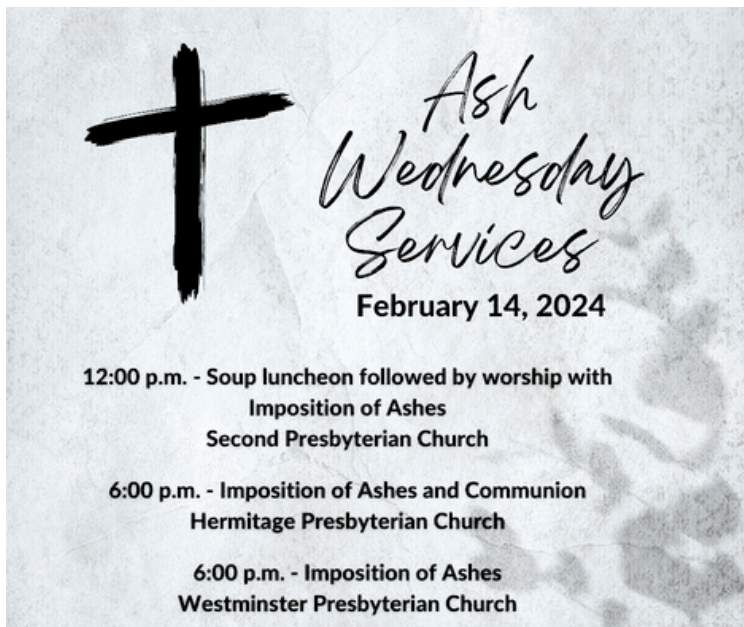


February 14, 2024 | Waynesboro, Virginia | *a newsletter supplement*



Confessions of a church-less pastor

*What does it mean to be a pastor
without a church?*

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without a pastor?*

By Karie Charlton
for the Outlook

The Great Rummage Sale of the church is happening now, just as theologian Phyllis Trible predicted in her book *The Great Emergence*. We are reshaping, as the church

does about every 500 years or so, by letting go of what doesn't work, evaluating what should continue, and looking for a new way to be faithful. Increasingly, churches are having to figure out a new way to be church in what seems to be a new era, where congregations are smaller, members attend monthly not weekly, and finances are leaner than in the past. Catherine Neelly Burton wrote about this recently in the Presbyterian Outlook, "The future of the PC(USA) is pastor-less, and that's ok." When this article was posted to the Outlook's Facebook, I noticed numerous pastors share in the comments that they worry about what this new era of church means for them. I want to tell pastors that we're going to be ok too.

When I was serving a church, my advice for charting a new path in ministry after the pandemic was to be authentic, work together and find new metrics. Recently, I've become a church-less pastor, and I am experimenting with applying my own advice as I chart a path of ministry outside of the traditional confines and supports of a church building and community. In this season of discernment, I find myself returning to my earlier words for guidance: **be authentic, work together, and find new metrics.**

Authentic self. In the rummage sale, we are reevaluating where to find safe spaces for the authentic self. People who attend church sporadically, or who have left all together, tell me that their spirituality doesn't depend on Sunday morning worship and that they are finding community and meaning in other spaces. Continued on p.3

Lenten Lunches



at FPC

Join each at noon Wednesday in Lent
for a simple meal
and discussion of the Book of James.

OUR WORSHIP CHANNELS

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Music Notes for February 19

This week marks the **first Sunday of Lent**. The two hymns, *Forty Days and Forty Nights* and *Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days* detail the steps one might take during this Lenten journey: fasting, praying and turning our hearts and minds to God. As challenging as these times are, we can rest assured that God is, indeed, with us always. May this Lenten season fill you with the love of Christ to "Do justly, love mercy (and) walk humbly with your God."

Confessions of a church-less pastor, continued

I have been without a congregation since Easter of 2023, and I can tell you that is my experience too. I find community in my work for the Days for Girls nonprofit, at the diner where I am a regular, at the hair salon, at the clinic where I volunteer, and when I am out with non-Christian friends. These spaces allow me to be my most authentic self in a way that church did not. Sometimes pastors can't be themselves because they are trying to be what the congregation needs/wants. Sometimes people can't be themselves around pastors because they see them as closer to God or somehow different than other people.

As I read Neelly Burton, I wondered if small congregations or pastor-less churches might offer authentic spaces in new ways. When no one has a claim on being the expert, can we engage parts of ourselves that we previously would have looked over? Perhaps these spaces empower lay leaders to acquire more education and expertise. For church-less pastors, who are known in the community for other work they do, can they bring their community self to the communion table in new ways? When church-less pastors work lay jobs and lay people take on pastoral roles, can we all be a little more authentic everywhere and not pretend to be "better" at church? I hope so.

Co-working. In the rummage sale, I am repurposing who it is I'm working for. I am not working for a particular church; I am working for God. Without a congregation of my own, I have been able to support other pastors and communities differently. For instance, I preached for a colleague during a week when other church community events needed her attention. While she led worship that morning, my ability to take care of the sermon created space in her schedule for other things. Could a lay leader preach in this case? Absolutely. Churches without pastors are already doing this. They bring in a pastor when they want to have communion as part of the service. This is not new, but I think the idea of co-working has focused on life in the traditional church. In the future, we will see how church-less pastors can impact a community. A growing number of pastors are taking "tent-making" jobs (like Paul in Corinth) so that they can continue to serve a church part-time and feed their families. You can take a pastor outside of a church, but pastors bring with them compassion and community building into their other jobs.

