

March 27, 2024 | Waynesboro, Virginia | *a newsletter supplement*

The Hospitality of ‘Yes’, part 1

Showing up and saying ‘yes’ is a major lesson in Christian hospitality, even when – especially when – we don’t know where that answer will lead

By Rev. Clayton Rascoe and Rev. Colleen Earp

HARRISONBURG, VA— Together, Colleen and I have spent more than 40 summers in camp and conference ministry. Our professional call to this ministry remains strong because our personal call is deeply rooted in hospitality. Over the years we have learned a lot about Christian hospitality; but perhaps the most important learning is the simple lesson of showing up and saying yes, even when – especially when – we don’t know where that answer will lead.



Christian hospitality operates in the positive.

YES is an answer, and it is a directive.

The staff at Massanetta Springs said yes.

The Holy Spirit took it from there.

— Clayton Rascoe

Rascoe.

God does wondrous things with our yes. The Holy Spirit works deeply at Massanetta Springs, a camp and conference center in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Some of the Spirit’s works were never on a strategic plan. But they have nonetheless beckoned us into a deeper understanding of our mission: to be a place for all people to experience God through renewal, discovery and hospitality. Many other details must be organized and agreed upon to develop a new partnership or conference. But by leading with a hospitality of yes, we’ve found new connections and energy through our work with Church World Service (CWS).

Yes to the stranger — Clayton Rascoe

In late 2016, my phone rang. On the line was a local pastor asking whether Massanetta Springs could help. Her congregation was providing temporary shelter for refugees through a partnership with CWS. Given the growing shortage of affordable housing in our area, these new neighbors often needed temporary places to live while CWS coordinated permanent housing, job opportunities, school enrollment for children and all the other things they needed to begin new life in the United States. An unusually high number of refugees were being placed here in Harrisonburg, and CWS was having difficulty finding space for a family expected within a couple of days.

“Would Massanetta be willing to provide temporary housing for this family while CWS works to secure permanent arrangements for them?” the pastor asked.

CONTINUED ON P3

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Music Notes for Sunday, April 7

This week's Introit, *Alleluia*, and the Anthem, *The Disciples Knew the Lord Jesus*, were composed by Lt. Colonel Dwayne Milburn, with whom Roger worked at St. Matthew's in Pacific Palisades, California. Lt. Col. Milburn served as associate bandmaster for the U.S. Continental Army Band (Fort Monroe, Virginia), The U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own" (Washington, DC) and the U.S. Army Europe Band and Chorus (Heidelberg, Germany). He commanded the Army Ground Forces Band, Atlanta, Georgia. Among his military honors are the President Benjamin Harrison Award, the Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal and the NATO Medal. Both pieces are part of a mass composed by Lt. Col. Milburn in 2006 for St. Matthew's choir while Roger was Parish Organist.



Milburn.



Sullivan..

The opening hymn for this week's Easter II service will be *Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain*, with music by Sir Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900). He and librettist Sir W. S. Gilbert (1836-1911) created some of the most popular stage works of all time. They collaborated on fourteen works, including *HMS Pinafore*, *The Pirates of Penzance* and *The Mikado*. Sullivan also composed dozens of operas, choral works, oratorios and ballets, as well as many songs and hymns, including *Onward, Christian Soldiers*.



The Hospitality of ‘Yes’, continued

Massanetta had never considered such a thing. The time frame was late 2016, late enough in the year to know we were in the red financially. Even so, we opened a conversation with trustees, staff and a few Massanetta Springs friends. Did this request fall within our mission? *Yes*. Did we have the capacity to help provide this opportunity? *Yes*.

Discerning both answers, we said yes to CWS. A few days later a family arrived. We welcomed them with safety, beds, a kitchen, a playground and more than 100 acres of God’s beautiful Shenandoah Valley. The family stayed for a few days, and then CWS was able to move them into permanent housing.

The following April, our trustees extended this hospitality of yes by passing a resolution to officially partner with CWS. Over the next several years, we became a regular host for CWS. Families from Central and South America, Africa and Asia all spent their first days in the United States on our campus. CWS came up with some funding, and we also found a few small grants to cover costs. Some newcomers stayed for a few days, others for a few months. Little did we know that during all this time of saying yes little by little, the Holy Spirit was preparing us for a really big yes.

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During the summer of 2021, we watched the reports and images emerging from Afghanistan as the United States withdrew and the Taliban reasserted control. Clearly our CWS partners were going to be called upon in new and demanding ways. Massanetta Springs was still in the depths of the pandemic. We’d had no guests for most of 2020. While we did reopen in 2021, our traditional ministry and revenue sources were extremely limited.

But even amid Paycheck Protection Program loans and difficult financial times, we wondered: Is there something we can do to support the work of CWS during the Afghanistan crisis?

We met with CWS, toured campus and talked through the needs. The answer turned out to be yes, we could help — if we could get the initiative funded. The cottages where we previously hosted refugees were simply not big enough. We needed to provide more housing, meeting space and three meals a day for seven days a week for an unknown number of refugees for an unspecified length of time. Cost estimates were projected to exceed half a million dollars. Could Massanetta help?

We walked out of that first meeting with a tentative yes and a basic plan. CWS would secure funding for the lodging, while Massanetta Springs would raise support for meals and meeting space. At the time, we had no idea where our commitment – for about half the projected cost – would come from. We hoped that our network of Presbyterian churches and Massanetta Springs supporters would join us, but we didn’t know. But again, recognizing that this opportunity lay at the core of our mission and was potentially within our capacity, we said an enthusiastic yes to this audacious hospitality effort.

