

"It is the will of Christ that there be world-wide unity in his Church... Within this movement the barriers of national, racial, social, economic, or educational discrimination have no place."

—Pastor Bev Cosby, 1956

Church of the Covenant

Module 1: Our Genesis



"When we choose to abide with others in love, then we begin to discover the blessing and gift of true community."

—Pastor David Edwards, 2009

"This light within each of us awakens when we seek its primordial presence within our lives...inside and out, let it come. Let it permeate each cell within our bodies and fill our mind, heart, and body with its divine presence, illuminating who we are in God, and who we are in this world."

—Pastor Dan Harrison, 2017

Reflections

1a. Home sweet home

Beverly (Bev) Cosby was the youngest of the Cosby children, born in 1926 (13 years younger than PG, 10 years younger than Gordon, but only 2 years younger than Jack); the family had just built and moved into the Cosby home on Boonsboro Rd. (now the parsonage), which was nicknamed "Pantops".

- *Mrs. Cosby loved the panoramic views from the house and adopted a common name used in the area – “Pantops”, like “Pantops Mountain” in nearby Charlottesville.*
- *The Cosby home was alive with social gatherings and regular dinners, where it seemed just about anyone could drop by and eat a home-cooked meal. It is said that neighbors joked that the house was often so full of guests and dishes that to store the tops of the pans, Mrs. Cosby would have to throw them on the roof— thus fondly calling the inviting home “Pantops”!*

Racial injustice in the Jim Crow South would have been evident to the Cosby family in a then segregated Lynchburg: The separate schools, the economic disparity, and separate churches (to name a few).

[illegible]

2

high schooler give it a try, and Gordon ended up preaching at the church for nearly two years, and his brothers who also answered calls to the ministry would do the same in the small congregation. This experience working within the black community in a very segregated South in his formative years would most certainly affect how he understood the necessity for racial justice within his future ministries, but also in how he mentored his siblings, especially his youngest brother Bev. *[Do Reflection 1a]*

The War

As World War II was starting up, the spirit of solidarity in standing against Nazi tyranny and worldwide fascism was ever growing in the US. The Cosby family was no exception. While by then, both PG and Gordon had become ministers (one Presbyterian and the other Baptist, of course)—and were exempt from the draft—Gordon decided to go anyway. He went in as a chaplain, and was assigned to the 327th Glider Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division, landing with armed soldiers onto Utah Beach, D-Day, earning two silver stars for heroic acts. His division was sorely understaffed with clergy officers, and he had so many under him in constant spiritual need that he deputized other “spiritual” soldiers to carry out the duties of encouragement and prayer—for there was so much pain and death. He was clearly impacted by this experience to the point that he wrote back to his wife Mary stating that if he returned home he would never do “traditional church” again. There was another way to do church that focused on the priesthood of all believers, equal agency among all members, and focused on the mission of loving each other in a way that met each other’s needs in this world. This radical vision came to fruition later, once Gordon returned home from war, through his starting of the innovative, racially integrated, social justice ministry of Church of the Saviour in DC (started in 1947).

Following in the footsteps of their older brother, Jack and Bev dropped out of college to join the war effort, both serving as Navy sailors in the Pacific. It is said that Bev was greatly affected spiritually when on the bow of his ship, he and two other friends standing scared out of their wits, staring wide eyed as a kamikaze pilot headed straight for them. Bev knew it was the end, but in the last moment he prayed to God that “if” he survived this somehow, he would follow his oldest brothers’ lead, and become a minister too. Suddenly, at the last second, the plane veered away from the ship and crashed into the ocean. He was spared, and he now had a mission to fulfill in his life—to serve others.

However, it was during Bev’s ride home after disembarking in San Francisco in the days following the war, that he got a stark reminder of the racial strife that awaited them back in the US. As they came off the ships, they boarded buses headed to their home states. So Bev, along with his fellow Virginians (which included a significant number of black sailors), got on the buses headed to Richmond. His bus was full of both whites and blacks, much like the ships where they all had just served faithfully in the war; they were integrated now. But as they trekked through southern towns on their way back, reality hit them hard. In each southern community where they happened to stop to eat or rest overnight, generally the blacks were not welcome. Many were taken in by the local black communities to feed and shelter them, and many did not get back on the bus the next morning. It is said that Bev witnessing this hate and bigotry up close greatly affected him. This feeling was perhaps further exacerbated when upon arrival in Richmond, it is said that the black sailors who had stayed back (for various reasons stemming

from systemic racism in those communities), were dishonorably discharged (therefore, losing benefits from their time served). Apparently, this grieved Bev in a life-changing way. He had witnessed the systemic racism not only of the South but of the federal government too—and this would forever serve to remind him of his own White Privilege, his own benefiting from the system, which he had always taken for granted. Racial justice had found a new ally in Bev Cosby, and Lynchburg would soon know it.

Post-War:

“Where will the children play?”

In the months following the war, while Gordon was reunited with his wife Mary in DC, Jack and Bev were back at their family home in Lynchburg (at *Pantops*). During that time, Jack and Bev started a neighborhood youth group that pulled from several area churches—and was largely non-denominational. The brothers found solace after such a violent war in the gathering of the neighborhood kids, teaching them the peace and goodness of God—despite a violent world. These children looked up to the two young war veterans and the teens who eventually became the children’s day-camp leaders. While Jack focused on the youth group (older teens), Bev focused on establishing play space for the local neighborhood children—using the few acres of forest behind their house for weekend campouts, and the ping-pong table he and Jack had set up in the Pantops basement served as entertainment for both the teens and the kids. At one of the youth group meetings—the “Monday Night Group” as it had been known and would later morph into the Lynchburg Christian Fellowship (LCF) and its Day Camp—Bev, concerned with fast city development and self-interest of urbanization, posed the question, “Where will the children play?” This question was born out of genuine concern for children being removed from God’s creation, nature itself—and also out of a desire to foster our natural, human tendency to love, respect, explore and learn from it. So, Mr. and Mrs. Cosby generously donated the five acres behind their home as a dedicated children’s play space. While much of the foundational, organic work of this new ministry bore itself out in 1947-48, this would primarily be a summer project because within a few months, Jack would enter the work sector, in insurance and banking (similar to their father), and Bev would soon enroll in the University of Richmond and then shortly after at American University in DC (where he would stay with Gordon and Mary) to complete his undergraduate studies. So, Jack would keep the youth group going through the year, and Bev faithfully would return in the summers to focus on what would eventually become the LCF Day Camp (formally

Reflections

1b. Coping with war

War creates casualties. In his book “The Greatest Generation”, Tom Brokaw reports that half of the VA hospital beds in 1947 were filled with vets without physical wounds. Even John Hunston’s 1946 documentary “Let There Be Light” reported that at least 1 in 5 WWII battle casualties were of a “neuropsychotic nature”. Needless to say, the emotional and mental toll (let alone spiritual toll) the war took on those who were in it was significant, and the Cosby brothers were certainly not unaffected by its traumatic nature.

The LCF youth group and its Day Camp were wonderful, initial missions that Jack and Bev poured themselves into immediately following the war. Bev’s critical question to the group, “Where will the children play?” started a unique focus on creating a nature refuge where the children could commune with the Creator through this beautiful creation all around. There is little doubt Bev felt a deep connection to God through the nature he spent his life introducing children to, where they could play and have fun, be truly carefree—and not think about war and violence.

