



Stephen Ministry

Pat Bartee – Leader

"The times, they are a-changing..."

Here, hopefully on the other side of Covid, we find ourselves in a world we cannot recognize or handle. There are massive shifts in the work world, the work environment, and even the definition of work. The value, the content, the delivery and the decision-making are changing for education. Politics are divisive and varied, even within parties. The truth, even, is in question and who the truth-tellers are.

In the midst of this ground-shifting, how can Christians cope and be beacons rather than casualties? Here are a few thoughts.

God puts emphasis on change as something good in Old Testament and New Testament scripture. He sees opportunity and growth awaiting us. Changing our mindset to the positive aspects and embracing the challenges of new beginnings can set us apart.

Will it be scary, and unsettling? Assuredly. Despite the changes and in the midst of them, we have a promise that "God changeth not" and He serves as our anchor now as He has been throughout this pandemic. Our faith and continued walk with our Protector will make us strong enough for whatever is next. Many replenished their spiritual tanks during Covid. Now is the time to pull from that source of renewed faith.

Already, we see signs of hope to spark us. More families are having meals together and enjoying family time, more businesses are reevaluating pay and flexible work schedules, more people are valuing family and friendship and just slowing down, even Congress is negotiating again and passing bi-partisan laws! We can get aboard this positive wave as Christian people by choosing timely projects and small group topics to grow together, to redirect and uplift conversations, to keep others from being isolated, and to provide community aid that brings justice, equity, and help for core needs to those closest to us.

<https://www.visualcapitalist.com/our-top-21-visualizations-of-2021/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/30/style/covid-risk-calculator.html>

**Age + vaccination status + number of guests + ZIP code + activity =
Should I even leave the house?**

**Charlie Gray
Finance/Administration Elder**

My Christian principle about investing and all aspects of life is, "God's in charge", meaning there is no reason to panic because no matter what happens, who is elected or whatever the circumstance, God knows how to guide us through uncertain times. Basically Romans 8:28 – And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

The Great Resignation

or

"Where did everybody go?"

I recently remarked it feels like a spaceship came and took away a large segment of our population! How else do you explain the labor shortage in places we typically go to, like restaurants and department stores.

Like many things these days, this relates to Covid 19. When we were all sent indoors for our proverbial "time out", in early March of 2020, many people lost their jobs or otherwise found their normal routine was suddenly gone. Due to telecommuting, the normal break between working and being off from work literally disappeared for many of us.

Little by little, what first was thought by some, as a condition that would pass in a few short weeks or maybe a month or two, has now morphed into, do I dare say it, The NEW NORMAL!

As we move into 2022, it seems Covid is likely here to stay. That may be depressing for many of you but, before you put this article down, consider the following:

Humans, as a species, are very resilient. We can and have evolved throughout time and while the debate rages on about whether to get vaccinated, social Darwinism will surely win out, as it has time and time again. Simply put, we will survive, but I digress.

Along the way during this journey/pandemic, many people have taken time to reflect on what makes them happy and what really matters. In my father's generation it was common for a person to finish college, get a job, get married, start a family, and stay with that employer for the rest of their career. This was the so called, cradle to grave cycle and for many it was a simple life.

The past year and half have shown people they have choices they didn't know existed because they were too busy with their pre-pandemic routines to notice.

Subsequently, more people are retiring earlier than ever, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. We are seeing our health care workers experiencing burnout at rates rarely, if ever seen, in the past. Also, many people who had low paying jobs, such as servers in restaurants, have realized there is more to life than dealing with their often rude patrons. On a parallel note, the airlines report the incidents of unruly passengers are at an all time high.

You can see it everywhere, especially on the roads and highways. Never have I experienced the level of aggressive driving we are seeing these days. Where is everyone going and why are they trying to get there so fast? People seem generally unhappier now than at any other time during my lifetime. Once again, we hear the familiar quote, "Mad as hell and not going to take it anymore". The vast distance between folks on the left and the right side of the aisle, what I call the Great Divide has widened with discord.

Ironically, there is likely a silver lining in all this chaos. In over 40 years as a Wealth Manager, I am seeing a shift in people that I believe most will find positive. The adage of "Keeping up with Jones's" appears to be disappearing during this peculiar time in our history.

From our work lives to our possessions, people seem to waking up to the point that time is our most scarce resource. Though there will be some growing pains along the way, and it might take longer to get our fast food or other restaurant experience, as people reset their priorities on what really matters, we will all be better off for it.

(To be continued with more observations as this movement affects our economy, mental health, and the changing job market. Look for more in our Spring-Summer Issue, May 2022)

Reading List for Learning about Race and White Privilege in American Society

David Hill, Clerk of Session

My "Golden Rule:" Christ summed up the law in two simple rules we must follow; one is to love God with all my heart, the other to love my neighbor just as much as I love myself. Imagine what a wonderful world if we all would strive to follow these rules in every interaction we have with others. This would make God visible to the world through our actions. What a wonderful way to witness to the world!

Annotated Bibliography

Bullard, Rodney D. Heroes Wanted: Why the World Needs You to Live Your Heart Out (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2018). Written by the Vice President of Community Affairs at Chick-fil-A, Inc., this is not a book about racial issues. What it is, though, is a book about Christianity and how Christians must live their lives every day. Consequently, this book offers a solution to the racial issues Americans face. The practices of Jesus Christ would alleviate racial problems since our focus would be on how we can serve by positively impacting the lives of others.

