

# Evergreen Notes

## Exploring Micah



By Rev. Doug Avilesbernal

Last month we explored Justice as Micah 6:8 asks. However, it occurs to me that we should spend some time discovering the context of this one verse most of us are taught as though it has always existed on its own, just a self-sufficient island in the vast world of our scriptures. Why not? It is very self-contained. It includes clear instructions for life. Best of all, it is

words we all seem to feel we know very well. On the whole it makes sense we tend to take it out of its context.

But, is there more we could draw down exploring its context? Resounding yes.

So, let us explore some. The book of Micah lives in the minor prophets' space of our Scriptures. All of these tend to be brief while also just as important as the "regular" prophets that come just before. Another common theme is that the prophet is calling the people of Israel to repent. Additionally, the book was written during a difficult season for the people of Israel and Judah.

Interestingly, this difficult season has come after a long period of peace for the people of God. This is different than other books where the people of God have been drifting away for a while and are being called back. That is likely why their frustration and disappointment flow through the entire book, which comes to us as a conversation between God and the prophet on behalf of the people.

Sadly we do not have the room to dig deeper but I hope this fills in more about why the verse begins the way it does, as an answer to a very specific question. The people have asked God what they need to

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EVERGREEN ASSOCIATION  
—OF AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA—  
TRANSLATING OUR UNITY TO THE WORLD

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### Pray for Churches seeking Pastoral Leadership

Filipino-American Christian Fellowship,  
Lynnwood, WA

Grace Baptist Church,  
San Jose, CA

First Baptist Church of  
Denver, Denver, CO

Mt. Zion Baptist Church,  
Seattle, WA

Shell Ridge Community Church,  
Walnut Creek, CA

# An Evergreen Annual Gathering Preview

*Evergreen Fam—now is the time for you to register for the Evergreen Annual Gathering, happening October 9-11, 2025 at Olympia First Baptist Church. In addition to registering for the event, if you're going to be staying at one of the local hotels, it's very important for you to **get your reservations in with the hotels by September 10th**, before they shut down the room block discount!*

*Please note all times listed are Pacific Daylight Time.*

Evergreen's Annual Gathering for this year, happening on October 9-11 at Olympia First Baptist Church promises to be one for the history books. We'll start off Thursday evening at 6pm with our Evergreen Ministers' Council Clergy and Evergreen Laity Gatherings. This dinner and program promises to be a good time for both groups, and the fee of \$10 for the dinner will be well spent!

Then we get things going on Friday Morning with **registration** opening at 9:30am. Our in person and online gathering officially kick off at 10:30am with our **Welcome Plenary**. We'll have **lunch** together at 11:30am. Then our workshops for our in person participants will begin at 1pm. This year we're excited to offer three great workshops. Rev. Doug Avilesbernal will be leading **"The Road from Strangers to Stranger No More!"** where we'll be learning how to cross cultural and other divides to help make those unknown to us our friends, allies, and siblings. Rev. Sam Kim will lead **"How to Discover Who Our Neighbors Are"** which will teach us how to assess your neighborhood so you can target ministry appropriately. And Rev. Ricky Barlow and Robert and Darrell Simmons will lead **"Building a Secure Financial Footing for Your Church"** teaching how to leverage resources to help the church have the finances needed for sustainable ministry. After the workshops we'll regather for **dinner** at 5:30pm. Then for our **Friday Night Worship**, our Featured Preacher is Rev. Dr. Gina Jacobs-Strain, the General Secretary of the ABC-USA! Our Friday Night Worship session will be livestreamed for our online participants and anyone

else who wants to take part.

Saturday we'll gather for **breakfast** at 8:30am. Then we'll have our **Business Meeting** starting at 10am. There will be full online participation for all aspects of the business meeting including Caucus breakouts! Then we'll do **lunch** at Noon. Our in person participants will get a chance to engage with our **Olympia Experiences**, including options for a tour of the Capital Rotunda, a guided Nature Walk in the Nisqually Nature Preserve, a chance to visit Percival's Landing and the Farmers' Market, a walk around the Capitol Lake, and a guided tour of the Squaxin Island Museum, Library, and Research Center with author Sandy Crowell, sponsored by the Evergreen Intercultural Team. Meanwhile our online participants will get the chance to participate in the **three excellent workshops** that were offered to the in person folks the day before. We'll regather for **dinner** at 5:30pm. After we eat, we'll gather at 7pm for our **Saturday Night Worship**, where our featured Preacher is Rev. Dr. Angela Barker-Jackson, the VP of Institutional Advancement for the Berkeley School of Theology, and a member of CrossWalk Community Church in Napa, an Evergreen congregation.