When in Nature, God’s garden, what feelings does it catalyze within you? Describe your experience(s):

From the Module cover page Dan refers to God’s “...divine presence, illuminating who we are in God, and who we are in this world”, how do you think Nature plays a part in illumination, and what does it look like?

established in 1950). The LCF group would participate as counselors and camp leaders in this first of many missional opportunities; from their very start, within the formation of LCF and its Camp, there was always a strong sentiment towards helping children, and helping the most vulnerable among us! [Do

Reflection 1b]

Church of the Saviour: A New Model for “doing church”

In the fall of 1947, Bev began his final two years of study, first at the University of Richmond and then at American University in Washington DC; he lived with his older brother Gordon and wife Mary while they pursued their new church-plant called Church of the Saviour. The timing was perfect; as Gordon was just starting to iron out what “radical church” looked like with barely a handful of eager Baptists, Bev was tied right into the process—learning and contributing (and this would typify their brotherly, ministerial relationship for the remainder of their lives—as eventual creators of something new and substantial for their two cities—Lynchburg and DC—which would outlive them both). While Bev and Gordon were distinctly different, in both style and at times approaches, they often seemed indistinguishable in trajectory. Gordon would serve as a mentor to his youngest brother. This manifested into a uniquely shared common vision and set of values as they together embraced this new way of “doing church,” often spending as much time together as possible over the years.

Born out of Gordon’s own convictions of how to do church that diverged from tradition, based largely on what he experienced while in WWII, he now hoped to see a church that, *“would not be a community which is withdrawn and which pulls out of society as we know it, but it would be a community that lives among people.”* This deeply rooted belief of true integration within society was precipitated by Gordon’s own experiences with trying to bring peace in the midst of violence while on the European front. He reflects on one particularly cold winter on the battlefield: *“I stood in the snow with those men and talked with them out of the depths of my heart. I preached five-minute sermons. I stood there when it was so cold I could not make my mouth move to finish the benediction. I came to know that, under those circumstances, I had to have something more real, more valid, to say than I had been saying before, because I was talking to some men for the last time... I knew I had to have a ministry which was real.”* This intense desire to “be real” was Church of the Saviour’s guiding principle of authenticity, fostering a recognition of equality—that everyone is ordained—not just the clergy—and to this end, a commitment (or more specifically, a covenant) was leveraged as a way to maintain a seriousness and mutual accountability to a divine “call”.

This understanding of “call” stemmed from an acknowledgement that followers of Jesus are to be active participants in His kingdom of justice and love, and each are called to this ministry based on desire and gifts (and this will vary) being used to live-out this kingdom in the world. In this view, a covenant serves to foster habits of spiritual discipline that energize this “call”, as well as spiritual growth. The covenant adopted by Church of the Saviour then (and still for many of Church of the Saviour’s churches today) includes a commitment to: 1) *Daily prayer* 2) *Daily Scripture reading* 3) *Regular tithing* 4) *Participation in a Mission Group* 5) *Loving one’s neighbor (and beyond)*, and 6) *Holding oneself accountable to the covenant*. Each member would renew or choose to not renew their commitment to the covenant each year. This greatly differed from traditional church membership, which was typically tied to a one-time (for life) commitment—and then simply left in name only, often leaving the member to self-manage

alone. Therefore, the covenant would become critical to Bev as he sought a short time later to replicate the same authentic “ministry which was real” that Gordon had aspired to bring to life following the war—and this foundational element would provide essential fodder for his future church—even its name later serving as a reminder of its origins, Church of the Covenant.

Church of the Covenant: A “call” Answered in Lynchburg

While working diligently on the LCF Day Camp program (before it had an official name), during the summer months in Lynchburg 1948-1950 and learning so much from Gordon’s exciting new church, Church of the Saviour, in DC during the school year, young Bev eventually answered his “call” to become a minister by enrolling in Princeton Theological Seminary in 1951. His framework for what a high-commitment/high-impact church could be was based on both the first Century church he studied in Scripture as well as the innovative Church of the Saviour in DC which he had experienced for himself. And as his seminary education was wrapping up (he had spent his final year at Union Theological Seminary in New York City thanks to the encouragement of Congregational Christian Conference Minister Douglas Horton—since theologian Reinhold Niebuhr was still teaching there), he was finally ready to start a formalized spiritual community to support the growing work of LCF and their camp, and he didn’t plan to do it alone. About those times back and forth between Lynchburg and seminary, Bev wrote, *“The inception of the Church of the Covenant in 1954 was related to the movement of renewal...The concerns of Iona, Kirkridge, the Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C., and other similar experiments spread to a handful of Lynchburg laymen. It was not a sudden or spectacular vision, but a gradual unfolding.”* To lead this newly emerging faith community, Bev recruited a friend.

His fellow student in ministry, Irving Stubbs (also a Presbyterian), had gone with Bev to Union from Princeton, and together had envisioned what this new church in Lynchburg could become, and therefore they decided to co-pastor (and so was the case for the first two years of the church’s life). Because of the nature of this new church and its premise for being integrated racially in a southern city was a new, out-of-the-box concept, few denominations if any would risk supporting it for fear of causing divisiveness. However, being in New York City at the time, where the Congregational Christian (later to merge into the United Church of Christ) denomination’s headquarters were based, Bev and Irving pitched their idea—and the denomination leadership loved it. The two seminarians then took full advantage during their final

1c. To be or not to be

Choosing a denomination is an easy task if only one denomination is willing to sponsor you. Well, that is where Bev and Irving found themselves in the spring of 1954 as they wrapped up their seminary studies. Bev later shared about how they had gone to several denominations, including his own (the Presbyterians) and Gordon’s (the Southern Baptists), but neither would support an interracial church in the South. Other church denominations were also approached, and again the response similar. It wasn’t until he came across the Congregational Christian Church (later merging into the UCC), who eagerly supported the interracial aspects of the ministry—that they were fully embraced by a denomination which seemed ahead of its time theologically and thus gave them the latitude to explore a new way of doing church altogether. Church of the Covenant is the only UCC church in Lynchburg. The nearest UCC church is in Charlottesville.

Another important aspect that Bev had learned along with his siblings was the importance of unity among the worldwide church: Ecumenism. Being ecumenical and working towards unity with all was critical to Bev’s vision of the new church in Lynchburg (just as it had been Gordon’s in DC), fulfilling Jesus’ prayer that “they all may be one” (John 17). To highlight this point, Bev and Irving had their dear friend Dr. Douglas Horton, member of the Worldwide Council of Churches & head of the Congregational Christian Church, preach their opening service, which was attended by more than 100 people (many had to sit outside and listen over a loud speaker).

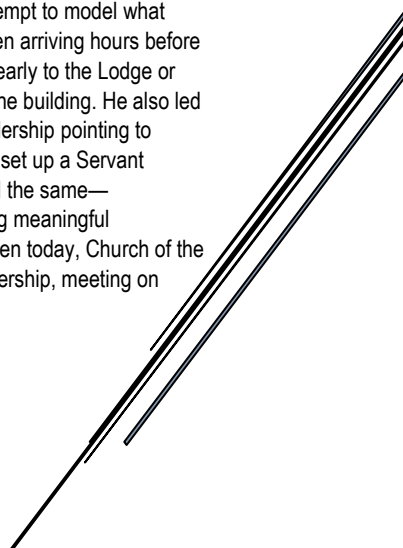
As seen on this Module’s cover, Bev believed strongly that, “It is the will of Christ that there be world-wide unity in his Church... Within this movement the barriers of national, racial, social, economic, or educational discrimination have no place.” What safeguards do you think Bev and Irving put in place to ensure consistent equity & ecumenism within the Church of the Covenant?

semester while in the city at Union, and were given special classes by the national minister in preparation for ordination—leading up to the launch of the new church as a Congregational Christian Church, to be called the Church of the Covenant, October 3, 1954. By then LCF had acquired several more acres of woods and buildings for the camp, including the Church House—which the new church would soon use as their place of worship (prior to that, the building had been called the LCF Chapel).