My experience is that when people find out I'm a pastor, I am their pastor whether they are church attenders or even believers. When I'm volunteering or working in other spaces, people have asked if I can switch into my pastor hat for a few minutes. I love wearing many hats, but my favorite moments are being a pastor to people who didn't realize they wanted one. The Spirit moves in those conversations in a way I haven't experienced in traditional church. I think God is up to something when pastors are in plain clothes and more accessible to those who can't/won't seek the holy in a church building. In this sacred co-working, the goal is never getting them into a pew but giving them language for the Divine that is at work in their lives. The Holy Spirit doesn't discriminate.

Metrics. In the rummage sale, I'm letting go of treasured things that are no longer serving me —like telling people I am a busy and exhausted pastor because it made me feel useful and important. As a church-less pastor, I am less busy, and I am better for it as are the communities I inhabit. For churches and pastors, the metric can't be how many hours we have put in this week. Smaller churches and pastor-less churches are already leading the way in evaluating what is important and what can be let go. Asking questions like what is serving the community and what is just making us busy and tired can help us put more energy into high-value activities and find more rest and renewal for all of us. Continued

Confessions of a church-less pastor, continued

As church-less pastor, I am finding new ways to live faithfully, by being exactly who God has made me, participating in sacred co-working wherever I am, and finding time for rest. I can see that pastor-less churches are also doing the same. We're all going to be ok, and more importantly, we will find God anew. I'll see you at the rummage sale, friends.



Karie Charlton is a PCUSA pastor in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is the leader of the Pittsburgh Chapter of Days for Girls. You can find more of her writing in her blog, www.periodpastor.com, or by following her on Facebook and Instagram @periodpastor.

Better Together Bible Study

Monday, February 19, 2024
Hermitage Presbyterian Church
1:00-2:00 p.m.

Join John Tindall in exploring
the great stories and themes
of the Bible

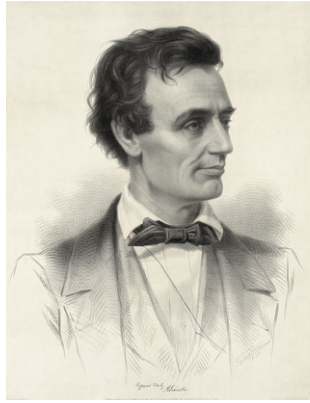
This week's topic:
Exodus
wandering through the wilderness...

This Week in History.



Jimmu is crowned the first Emperor of Japan, a day celebrated as the traditional founding date of the Japanese nation.

February 11, 660 BC



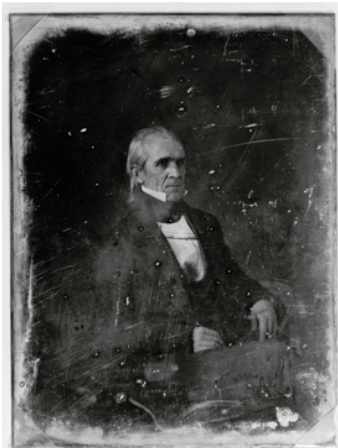
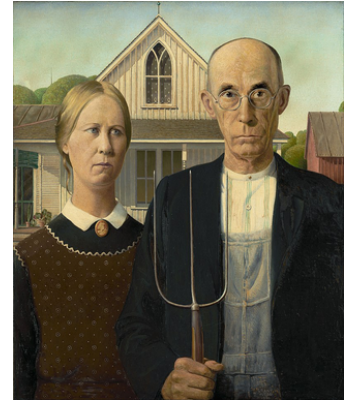
Abraham Lincoln is born in Hardin County, Kentucky. He would be elected as the 16th U.S. President in 1860.

February 12, 1809



American artist **Grant Wood** is born near Anamosa, IA. His best known painting, *American Gothic*, depicts a farmer standing beside his daughter.

February 13, 1892



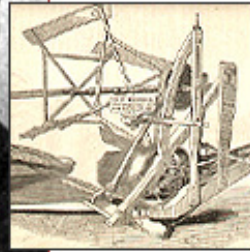
James Polk is the first sitting president to be photographed - a daguerrotype taken by photographer Matthew Brady.

February 14, 1849



Inventor **Cyrus McCormick** is born in Rockbridge County, VA. He invented the horse-drawn mechanical reaper, a machine that freed farmers from hard labor and contributed to the development and cultivation of vast areas of the American Great Plains.

FEBRUARY 15, 1809



The **Canadian Pacific Railway** is incorporated by Act of Parliament at Ottawa. It would be Canada's first transcontinental railroad.

FEBRUARY 16, 1881



The **Armory Show**, also known as *the International Exhibition of Modern Art*, opens in New York City. Organized by the Association of American Painters and Sculptors, it would be the first large exhibition of modern art in America, displaying the work of artists who would become some of the most influential painters of the early 20th century.

FEBRUARY 17, 1913