, faith, love, and hope remain. We can breathe a small sigh of relief - and see the smile through the mask.



*Cheryl Glassman is the music director at St. Nicolas of Myra Catholic Church in Hays.*

## ***Renew Your Spirit***

***Reverend Karen Harvester  
Hays Med Chaplain***

Most of us lead life at a very hectic pace. There are jobs, children or elderly parents who need us, meetings to attend, commitments within our communities and churches, and the list could go on and on. All of these responsibilities are important because we know that there are people who are counting on us to give our very best. Living through a pandemic has only increased the stress in our lives. Remote learning for our children, working from home, the wearing of masks in public places, and social distancing were not part of our daily lives just a year ago.

However, this hectic pace, along with the changes, can drain us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We are not meant to pursue such a relentless pace without times of rest and renewal. It is important to have time, each day if possible, to take a deep breath and quiet our minds.

Psalm 46:10 reminds us of God's instruction, "Be still

and know that I am God." Each person is different in what provides rest and renewal for them. Some enjoy quiet time in the morning before beginning their day. I consider myself a night person and so I prefer a time of reflective reading and prayer just before I go to sleep.

Besides a daily routine, it is often helpful to go to a special place which provides peace and solitude. It might be a comfy chair in a quiet corner of your home, a spot in the backyard patio, or the back pew of a chapel.

Solitude in the beauty of nature can provide us with occasional opportunities for longer periods of rest. In my own life, anything involving water is soothing to my soul, whether it be swimming or sitting beside a lake or river. This Kansas girl thoroughly enjoys the rare opportunities of a few days by the ocean, just watching the waves crashing on the shore. The spiritual and eternal nature of water replenishes my parched soul. Of course, with travel restrictions due to the virus, it has been quite a while since I have last seen

the ocean. However, I have a picture of the ocean taken several years ago along the coast of California. Just looking at the picture helps to calm my soul on stressful days.

Is your spirit in need of rest and renewal? In readings from the gospels, we learn Jesus often withdrew to deserted places and prayed. There are at least twelve gospel references of Jesus seeking out some quiet time away from the crowds to pray. What an important example Jesus has provided to all of us! Even while doing the work of teaching and healing among the crowds that followed him, Jesus demonstrated that even he needed time to get away and renew his spirit. As we begin again our journey through Lent, may we all find peace and renewal in these uncertain times by following our Savior in prayer and silence before God.



*The Rev. Dr. Karen Pershall Harvester is the Supervisor of Pastoral Care at The University of Kansas Health System Hays*

*Medical Center.*

## ***What I Learned During the Year of Covid***

***Reverend Shay Craig***

***St. Andrews Episcopal Church***

***St. Michael's Episcopal Church***

On March 15 of last year, when we were given the lock-down order in the county in which I lived, I made some plans. I bought a home exercise machine, I gave up all alcohol, tobacco and Netflix. I became entirely Vegan, read two national newspapers every day, wrote to shut-in family every week, learned French and started a sourdough that has survived to this day.

As a result, as we approach the end of this horrible year of confinement and trauma, I am thinner healthier, smarter, better informed, more accomplished, and more loved than ever before in my life.

Just kidding. I didn't do any of those things. Except maybe the part where I RESOLVED to do them.

Like everyone else I know, I started the lock-down year thinking it would be a matter of weeks. So, I planned services that were never held, wrote sermons that were never given, and read for conferences that were cancelled. As weeks

stretched into months, the mounting feelings of futility and disgust with my kitchen cabinets resulted in my turning to social media. I began to Facebook.

I reconnected with friends I had lost track of, I formed and joined groups of people with whom I shared interests and attended Zoom cocktail hours and watch parties.

But very soon that was not enough.

I wrote letters, actual postal letters, to friends who were not online. I ordered cards online and fancy pens and made it my mission to use all the stamps in a book every month by just writing cheerful notes.

And then came the worst. I. Called. My. Stepmother.

I don't think I have ever done that before without a real and probably urgent reason. And then I called other people. I talked to people while I walked the dog, while I went to the post box, even while I cleaned out those nasty kitchen cabinets. People GAVE me the phone number of OTHER people and I called THEM. And I did this on the regular. Like daily!

And you know what? I loved it. I loved hearing about what high school friends were doing. I loved seeing the dogs of my former college professors. I got to know the names and ages of my friends' kids and their kids, and I got interested in things I never even knew existed and that I thought were pure crazy-town (freediving - Google it).

But along the way I reconnected with people. I discovered that the people I thought I had trouble talking to, after the first few minutes, were very easy to talk to. I discovered that the things I imagined people thought about me, were just in my head. I learned to be grateful for all the people in my life and all the things they were doing. I learned that I had a lot in common with many people, and those with whom I had nothing in common were the most interesting of all. In short, I was reminded that God made every person on this earth for the sole purpose of being the person that they are. And discovering those people, learning about them, letting them into my thoughts and aspirations,

## ***What I Learned During the Year of Covid (Continued)***

was a particular miracle that I had taken for granted, or forgotten long ago.

We are all made in God's image. The ancients called it "imago Dei" and it means that there is a thumbprint of God on the heart of every one of us. And when we reach out with good intentions, that little bit of God in other people speaks to us. And our little bit of God speaks to them.

Let me put it to you like this: Imagine everyone in the world had a mirror in their chest. And you have a friend whose mirror shows the image of a lovely candle flame. If you stand a certain way - open and facing your

friend - your mirror reflects that light. And if another friend comes and stands facing you, just so, they can pick up and reflect that light. And it goes on and on. One after another, the entirety of humanity is using their mirror to pick up and move on the reflected light of the original candle flame. And the original flame is God's love. And it's lighting and uniting us all. That is what I learned about relationships during this year of pandemic. I learned about that light.

So, no, I'm not any thinner than I was a year ago. I'm not a Vegan, I don't speak French and the thing "starting" in my fridge is absolutely not meant

to be eaten. But after a year of all this, I can tell you that those ambitions that I had at the beginning were not the important ones. Yes, keeping your mind and body active is important; yes, using your time faithfully is important. But at the end of the day, at the end of the year in this case, I never lost sight of God because I was never out of sight of someone who could reflect the candlelight to me when I needed it most.



*The Rev. Shay Craig is Vicar of St. Andrew's and St. Michael's Episcopal Churches in Hays.*



**“FOR I AM SURE THAT NEITHER DEATH NOR LIFE, NOR ANGELS NOR RULERS, NOR THINGS PRESENT NOR THINGS TO COME, NOR POWERS, NOR HEIGHT NOR DEPTH, NOR ANYTHING ELSE IN ALL CREATION, WILL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.”**

**– ROMANS 8:38-39**

**“COME, MY PEOPLE, ENTER YOUR CHAMBERS, AND SHUT YOUR DOORS BEHIND YOU; HIDE YOURSELVES FOR A LITTLE WHILE UNTIL THE FURY HAS PASSED BY.”**

**– ISAIAH 26:20**