Despite a large turn-out at the opening service, the worship crowd eventually pared down to about 20-30 regular attenders and six charter Covenant Members (Bev & Jack Cosby, Irving & Ann Stubbs, Jim and Mary Jane Ould)—which is the same size (more or less) as it is today. A defining part of the church’s initial framework included the covenant, which mirrored in many ways that of The Church of the Saviour, and within it—spiritual disciplines (e.g., prayer, Scripture reading, tithing) to help in its facilitation. This was revolutionary at the time as most traditional churches did not require anything other than a “profession of faith” in order to be a member, but Bev longed to see a church much more committed to each other in order to facilitate tangible impact on the world around them—and to be honest with themselves when the commitment proved to be too much (hence the renewable annual commitment). *[Do Reflection 1c]*

BECOMING A SERVANT LEADER

Dr. Douglas Horton was instrumental in helping Church of the Covenant form in 1954. He was a mentor to both Bev and Irving. However, it was his humility and servant’s heart that captivated Bev and Irving most. After he had preached an impassioned sermon on “covenant and the church” at the first service, and after many of the attendees had long left, an exhausted Bev Cosby found his revered mentor (and guest of honor) happily doing dishes in the small kitchen of the Church House. This example of “servant leadership” stayed with Bev long after Dr. Horton had returned to New York. Bev would also attempt to model what servant leadership looked like for the rest of his days, often arriving hours before anyone else at camp to pick up fallen branches or arrive early to the Lodge or the Church House to make a pot of coffee and warm up the building. He also led the way in encouraging others to dig into this style of leadership pointing to Jesus as the true model. The Church of the Saviour later set up a Servant Leadership School, and Church of the Covenant soon did the same—encouraging its members to adopt this posture in pursuing meaningful leadership. Humility seemed to come naturally to Bev. Even today, Church of the Covenant has continued with the School of Servant Leadership, meeting on Sunday mornings before service.



Reflections

1d. Path of reason?

As a peaceful community, Church of the Covenant found itself at a crossroads with social justice and non-combative resistance for the sake of equal treatment for all; in other words: The church did not believe in violence nor militancy in its approach, and greatly valued quiet contemplation as a worshipful posture to God, but were not blind to the effects of inequality at the time and wrestled with how it could be both peaceful and helpful to the cause of justice. So, it organically established itself as provider of refuge for those most targeted by unjust laws, thus becoming a body of encouragement for the most marginalized and the face of compassion for ALL God's children at a time when it was desperately needed.

Individuals within the congregation would make more poignant acts of resistance to show solidarity against blatant injustice, which resulted in at least one member losing his job and another being jailed. However, in the grand scheme, these were small prices to pay for Christ-like justice. The congregation/camp also bore the brunt of community attacks and alienation because of their spirit of inclusivity in a time when racial segregation and bigotry was the norm. Members remember the emotional toll this period took on them as a church body in the 1960s, but none regret it.

The Potters' historical assessment attributes Lynchburg's relative "calm" during the 60s to both sides, that is—black and white civil/religious leaders, resigning to a sort of "conservatism" where they chose to "follow a path of reason and non-violence". Do you agree with their assessment? And do you feel this approach has still inadvertently left some inequities in place in Lynchburg to this day? If so, which ones? Explain:

[illegible]

Reflections

1e. The Lodge

Shortly after the “Patterson Six” were arrested, The Church of the Covenant saw even more reason to create a safe space for people, especially young people, to discuss those controversial topics that directly affect their community, such as segregation. There were a lot of questions about racial justice and faith and there wasn’t any place in Lynchburg where such conversations were safely possible, let alone encouraged. Church of the Covenant sought to change that with the birth of The Lodge of the Fishermen in January 1961.

In the Potters’ historical account of the Lodge in their book Lynchburg: The City Set on Seven Hills, they report, “The Lodge of the Fishermen on the grounds of the church became a gathering place for those who wished to transform their city. Hoping to close this conduit for change, conservative city employees forbade the staff of the Lodge to charge for food and beverages they served because they did not have a restaurant license. They could only suggest a price. Many came and refused to pay for their meal; many others came and willingly paid twice. The Lodge of the Fishermen survived.” And has for the many decades to follow been a place to explore life’s deepest issues through what Bev called “genuine communication.” Many of the local organizations that focus on marginalized people started while sitting around the table at the Lodge, like Lynchburg’s Diversity Center, the Haven, and Miriam’s House,—to name a few.

The Lodge has served as a safe space for unfettered spiritual conversations since its beginning, with no judgement. Often these conversations turn to issues of social justice. Do you think there is a natural connection between one’s spirituality and social justice? If so, how? This is now often called “public theology”—the intersection of faith and how it impacts the world around you. What does your personal intersection look like?

(named for Jesus’ first friends, the “fishermen” from Galilee—an authentic camaraderie they had hoped to replicate). The Lodge was modeled after the Potter’s House coffee shop in DC, started by the Church of the Saviour the year before—purported to be the first Christian coffee house of its kind in the country. The Lodge’s original mission was simple, yet profound in its scope: *“Here at the Lodge of the Fishermen, we too wish to communicate a truth to the world. It is our belief that by appealing culturally to humans’ higher intellect, we can make a lasting impression upon those with whom we make contact. We have no desire to preach, no desire to win members for any particular religious denomination. We do, however, seek to inspire people that they might become more aware of the beauty around them and thereby seek the best in themselves. By so doing, we believe a communicative link can be established between the church and humankind that will reinforce the frayed ties which bind them so loosely together in contemporary times.”* The church recognized the broken relationships that were indicative of their small city, and they thought having a safe place to explore oneself and relationship-reconciliation would push it ever so slightly onto a trajectory towards God’s love. However, some in the city felt threatened by this approach, and sought to have it closed down shortly after it had opened—but the Lodge kept its doors open anyway. Bev posed two key questions in a 1961 article, *“Is the Church and all its members willing to become involved in the social, political and economic problems of the world, particularly when the involvement may be costly? In what way and in what places does the Church find its rightful involvements?”* Within this context and biblical grounding, Bev had made a compelling argument for resisting systemic racism or intolerance overall, and the oppressive policies follow suit. *[Do Reflection 1e]*

After the overthrow of the Cuban government in 1961, fleeing Cuban refugees—in absolute desperation—found their way to the United States, and Lynchburg was a landing spot for some. Area churches worked to help, and Church of the Covenant joined in. One of the refugees, Elana Garcia (and her son Herbert), became a part of the church life at Church of the Covenant. She eventually married and had to move to Florida to be with her new husband. However, her young son Herbert (born from a previous marriage), was settled into Lynchburg life by then and she struggled with whether to move him also. Jack and Ann Cosby compassionately offered to take care of him, eventually adopting him—and Elana agreed.

As LCF’s Day Camp started the summer of 1961, a doctor friend of Bev’s (a man of color) asked if he could enroll his children. Bev said,

Reflections

1f. The summer of '61

For some nowadays it is hard to imagine an activity as innocent as swimming in a mixed-race setting to be so contentious and taboo, but pre-1961 in the South (when it came to a multiracial population), it unfortunately was. Back then most whites could not imagine themselves swimming with nonwhites. As for many at that time, swimming was somehow seen to be a very intimate activity, sharing the water together, with so much exposed skin, many whites feared close proximity to people of color (generational racist fear had seen to that). This level of prejudice, fueled by fear and coupled with systemic control of an entire race of people (Jim Crow laws/policies), many white families were incensed when they discovered black children were at the LCF Day camp in 1961.