*We will have shuttles running from the airports to the hotels, and the hotels to the church.*

The cost for in person attendance is \$100, or \$110 if you include one of the Thursday Night gatherings. The cost for online attendance is \$50.

To register for the event, please click this link: <https://forms.office.com/r/HSmyKKYCMM>.

To reserve a room at the Towneplace Suites (directly across from the church, only single King rooms available) please click [here](#). Or call (360) 753-8770.

To reserve a room at the Hilton Garden Inn (1.1 miles from church, double Queen & single King rooms available) please click [here](#). Or call (360) 236-9934.

You may have to modify dates or number of adults shown to match what you are looking for. If it says rooms aren't available you may have to call, or check the other hotel. If you call make sure you say that your with the Evergreen Association Room Block.

# Smartphone Photography: Getting Gallery-Worthy Photos from Your Device



*By Rev. Shavon Walker*

In the beginning, there was film photography. And it was good. We all remember those small rolls of cellophane, trying not to accidentally open the back of the camera, drop-

ping off a canister at the local Walgreens and waiting impatiently for the week to end so you could pick up your finished photos.

Now, we have smartphone cameras. They're certainly more efficient than their Kodak and Canon predecessors, but they look more complicated. At their most basic, however, they're just as easy to use. You can create professional looking photos without a huge learning curve.

The first step is figuring out your camera. Search for the app or scroll through the interface until you find it, then open it. If you turn it on, you can use the rule of thirds, which we'll get to in a moment. Aim your camera, tap on the screen to focus on your subject, then tap the button to take the picture. Congratulations, you've taken your first photo! That's it for now.

Just kidding, we're just warming up! As I mentioned before, you can use the rule of thirds with your grid. Place your subject on the left third, the middle third, or the right third of the screen to take your picture. Get closer to fill the frame, and make sure you have good lighting, for example with a window behind you and facing the subject. If you'd like to lend your photo a bit more of a professional look, find portrait mode and switch to that to take the picture. This works best with a single subject or with a still life, like a plant or bowl of fruit.

But you can't just take a picture and hope you got it right on the first try. You can edit your images right in your phone. Use your phone's built-in editor (found in the Photos app) to adjust brightness and contrast with simple sliders, and use the Crop command to straighten crooked horizons with one tap.

Here are some useful tips for popular photography types:

For people, position subjects near natural light. Don't cut off heads or feet when cropping.

For travel and family events, take both wide shots and close details. Get those candid moments, not just posed photos (you'll thank yourself later). In low light, move closer to light sources.

You've successfully taken a bunch of pictures, but your phone's storage is running out. What can you do? The easiest thing to do is to create a Google account and use Google Photos to automatically back up all of your pictures. If you have an iPhone, you can do the same with iCloud. Both apps allow you to organize pictures with albums, and they allow you to search for certain pictures using keywords. To share your pictures, you can share them directly from iCloud or Google Photos, you can text them as attachments, or you can email them. Most social media apps will also let you share your pictures.

Remember, practice makes perfect. Don't be afraid to play around with your camera and its settings; experience, not perfection, is what you're after. After all, you should be having fun and making memories. If you're doing that, you're on the right track.

That's it for this week. Next week, we'll tackle a different topic. If you'd like to see me write about something specific, email me at [Shavon@ea-abc.org](mailto:Shavon@ea-abc.org). And don't forget to check out our social media on Facebook and Instagram!

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bring Him so their good fortunes return. In other words, they've just said, how much do we need to pay for your favor? Which is a very common thing for all the people of those times.

"With what shall I come before the lord...?"

The question clearly tells us how the people of God see their relationship with God. It is very clear they think of their relationship in a transactional way. They're not asking how they should come but instead ask what they should bring when they come. They see their relationship with God and the path forward like everyone else around them, what kind of offering do we need to give to appease our deity?

Now we are finally at our famous verse. The 8<sup>th</sup> verse of the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter is God's response to the people asking how they can appease their deity. God's response changes everything in a radical way that echoes right through to our time. Rather than saying how much offering God wants the instruction is to live in a deeply relational and transformational way with each other and therefore with God too.

This answer has little to do with what the people asked. They asked for a transactional relationship, like all the people around them had with their gods. How much do we need to pay so you stop punishing us? In a way, they wanted the response of a god of their own creation.

Instead, God asks for action that leads to transformation.

Do justice. Love mercy. Walk humbly.