Chernow, Ron. Grant (New York: Penguin Press, 2017). Pulitzer Prize winning author Chernow has written a superb biography of one of the most misunderstood Presidents of the United States, Ulysses S. Grant. While the focus of the book is on Grant, the reader discovers the horrors of Reconstruction following the Civil War. Thousands of black Americans were slaughtered in the South. If anyone thinks the Civil War was only about state's rights, Chernow paints a clear highly documented picture that state's rights was simply the cover for maintaining a system of slavery that supported Southern landowners at the expense of slaves and non-landowning whites. The data is gruesome.

Conwill, Kinshasha Holman, ed. **National Museum of African American History and Culture. Dream a World Anew: The African American Experience and the Shaping of America (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2016).** Beautifully written, photographed, and documented to give a more accurate and complete version of history. So often history books are sanitized and condensed, so readers do not get the level of detail they need to understand what happened and how it happened. This book carefully lays out the history of black Americans from the origins of slavery to today. Lynching is addressed, but so too are the achievements of black Americans. Great promises were made to African Americans following the Civil War, but hopes were dashed as white America found new ways to enslave a race of people as if the war never happened. A great book for those who got the sanitized version of American history.

(To be continued with Annotated Bibliography, Spring-Summer Issue, May 2022)

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/meaning-lost-and-found/202112/5-small-ways-reconsider-your-lifes-meaning>

**WINTER 2022 MVPC
PW Moderator Report
Ann Williams**

<http://www.atlpcusa.org/pw.html>

- Mount Vernon Presbyterian Women Day Circle, Book Circle and Sunday Circle will meet virtually in January 2022. Each month, we will review whether we continue to meet in person or virtually.
- In January, we will continue the Horizon's Bible Study, What My Grandmothers Taught Me: Learning from the Women in Matthew's Genealogy of Jesus, by Merryl Blair.
- Our Coordinating Team put together a garden themed basket for the 15th Annual Caring Hands Classic Ceilidh Auction Fundraiser held on Sunday, October 24. The fundraiser benefits residents at Presbyterian Village in Athens.
- MVPW sponsored a Cake Walk at our Fall celebration, Pumpkin Palooza. Members baked cakes for the event.
- Circle of Grace met in November at a Circle members' home to assemble care packages for college students.
- MVPW hosted our Christmas Program and Luncheon on Sunday, December 12 after our 10:30 am church service. Reverend Isaac and Christina Toney-Schmitt shared a collection of Advent poems that they had written as well as some traditional Christmas themed poetry that they had selected. Thirty-six ladies attended the luncheon held in the Kirk Center.



INTIMATE CREATION

Rev. Isaac Toney-Schmitt

Associate Pastor for Faith Formation

When I was sixteen, after driving for about a year, I aspired to drive anything with a manual transmission. I had enjoyed learning to drive; there were mistakes, a minor wreck that could have been avoided, but mostly great memories of exploration and freedom. I had the benefit of not learning to drive in Atlanta, so driving was a calming, steadying activity. A manual transmission seemed the obvious next step for a more immersive driving experience. I remember my mom's skepticism when we bought a Jeep Wrangler with a manual transmission. She told me I'd be frustrated with the shifting, worn out after long trips, anxious on hills. I, secretly, worried that she was right. I stalled out more times than I can count, but I fell in love with the intimacy of driving with a manual transmission. Driving, shifting, planning, pedaling... transformed my Jeep into a sacred, meditative little space that called for awareness and reaction in equal measure. Driving began to mean more than moving from here to there.

Personally, I feel a steady call to ramp-up the intimacy of my daily tasks. This call guides my identity as a pastor, and it leads me outside of myself to places of awareness and reaction. I am sure that my hobbies like pole vaulting, cycling, and climbing are all responses to this call; each one's accompanying consequences pull me out of myself and into an awareness of what is around me, what is more than just getting from here to there. I believe that everything around us has presence and that our awareness of and response to that presence is akin to prayer. God fills creation with life, and that life breathes and flows to all corners, human or otherwise. We can develop a relationship with this presence in the same way we develop a relationship with the presence of other people. Our planet may be changing, from things we do individually and negative habits we fall into as communities, but that presence is still there. We must recover the moments of intimate relationship with what is around us, those activities that pull us out of ourselves and into sacred relationship with what is around us. Then, we will be well prepared to positively affect our environment.

This season, take up the sacred tasks of walking, being, and resting. Find those activities that pull you into the space of awareness and reaction. Reach out to the divine presence in the world around you and pray for a growing relationship. May God meet us where we look!

<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-59761839>

WINTER ISSUE 2022

**THE MVPC MEMBERS'
GIFT OF WISDOM**



**In Rain
By Wendell Berry**

**... I go in under foliage
light with rain-light
in the hill's cleft,
and climb, my steps
silent as flight
on the wet leaves.
Where I go, stones
are wearing away under the sky's flow...**

(Poem chosen by Rev. Isaac Toney-Schmitt)

**"Let us love in truth and action" *
By Applying our Christian Principles
in Changing Times**

***1 John 3:18b**

A MVPC PW Publication

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