This, in large part, explained the immediate reaction some white parents had in pulling their children out of the camp that summer. Joe Nelson, professor of religion at Lynchburg College and member of Church of the Covenant at the time, reflected on the costs of social justice in the 60's, "Within a few minutes cars were rolling up the driveway, and white parents began pulling their children out. In the end, there were just the two black kids and five white kids. Two of those kids were mine, and they were later cursed and beaten for being there." There was indeed a generational shift in ideology happening in the neighborhood and a social price to pay. Dick Harris Sr. (neighbor to the Cosby's) was "initially opposed to his grandson Rich attending Camp Kum-Ba-Yah... [that summer], but acquiesced to the desire of his son and daughter-in-law, Dick Jr. and Dulcie Harris. Rich Harris was one of the first few white campers that year."

How many times do we refuse to do the right thing because the cost is deemed too great? Whether bodily or socially harmful, the costs of social justice can be heavy. Share your thoughts:

"Of course!" As the doctor dropped off his children in the morning of the first day of camp, Bev and the staff thought nothing strange about it (they had always thought it to be an integrated camp), but word would get out to the parents somehow, and many returned to pull their children out of the camp. Only a few white children remained by the end of the day, largely those from more "liberal families". To add to the quickly changing climate shortly after, the city was forced to integrate the public swimming pools—which led to the closing of all city pools (including the one pool for blacks—Jefferson) because of the white pushback. While wealthier white families could still enjoy the luxury of private pools at homes or the local country clubs, most black families and poor whites had nowhere to swim but the river and creeks (the river claiming the life of at least one child of color that summer). In a bold move, Bev Cosby offered the campus pools to the public, making them open to both black and white non-campers. This courageous decision was graciously received by the black community. Then LCF director David Pollitt remembers this time fondly, *"As the summer moved on, the word spread that black as well as white children could swim in the LCF swimming pool... On that [first Fourth of July] afternoon, 95% of swimmers were black children. A white American Baptist minister and his wife joined Bev and my family together with a few other white families to integrate the pool...resulting in some nasty phone calls as well as opportunities to discuss race relationships in the city."* This defiant act on the part of LCF and Church of the Covenant to counter white supremacy laws and policies pushed their cause to the forefront of debate—evolving from the original question posed by Bev to the "Monday Night Group" more than a decade earlier, "Where will the children play?"—this faith community had to confront a more urgent one, "Where will ALL God's children be accepted and loved?" [Do Reflection 1f]

Church of the Covenant, with its progressive stances on race and economic justice, found itself at the receiving end of name-calling such as "n-lovers" and "commies" and this even by the "church-going" folks of Lynchburg. At various times hostilities escalated, even to include instances of Molotov cocktails being thrown onto the church/camp property. However, Bev and his small church would not be deterred, doubling down on the Gospel as they knew it to be, to bring "good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed." Case in point, seeking to share with his 7th grade public school class the value of international peace, Church member John Withrow invited an expert on US-Cuba relations to speak to the class; but because this guest had participated in the Canada-to-Guatemala Bay Peace

Movement, there was a public outcry—wanting to have John removed from the school. Unfortunately, they were successful.

In January of 1962, the first two students of color enrolled in the then white-only E. C. Glass High School. To encourage the students and help the city move forward with more formal integration, a young black preacher from Georgia paid a historic visit. The Church of the Covenant's Lodge would play an important part in March, 1962 as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. came to Lynchburg. As he visited with local black leaders, the famous poet Anne Spencer, and spent time encouraging the two brave students who had courageously stepped over the racial line of segregation—the Church of the Covenant was to play its part. In hopes of helping the trend of integration move forward, Dr. King would speak at E. C. Glass High School, to an inter-racial audience about "The American Dream." Before he gave his speech, however, on the evening of March 27, 1962, Dr. King gathered for a meal with prominent leaders at The Lodge of the Fishermen. The Lodge was one of only two places where blacks and whites could eat together at the time (the other place was the local hospital cafeteria). Because of the black ministerial association's relationship with Bev, and the privacy the location afforded them, they chose to dine at the Lodge—undisturbed by segregationists or the press. Bev, David Pollitt, and Church of the Covenant member Larry Farmer were among those who served Dr. King that afternoon, and were simply excited to honor him with a meal—along with the spirit of friendship and openness of communication for which the Lodge was already known. The Lodge of the Fishermen had truly become the refuge Bev had hoped it would be known for.

Nearly a year after his visit Martin Luther King, Jr. would write from the Birmingham jail a poignant critique of "well-meaning" white Christians, *"First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: 'I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action'; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a 'more convenient season.' Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm*

Reflections

1g. Martin Luther King Jr

At E. C. Glass High School, Dr. King sought to paint a picture of what the "American Dream" could be with a truly integrated South. He encouraged activists not to stop. He said (1962):

"Indeed, slavery and segregation have always been strange paradoxes in a nation founded on the principles that all men are created equal. There is something tragically wrong with a nation that is spending billions of dollars and is making speedy plans to get a man on the moon and has no plans to put a Negro in the state legislature of Virginia. But now, more than ever before, America is challenged to make this dream a reality. For the shape of the world of today does not afford us the luxury of an anemic democracy. And the price that our nation must pay for the continued oppression of the Negro is a price of its own destruction. We must come to see now that the hour is late. The clock of destiny is ticking out, and we must act now before it is too late. I know that there are people telling us to slow up. They are telling us that all over the South. And sometimes, governmental officials tell us to cool off. But we must say in patience and in firm terms that we can't afford to cool off. The fact is that we have been cooling off too long and if we keep cooling off we will end up in the deep freeze. Yes, they are saying that we must adopt a policy of moderation, and certainly if moderation means moving on toward the goal of justice with wise restraint and calm reasonableness, then moderation is a great virtue which all men of goodwill must seek to achieve during this tense period of transition. But if moderation means slowing up in the move of justice and capitulating to the undemocratic practices of the guardians of the deadening status quo, then moderation is a tragic vice, which all men of goodwill must condemn. We can't afford to slow up. We love America too much to slow up... — whether we be Negro or white — those of us who are working all across the nation to make the American Dream a reality are engaged in the most significant work of this age for we are seeking to save the souls of the United States of America."

What are your thoughts regarding Dr. King's and Bev's (from his 1964 sermon) views on "saving souls"? How is this different than most people's views? And how do you personally view it?

acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection." Sixteen months later, King would lead The March on Washington—demanding action for low employment and continued systemic racism. Members of the Church of the Saviour would be there. Nineteen months after that, Dr. King would march arm-in-arm with whites over the bridge in Selma, Alabama, where they would face down bigoted "peace" officers together (answering Dr. King's call, John Withrow from Church of the Covenant and Gordon Cosby from DC would be marching along with them). During these years, Bev took note of Dr. King's referendum on the "Christian Church," and sought (like Gordon) to help forge its path towards true social justice.