In mid-October that year, the first 20 refugees arrived. Our population ranged from that number to a peak of 120 refugees. By mid-March 2022, when we wrapped up the effort, 185 Afghan refugees were offered hospitality at Massanetta Springs. We even welcomed two new American citizens, as refugee mothers gave birth at the local hospital while staying with us! By offering a hospitality of yes, we were blessed with having a community come alongside us. CONTINUED

The Hospitality of ‘Yes’, continued

Saying yes was not always easy.

When those first folks arrived, our dining services manager came down with COVID-19 and was out for three weeks. A group of staff and volunteers partnered with a local Middle Eastern restaurant, learned how to order and prepare halal meals and put food on the table. Eventually, a volunteer group from a local congregation offered to provide our own staff with some hospitality by cooking all the breakfasts, to which we enthusiastically said yes.

We were welcoming new neighbors who had varying degrees of familiarity with American plumbing, electrical service, appliances and more. Our maintenance crew cleaned drain lines and repaired broken heaters, while our housekeeping staff turned over rooms — often with little notice between one family leaving and another coming in.

But do you know what we discovered during this time? By offering a hospitality of yes, we were blessed with a community eager to come alongside us. More than 150 volunteers – from Presbyterian churches, churches of other faiths, local colleges, Ruritan clubs and the local mosque – prepared and served meals. We made lasting connections in our community we never would have before. We were able to restore full-time employment for employees we had previously changed to part-time arrangements because of pandemic conditions.

And the funds we needed? Once word got out, more than 60 congregations and individuals donated funds to cover all the meal and meeting space needs, while CWS found a critical partner, Airbnb, which supplied grants for lodging.

When we wrapped up this time of hospitality and realized that many of our mattresses would need replacing for us to resume regular programming, yet another church came through with a grant.

When we simply said yes to our neighbors in need, and continued saying yes along the way, we found that the Holy Spirit moved in others, time and again, to provide what we needed so we could continue to say yes. Blessing upon blessing poured out from the simple act of saying yes to hospitality.

Rev. Clayton Rascoe has been executive director at Massanetta Springs Camp and Conference Center since 2016. Over the past 20 years, he has served camps in North Carolina, Georgia, Texas and Virginia. Rev. Earp’s thoughts will be featured in next week’s Columns Online.

To support the mission and ministry of Massanetta Springs, Click the springhouse below.





Sunday worship:

1 John 1:1-2:2

Acts 14: 32-37

Sermon: Community.

Better Together

Monday, April 8

Bible Study

Second Presbyterian Church

1:00-2:00 p.m.

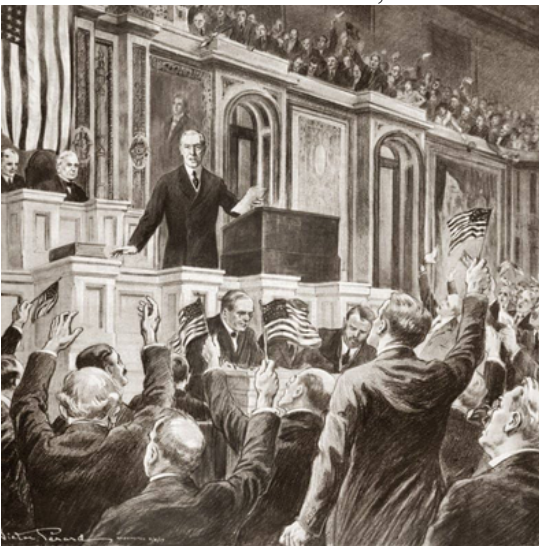
**Join John Tyndall in exploring
the great stories and themes of Scripture**

This Week in History.



Parliament passes the **Trade Act**, closing the colonial port of Boston. This is the first of the *Intolerable Acts* passed in response to the Boston Tea Party of December, 1773.

March 31, 1774



President Woodrow Wilson asks the U.S. Congress for a declaration of war on Germany.

April 2, 1917



Ripple Rock, an underwater barrier to navigation in the Seymour Narrows section of the strait separating Vancouver Island and the Discovery Islands of British Columbia, is destroyed in one of the largest non-nuclear controlled explosions of the time.

April 5, 1958



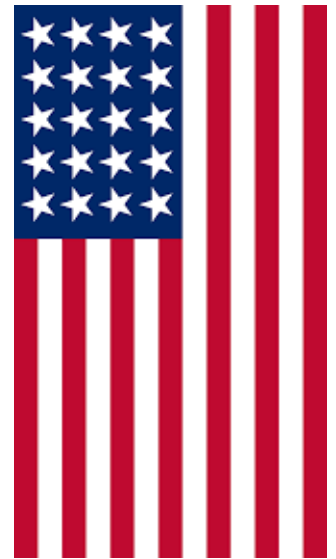
In 1918, the **Royal Air Force** is created by the merger of the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service. **In 1924**, the Canadian Air Force becomes the **Royal Canadian Air Force**. **In 1937**, the **Royal New Zealand Air Force** is separated from the New Zealand Army, becoming an independent military branch.

April 1



Joseph Stalin becomes the first General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

April 3, 1922



Congress adopts the flag of the Second Continental Congress, featuring 13 red and white stripes and one star for each state.

April 4, 1818



The American League ushers in the demise of Major League Baseball with the introduction of the **Designated Hitter**.

April 6, 1973