Later in the 1960's, Church of the Covenant could feel the tension tightening between systemic racism and racial justice, especially in the wider community, and Bev preached that a Christian's place in this struggle is not to be one of indifference. On October 11, 1964, Bev—in his sermon titled "The Scandal of Becoming a Reconciler"—shared from the pulpit, *"Scores of people now, both Negro and white, are standing on the line between the white community and the black community trying to mediate this awful crisis. We will never know who most of them are. They are participating in the pain and suffering of broken relationships. I know of some in our Lynchburg community who are thought cowardly by one segment of the community because their stand is not bold enough, and who are thought radical by the other segment of the community because their stand is too bold. There is nothing but loneliness and a feeling of guilt and dishonor for these people. You say, 'I didn't know this is what Christianity was about. I thought it had to do with saving souls and helping people find new life.' Well, it does. This is what you mean by 'saving souls': Closing the gap between persons and persons, persons and God—until there is wholeness and unity in our relationships. This is what the Bible means when it says that 'Christ is a stone that will make men stumble and a rock that will make them fall.' Some of us will trip over this one: Community."* Bev's answer to Dr. King's Letter from the Birmingham jail was a commitment not to be on the sidelines, but to stand in the gap for social equity and racial justice; though often a painful place to be, it is by definition the most "Christian" place to be. *[Do Reflection 1g]*

STANDING IN THE GAP TOGETHER

Rabbi Dr. Ephraim Fischhoff from Agudath Sholom, the local synagogue, encouraged Bev and the Church of the Covenant community when he spoke there on November 14, 1965. From the pulpit, Dr. Fischhoff highlighted Bev's making "reference to a divided and broken world," and then drawing a parallel with Noah, said, *"[b]ut the world, divided as it was and broken as it was, was not completely without hope, nor is it today... There was a tiny minority of goodness left in an evil world... Wherever we turn in the world at whatever point in history, we find a broken world filled with violence, with only the occasional Noah."* Dr. Fischhoff encouraged the church community to continue to stand in the gap where racism and bigotry dominate civil discourse. Dr. Fischhoff then offered a final thought to combat the alienation this small church might feel (much like Noah): *"But in every context, somewhere there has been another; there has been someone who has foreseen the evil. There is someone who has predicted its inevitability; there is someone who has sought with all the power of his voice and his life to awaken his fellowmen to the danger. There is one for whom the world was saved from destruction, and, when the destruction has subsided, has slowly and painfully, but with infinite hope begun the task of reconciliation and reconstruction."* These words culminated into a message of hope and solidarity in the most alienating of times for this faith community. It was encouraging to know that the Jewish community was with them in both body and spirit.

CHAPTER 3

Bev continued offering leadership to the LCF Day Camp as its summer director for the next few decades, while pastoring Church of the Covenant and serving on the board of LCF. Another ministerial milestone was to happen in 1966, when Bev, in an ecumenical effort, partnered with Doug Oldenburg of Covenant Presbyterian Church, James Pannell of Jackson Street Methodist Church, and Alex Robertson of St. Paul's Episcopal Church—together creating a ministry focused specifically on the downtown area residents—largely people of color (using their building on 412 Madison Street). Their ministries included helping kids with after-school tutoring, a children's day camp during the summer, and sewing classes. The ministry was called the Kum Ba Yah Association, part of which would later form the Interfaith Outreach Association. The summer day camp downtown took on the name Camp Kum Ba Yah (a popular song at the time), which would then also become the LCF Day Camp name when the two eventually merged (combining, to use the 4415 Boonsboro campus in later years). Both organizations would become independent from LCF in 1982. However, earlier in 1966, the oldest of the Cosby brothers, PG, became the second fulltime director of LCF. And in answer to President Johnson's "War on Poverty" and the need seen by the Kum Ba Yah Association's leaders in the downtown area, PG and Bev went to D.C. to learn more about public housing programs and how LCF could help. Upon their return, LCF began acquiring properties to repurpose as suitable multi-family dwellings. This would become LCF's focus from then on, attempting to curb substandard housing and living conditions for the city's most vulnerable. Thus, creating notable apartment complexes such as Shalom Apartments, Lynchburg High Apartments, and the Frank Roane Apartments (among others).

Two months before Dr. King would be assassinated in Memphis in 1968, Bev reminded the Church of the Covenant that we are compelled to be in the business of tearing down walls of inequity and division: “[W]e’re concerned with disruption and fragmentation, with any dehumanizing process which thwarts a man’s potential and which robs him of his personhood... [W]here such wholeness is threatened and denied, that is the point where the problem comes to focus... Genuine brotherhood involves not only getting the racial barriers down, but all sorts of human barriers, the multitude of separations which dehumanize us—including national, political,

Reflections

1h. The “War on Poverty”

On January 8, 1964, President Johnson launched what would be known as the “War on Poverty”, a set of policies aimed at bridging racial and economic disparity in the country. While some strides were made, by 1968, the poverty rate was still at a high 13 percent—and double that number among communities of color. Surprisingly, these statistics have not changed much as of 2018. However, some would declare that the “War on Poverty” is over.

In Dr. King's final Sunday sermon, he said, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal—that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. That among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But if a man doesn't have a job or an income, he has neither life nor liberty nor the possibility for the pursuit of happiness. He merely exists... We are coming to ask America to... call attention to the gulf between promise and fulfillment; to make the invisible visible." Bev spoke a few weeks earlier with a similar observation, "Genuine brotherhood involves not only getting the racial barriers down, but all sorts of human barriers, the multitude of separations which dehumanize us..." By then, he and Church of the Covenant members, as well as a plethora of partners were in full swing with LCF to see that housing and other barriers were being toppled in Lynchburg. Though the work has been energizing and has had successes over the years, the poverty rate in Lynchburg (as of 2018) is still nearly 24%.

Bev said our “function” is to be reconcilers, to bridge the “fragmentation,” which causes dehumanization. How do you think the Church of the Covenant has attempted to do this over the years? Has it been successful or not, and in what ways? Also, do you feel the “War on Poverty” is over—and where do you think we go from here?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines, typical of notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

economic, social, religious, cultural, education and personal barriers. There was never a deeper cleavage in human history than that between Jew and Gentile in the first century—with racial, national and religious and political dimensions—and this the disruption which came into focus in the new Testament times, and it is the dividing wall of hostility which Christ made it clear he would break down: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, Barbarian or Scythian, male nor female, for all are one in Christ Jesus.’ Now as committed Christians we need to know what kind of people we are to be and what it is that we are to do in the midst of the disruptions. We need to be aware of what our function is... including the racial revolution in which we are presently involved. The New Testament word is a very hard word. It is ‘reconciliation.’ It is the essence of Christian faith.” As LCF moved forward in its focus to ease the most fragmented parts of the city with much-needed housing, Church of the Covenant also found its place in mobilizing the faithful to stand in the gap during some of the city’s most challenging times, building a bridge of love between the black and white communities. *[Do Reflection 1h]*

In 1973 Lynchburg Christian Fellowship changed its name to Lynchburg Covenant Fellowship in order to formally recognize its partnerships which included members of the local Jewish community, taking a more interfaith approach moving forward. And as the church transitioned into the 70’s, Bev continued his sermons on integration and reconciliation as a fundamental mission for Christians specifically, but also for humans in general. He also looked to expand how his own faith community was to care for people suffering along the economic/racial barriers that were (and are still) in place in Lynchburg. One day in 1975, during a particularly cold January morning he got a call from Mrs. Elliott—who lived downtown on 7th Street. They were out of wood for their only source of heat, their small wood stove. Bev jumped into action, enlisting others to help gather all the downed wood they could find on the church/camp property. The Elliott’s were grateful. The next day Bev recruited more help as other neighbors shared their stories of cold nights. By the end of the winter, volunteers were taking wood regularly to six other families as well the Elliott’s (eventually the ministry would provide wood for over 350 homes each winter). LCF and Church of the Covenant partnered together, along with District 5 of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), over the next few years in what would be known as the Wood Ministry.

Also, a new ministry called City Gate, led by Rev. Herb Moore in 1973 (Herb was also the 3rd fulltime director of LCF starting in 1976), served as the coordinating entity for much of the work at the Wood Ministry; City Gate also would play a pivotal role in various citywide initiatives coordinated with city hall and various nonprofit organizations, all in the hopes of closing the economic and resource gaps throughout the city. They catalyzed the establishment of Central Virginia Tomorrow, which *“brought together people from all sectors of the community. In a series of workshops and dialogue meetings, diverse people met together to share their feelings, insights, visions and hopes for a better community”* (from *The LCF Story: 1950-1990*). But like Bev preached from the pulpit, being a “reconciler” isn’t easy—though necessary. In one of the dialogue sessions, a woman of color who had worked for a white man for much of her life was able to look him in the eye and confess she felt she had been paid “slave wages.” Such honesty was unthinkable just a short decade before. However, thanks to the leadership of Bev and Church of the Covenant, LCF, City Gate, and others—honesty was finally finding its way into public discourse. Bev knew that true reconciliation could not exist without both honesty and humility. On September 14, 1980, he challenged his parishioners with this: *“Reconciliation means that instead of having to be on the right side of every issue, we may be willing to sacrifice our rightness to be the bridge across which people can get to each other and touch one another and build some semblance of*

Reflections

community.” Even though some would criticize Bev’s goal to be too lofty or unattainable, for Bev and his church—there was no other choice. Case in point, while gathering in the then rubble filled basement of the old Lynchburg High School (before it had been converted into apartments—and it still seemed like an impossible task!), Bev reflected (1979), *“the sustained and sacrificial commitments of this Church of the Covenant community over the years has been and will continue to be integral to this mission and the life it will bring to the people of this city. And all who will gather... on the roof [of this building] over the future years to laugh and weep and pray and dream over the city, and to build community among both residents and city dwellers. Let it be our hope that life generated on this highest hill in the city will long be a symbol of the hope that God loves the city, cares for its people, and gives of himself to make life new for all of us.”* This dream has been and continues to be the essence of the Church of the Covenant and its larger community of kindred hearts in and around Lynchburg. Often times, Church of the Covenant’s members obliviously ignored the line between their ministries and LCF’s, so much so, that it was sometimes difficult to tell if a project had its start in LCF or in the Church of the Covenant. For many, though, it really didn’t matter. The work was the important part, not which organization was its originator.

New Missions

Church of the Covenant frequently found itself growing great works of compassionate ministry through its congregants, even if the church wasn’t labeled as the “official” sponsor. The church has been a catalyst or natural supporter of many great missions without being its leader *per se*. Some works just came out of the hearts of the members themselves. One example was after Kevin and Gayle Campbell became a part of the Church of the Covenant in 1981. Kevin first founded Citizens for a Future World, which changed its name in 1984 to The Lynchburg Peace Education Center—dedicated to the mission of educating the public regarding peace issues. This group still meets at the Lodge of the Fishermen to this day. Kevin later founded Lynchburg’s Habitat for Humanity, building over 300 homes in Lynchburg (the most in any single city at that time). These are simply two examples of the many community-focused initiatives growing themselves organically out from the roots of this special faith community. Other examples from this decade of innovative need-based ministries included New Land Jobs, a job program created out of the need discovered while working in the Wood Ministry—helping with job counseling and placement; there was a

1i. Removing Barriers

In 1983, LCF decided to tackle generational poverty by offering accessible home-ownership to low-income working-class residents, those who would otherwise not qualify due to a number of reasons (i.e. credit history, residual redlining, down-payment/income requirements, etc.).

Dr. John Abell of Randolph College explains the residual effects of local redlining in his article “Redlining in Lynchburg” (4/8/18 News & Advance): “Imagine being one of the residents living in a ‘D’ rated neighborhood back in 1937, wondering about your life possibilities. You probably aren’t aware that the government has declared your neighborhood to be ‘hazardous.’ However, you are feeling the effects of that decision. You can’t get a loan. You are not welcome to move to a better neighborhood. You’re stuck. Suppose you’re living in one of those same neighborhoods today. You may have accumulated very little wealth. You’re likely among those without a bachelor’s degree. So the path ahead for you and your family is uncertain. You look to the city hoping something good might come from the Poverty to Progress initiative. Or, you look to the federal government, but you discover that HUD has removed the words ‘inclusive’ and ‘free from discrimination’ from its mission statement.” Needless to say, the barriers are real, and these redlined areas are mostly communities of color.

So, LCF partnered with the Enterprise Foundation, Lynchburg Redevelopment & Housing Authority, L.G. Flint Construction Company, Crestar Bank, and Edmunds & Williams Law firm—to develop 20 three-bedroom homes with easy qualify, low or no interest loans—so families didn’t pay more than \$270/mo.

Dr. Abell’s article laid out how communities of color were redlined as “hazardous” in 1937, and how this blocked access for residents to loans, grants, and other helps that white neighborhoods directly benefited from. How can equity be established even after generations of inequity have been thrust upon residents? How can some form of reparations be effectively utilized to help?

need for more entry level jobs in Lynchburg. This new effort was initially led by member Barbara Holdren (New Land Jobs), which later created New Land Industries, resulting in helpful experience-based job training and the creation of a small factory. Another need-based initiative for the city was led by member Vince Sawyer; in 1988, he and Bev (and others), responding to New Land Jobs' participants who did not have stable housing, launched New Land Samaritan Inns to combat homelessness. Seeing the intersectionality between homelessness and substance abuse, in 1992 they launched The Gateway—a transitional-residency program for homeless men housed at the newly renovated, former Salvation Army building downtown. Vince, Bev, and others would later form a vision for long-term supportive housing for men and women in recovery through the Haven Mission Group (formed in 1998), and this vision would later involve to include adding a one-year peer-based recovery program as well. They hired their first staff member, project director Niles Comer (former member of Church of the Saviour in DC) in 2018, to formally establish this program in Lynchburg. *[Do Reflection 1i]*

In the 1990's Bev was on a roll with honing in on some of Lynchburg's most marginalized. He and others in the community had a vision for a refuge for women and children who were homeless. So in 1993, again born out of New Land Samaritan Inns, Miriam's House was formed—which today helps nearly 40% of the city's homeless find transitional housing. Elizabeth Forsyth would serve as benefactor for both Miriam's House and Elizabeth's Early Learning Center, which was started next-door in 1997. The latter mission has worked hard to curb the lack of early childhood education and daycare in the city by taking in about 170 children each year. These ministries naturally resonated with Bev and Jack's initial draw to work with the neighborhood children just after World War II. Now, it had expanded to include, not just the neighborhood and not just downtown (as Camp Kum Ba Yah and Interfaith Outreach had both done), but now included the city's most vulnerable children throughout the Lynchburg area.

Will and Dolly Cardwell were with the church nearly from its start. Reflecting on the church's essence, Dolly said, *"Church of the Covenant was not built on popular so-called successful strategies. God worked through Bev to help us, to some degree at least, choose the narrow way. Bev was most of all courageous and uncompromising on the issues of peace, equality and justice. His vision of the church was to primarily side with the last, the least and the lost, as did Jesus. This was a difficult way for many of us, but God called a sufficient number of people to either readily embrace this path, or at least to hang in and work through some of the agonies involved when rough waters were encountered, so that the community abides today (April 27, 2003)." Bev challenged this small faith community to not only search God within (the inward journey) but to search God without (the outward journey). And Bev even taught if a Christian's mission is to find and follow Jesus, then they must look to the "least of these," because that is where Jesus is: "Often the poor become the objects of our charity. We often do it for them, thinking in turn God is going to do something for us. They are objects of our efforts in generosity. We think and act from what is above and move to what is below. We are always moving from us to them, but this is not how Jesus intended it to be. Jesus does not tell us [that] those of us who have it are to be the benefactors of those who do not have it. Jesus is telling us something quite different. It is difficult to get a hold of but if we can ever grasp it, it will mean the most significant shift we can probably ever make in our lifetime—in our thinking and in our mode of operating in this world. We may not be able to grasp it today. But perhaps some of us can begin working with it until in time it becomes clearer and then the truth will break in upon us one day—that the people are not first the objects of our charity, but are already the subjects of a messianic kingdom of love. That means simply that Christ is hidden in the world, in the hungry, in the thirsty, the alien, the naked, the sick, and imprisoned. And because of our*

“THANK YOU, JESUS!”

as where it was
t, it was as if they
d resources and
one another in the
one of the coldest
d may have been
od that seemed to
the Creator, all

[illegible]

CHAPTER 4

A Period of Renewal and Growth

Bev died suddenly from a heart attack on Monday, January 21, 2002; it happened to be Martin Luther King Day. His oldest brother and a friend found him in a kneeling posture at his bedside—as if in prayer. He had never married. The Church of the Covenant was his progeny, its congregants and supporters his closest family. A week before his passing, Bev shared from the pulpit in his final sermon, *“Every man at the Gateway, every woman at Miriam’s House, every child at Elizabeth Early Learning Center... every inmate in every prison is potential wrapped in human flesh and bone. I want my vision to be able to see that and to respond to that potential, and to ask God how I can call it forth and be a small part of its happening—by providing in my person the environment (i.e. soil, water, light) in which it can grow.”* Bev did all of these things, and even towards the end of his life, he was humble enough not to notice. Bev had left a unique legacy to be followed, and Church of the Covenant spent much time in prayer and discernment in the month’s following his passing in order to envision what this next chapter might look like—and then, within time, their future would come into focus.

Not long after (2003), David Edwards answered the call to be Church of the Covenant’s next pastor. Along with his wife Kaye, David had been a familiar presence to the community for decades. For several years he had pastored the much larger—but certainly kindred hearted church one mile down the road—First Christian Church of Lynchburg. Kaye was still on staff with the national office for the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ denomination, working specifically on children’s curriculum and ministry. Since the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ (DoC) had maintained a full communion partnership with the United Church of Christ (UCC) since the early 1980’s, the church membership thought it natural to seek to enhance Church of the Covenant’s denominational affiliation to include the DoC as well—a natural fit. This resulted in Church of the Covenant being dually aligned officially, DoC and UCC, in 2004. David and Kaye had brought a key set of gifts and talents to the community that would usher in a new era for Church of the Covenant.

David seemed to take up right where Bev had left off—especially in regards to the spiritual disciplines, which had been the foundation of the Church of the Covenant from its start. With a keen focus on renewal, David led the congregation to reengage their spiritual disciplines once again—to look at the inward journey as something not to be neglected, along with the outward journey as its natural byproduct. In one of David’s earliest sermons after taking the helm (September 14, 2003), he challenged the congregation to look deeper than just the inward/outward expressions, and to discover a deeper essence within oneself that can be projected outward: *“Joy is at the heart of Christian faith and life. Not a joy that ignores evil or avoids looking at the suffering of the world. But a joy that comes from a deeper place, where we know our relatedness to all creation, where we know that our lives are rooted in what is eternal... Without this joy in us, individually and together as Christ’s community, there is something essential missing. We may do great things. We may speak great truth. We may excel in spiritual practices. But if we are not touching the wellspring of joy that comes from God’s creating, sustaining,*

With the turn of the century, there also came a renewed vision of reaching out and helping Lynchburg's most marginalized. 2003 would be a year of change but also a year of re-focus and renewal. The Jubilate Mission Group (which had been meeting since 1995) were able to finally see their first L'Arche Home (Blue Ridge Mountains) opened in Lynchburg—a home focused on a loving, caring, family environment for adults needing assistance. A second home would be opened two years later. Additionally, The Festival Center (located at 501 Madison St.) was started from its Mission Group in 2003 as well; the center would focus on building genuine community across racial and socio-economic boundaries—especially focusing on children, providing educational help and additional services for nearly seven years. 2003 would also be the year that the church would add clarity to its mission as an inclusive community by formally establishing Church of the Covenant to be “Open and Affirming” to all sexual orientations, identities, and expressions. This

[illegible]

would alert the wider community that Church of the Covenant truly accepts all God's children—that is, all people. *[Do Reflection 1k]*

In 2005, Phil Boyce, the then Program Director and later Executive Director of Camp Kum-Ba-Yah, created an opportunity for dialogue and further inclusivity. As a Zen Buddhist, he and David regularly discussed the intersectionality of their faiths, recognizing the common ground found in each person's unique faith journey. Later in 2006, David highlighted this intersectional dialogue of faiths when he shared the following, *"Back in the summer Phil Boyce and I were talking about how some people come here to be involved in the camp or the church, and they get hooked. They move on to what Buddhists call 'right livelihood,' compassionate work that serves people and the earth. It is what Jesus understood as eternal life discovered as we live the life of commitment and faithfulness* (October 15)." This natural synergy between David and Phil would eventually give life to a new Mission Group that would then create the Chrysalis Interfaith Retreat Center the following year. Phil would serve as its first part-time Director, and Chrysalis would become an intentional retreat space (utilizing its cottage and the bedrooms at the Church House) for anyone seeking a place for rest, meditation, and spiritual renewal—regardless of their faith tradition. David said, *"The Chrysalis Mission Group seeks to foster a spirit of interfaith respect and learning. Understanding of and respect for spiritual traditions and practices other than our own contribute richly to the deepening of our own faith and practice. Though there are important differences among various religious traditions, there are also essential commonalities in terms of what it means to live as human beings."* This crucial step for both David and the church would help strengthen its mission to the larger community by embracing the spiritual journeys born out of different faith traditions—culminating in a greater commitment to diversity and inclusivity, all within a context of a distinctly Christian community.

Working in concert with her husband, Kaye Edwards brought her talents and gifts to the community in full force. Exercising her expertise in children's education, in 2005 Kaye introduced Church of the Covenant to a program that had already been housed within their national denomination (DoC) called Children Worship & Wonder. This unique program takes a Montessori approach to children's learning, accepting children as autonomous beings who already know God—and so therefore encouraging the teacher to equip students with tools to simply deepen, express, and explore that relationship further. In this format, the adults create the space and provide helpful tools, but the onus for growth squares itself naturally onto the children themselves. This empowerment model raises children to their natural state of "equal" within the power dynamic of teacher-student in a sphere of mutual learning; knowledge in this way is not exclusively didactic nor a tool for leverage or control. As David so eloquently stated, "We need children in our lives because they know the way to the kingdom of God." So it is, we too must learn from our children. Born out of this love for children and wanting to see greater connection with the nature that surrounds the campus community, the Children Outdoors Mission Group was formed in 2011—which eventually culminated in the establishment of Kinder Woods, a natural two acre play space for preschoolers to freely roam and explore God's creation uninhibited, leaving parents worry-free thanks to the gentle fence that surrounds the parcel.

In the meantime, David had brought an added element to the pastoral leadership role: Worship. David, an accomplished musician and song writer, naturally enhanced the church's worship experience—incorporating much of his original worship music into the life of the church. As fate has it, while a young college student in 1960's Lynchburg, David had occasionally performed at The Lodge of the Fishermen—and now here he was again, utilizing his musical talent as part of a renewal of the church's journey in

authentic worship. David collaborated with other musicians, composing heartfelt worship songs and responsive readings. With the help of fellow musician/songwriter and church member Thom Field, David compiled a songbook of original music called “Songs for the Journey” in 2009—which has been a worship staple at Church of the Covenant ever since, bringing with it wave after wave of authenticity in personal reflection and worship for the corporate body; this book has been the source of spiritual renewal and restoration for many over the past decade, and will undoubtedly continue to be so for many more in the decades to come.

Along with these tools for unabashed renewal in worship, David also brought an articulation of the new contemplative model to more accurately describe life in this unique Christian community, rooting it further in spiritual practice by teaching what silence in contemplative prayer looks like—exploring together the teachings of Thomas Keating, Richard Rohr and others. David worked with congregants to reassess their inward journey and committed to see new depths discovered. Preaching this from the pulpit (November 30, 2008), he said: *“[T]he inward journey. This is an appointment we make with ourselves and God each day, and keep it faithfully. We sit quietly, let our thoughts and feelings settle. We listen inwardly to our own lives and to God. We grow in our capacity to look deeply into and gain compassionate understanding of ourselves, especially the parts of us we fear or hate. We read scripture and other writings that nourish awareness of life, of God. We pray for others and ourselves, for the particular needs we have, but also never forgetting to be grateful. When we begin this kind of daily practice, keeping faithful with it over time, we discover the joy of making that journey toward God who has drawn near to us. We grow in our understanding of what it means to wake up.”* Silence had always been a major part of worship at Church of the Covenant. However, now, David had helped in the formalizing of what had become known as centered/centering prayer in the life of the church community. In sync with Church of the Saviour’s own spiritual journey, utilizing day-long silent retreats at their retreat center (Day Spring) in Maryland, Church of the Covenant had once again begun frequent day-long silent retreats on their campus as well. David also led the church to adopt a weekly time of contemplative prayer—encouraging congregants to make it part of their spiritual disciplines also.

Freshly invigorated with renewed worship and spiritual practice, Church of the Covenant’s Lodge of the Fishermen ministry would soon find itself being revived as well. Having waned considerably by the start of the new century, The Lodge was barely limping along when David and Kaye arrived. However, by 2011—there was new talk of its revival, and a renewed sense of its necessity once again. Therefore, the New Lodge Mission Group was formed. This group, which initially consisted only of Kaye Edwards and Mike Buhler, would eventually gain traction as they faithfully prayed and sought how to repurpose the once vibrant life of The Lodge, which meant so much to so many over the years. Gaining additional helpers, Kaye and Mike restarted The Lodge as Common Grounds Café in 2014—opening once a week (Friday mornings) for breakfast, with much attention given to being child-welcoming, and tasked with gifting a large portion of the donations to a different local children’s organization each month. This ministry has been highly successful. The New Lodge Mission Group hopes to expand its focus to be able to utilize The Lodge in other ways as well.

By the summer of 2015, David and Kaye were feeling strongly drawn to commit their retirement years to the Sisters of Loretto Community in Kentucky, giving David space to focus his next chapter of life on music and children (two profound sources of joy for him and Kaye). Therefore, they announced their intentions to retire formally from pastoral ministry at the start of 2016—after thirteen amazing years of

spiritual re-grounding, journey re-tooling, and missional directing within the Church of the Covenant community. David and Kaye had also championed the cause for the church buying (from LCF) the historic Cosby homestead after PG Cosby had moved out and into a retirement home. *Pantops* became part of the campus once again, undergoing extensive renovations in 2010; *Pantops*, whose basement is where it all started, would now make an incredible parsonage, which David and Kaye thoroughly enjoyed during their last few years at the church. Unfortunately, just a little over three years after moving to Indiana David passed away from cancer (March 4, 2019).

A New Chapter

Dan and Ruth Harrison, former Baptists, and later active in the UCC, found Church of the Covenant almost by chance. Dan was pastoring a restarted UCC church in Southwest Virginia’s Appalachia region (Fancy Gap, VA) and both he and his wife had started a bilingual church in Galax, VA—and were not planning to move away anytime soon. However, when passing through Lynchburg on a business trip in the late spring of 2017, this would all change. Dan had been bi-vocational nearly all of his twenty years in ministry, and he had made it a practice while out on business to stop in and visit any UCC church relatively near his own, especially in the more remote parts of Virginia—as there are very few such churches in the region. When he read on Church of the Covenant’s website that they had an “interfaith retreat center” on their grounds, he was convinced that he must make contact immediately—for him, a church that recognizes and respects the interfaith nature of God is a major milestone that many churches have yet to experience. Of course, this was only a small part of the church’s unfolding history—as he would soon learn. So, in the early summer of 2017, as opportunity would have it, Dan stopped in on his way to a business meeting in Farmville. He was immediately taken in by the campus—the trees, brick buildings, and gardens. However, he was confused as to which building to enter. By chance, the women’s book club was meeting at The Lodge that day, and fortunately Dolly Cardwell immediately responded by walking out onto the patio to help this young man who appeared utterly bewildered. They spent the next hour or two exchanging stories and becoming acquainted with each other. Dan was awe-struck at the story she told—how this church had weathered so much and yet had produced so much with so little. Both parties believing it a potentially divine appointment; much conversation and prayer were quick to follow—and by the end of the summer Dan and his family (wife and four children) would move to Lynchburg, sparking a new chapter for both the Church of the Covenant and the Harrison’s. *[Do Reflection 1I]*

Reflections

1I. Making history

Now it’s your turn. You’ve read the story of the Church of the Covenant. You’ve wrestled with intersections of faith and social justice. You’ve reflected on the teachings of the leaders that courageously shaped this community of faith, and have grasped the essence of its mission. And as you begin to see where you fit on this momentous timeline of spiritual awakenings—it is your turn to reflect once more. Read what Gordon Cosby (2004) said about the “authentic church”:

“God’s vision for the church doesn’t change, but the structures of the church must change to speak that vision in authentic ways to each new era. We must be ready at all times to transcend all our loyalties to religious traditions in order to find the new ways that will reach people now. No one knows what any church, genuinely seeking to be Christ’s body on behalf of the world, should look like. There is no single right way, only the willingness to move into the new, not knowing with certainty where we are going but with the Holy Spirit’s companionship going anyway. One thing is clear: all of us are desperate for meaningful existence. We are desperate for a place of belonging and trust, desperate for a life free of addiction and compulsion, desperate for meaningful work and a way to contribute to society with dignity, desperate to know people who care. Does the church have a message worth hearing when we feel desperate? If we have nothing to say in the presence of our desperation, we have nothing to say at all. In saying yes to the church’s story, we say no to the world’s story of power and violence and greed. Saying yes to the church’s story doesn’t end our addiction to the world, but it ends our denial. And once we move out of denial, God is set loose in us in a way that wasn’t possible before. We are freed at last to become the gift of love that is our deepest nature, who we truly are. When we enter the authentic church, we enter a recovering community rooted in honesty and accountability whose healing is found in reaching out to help heal the world.”

Which parts spoke to you most from Church of the Covenant’s story? Why? Where do you see yourself on this evolving timeline? And what can this church do to embrace authenticity more?