The problem with justice is that its true version demands the person who offended, hurt, transgressed, and more, be treated exactly in the way I think I and those I love should be treated. The clear result of that is loving mercy since it is absolutely what we would want for us and our loved ones. Which then in turn forces us to walk around the world humbly as we have been transformed into loving those around us deeply.

Micah 6:8 in context then is not a set of instructions but a path to transformation.

## Helping People from Burma Be Safe & Feel Safe

It is painfully clear in this day and age that many groups of people, for a variety of reasons, do not currently feel safe in their environment. This includes many of our friends from Burma who came to the US as refugees or immigrants—even those who are legal permanent residents ("green card holders") or already US citizens. It certainly is true of others from Burma who have applied for asylum or have come to the US with educational or other non-immigrant visas.

On June 18<sup>th</sup>, 158 national, state, and local organizations submitted a letter to President Donald Trump, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem urging the Administration to "extend and redesignate Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Burma." According to the website of US Citizenship and Immigration Services, TPS for Burma is due to expire on November 25<sup>th</sup> of this year. The Burma Advocacy Group that grew out of the American Baptist Burma Refugee Commission was one of the religious freedom, human rights, and civil society organizations that joined in this request.

The full text of the letter, including numerous footnotes, can be found at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kCVGojJqVvc7J4Fv0sXXDVitLcw7dZy/edit>. After summarizing the terms of Temporary Protected Status, the letter goes on to describe the conditions in Burma that make safe returns impossible. These include environmental disaster (the March earthquake), ongoing armed conflict, and ethnic and religious persecution. The letter continues by stating that TPS for Burma aligns with US foreign policy and strategic interest. A full list of the 158 organizations appears at the end of the letter.

Please continue to pray for the people Burma, including those who have come to live or study in the US. Please also consider ways that you may advocate on their behalf, including calling, emailing, or visiting your representatives in Congress.



# Meet our Global Servants: Lauran Bethell

*By Rev. Paul Schneider*

This month's article on one of our amazing Global Servants focuses on Lauran Bethell. Lauran has had a long career with International Ministries, though that was not what she pictured doing as a child. Now, she makes an impact in the lives of trafficked people all over the world through her ministry.

Lauran grew up in California, in that state's great Central Valley. A network of agricultural communities, her father served as a pastor of three different American Baptist Churches in the Valley before becoming an Area Minister for the American Baptist Churches of the West (ABCW). Lauran's original ambition was to become a teacher, which she did, teaching grades 3-6 in Merced, CA for six years. But her ultimate goal was to live abroad and she was thrilled to be invited to teach at the Hong Kong International School, where she taught grades 1-3 for the next four years. It was in Hong Kong where God Called her into full-time Christian service.

She returned to the United States and went to the American Baptist Seminary of the West, graduating in 1985. She was commissioned with International Ministries (IM) at the Portland Biennial that June and was ordained at Fresno First Baptist Church immediately after. Lauran hoped to go back to Asia, as during her time in Hong Kong had come to love the Chinese culture. While initially IM didn't have a need for an educator in Asia that changed later in 1985, and Lauran was sent to teach English in China with

the Amity Foundation. It was an amazing turn of events: for the first time in the communist era, in cooperation with the Chinese government, the church in China was allowed to invite foreign Christians into the country to serve as teachers and consultants. Lauran started teaching at an agricultural research academy near Nanjing.

Sometimes though, even when it looks like things have worked out, it still doesn't go the way we had hoped. Lauran developed a serious issue with her back which required surgery in

the United States. In her absence, another teacher was hired to take over her position. With the job and partnership with the Amity Foundation no longer available, she could not go back to China.

Instead, IM sent her to Thailand. While she was in Thai language school in Bangkok she had to walk through a Red-Light District each day. She was curious about who the women were and why they were working there,

so she started volunteering to teach English with a secular organization so she could interact with them. She heard their stories and was moved when they told her that they were "sacrificing" themselves to help their families. They were prostituting themselves out of economic need, educational deprivation and because of the cultural expectation that the girl child should do whatever she could to provide for her parents and siblings.

She prayed fervently that God would make it



possible for her to know how to help the women to find economic alternatives for their lives. As the end of language school was approaching, Lauran received a call from Paul and Elaine Lewis, who had already been serving in Burma and Thailand for almost 40 years. The Lewises had translated and transcribed the Bible and hymns into two different tribal languages. They had also done work around finding the least culturally intrusive ways for tribal women to have access to birth control. When they called Lauran, they expressed their concern that young tribal women were leaving the villages to go to the city to help support their families and ending up in being exploited in brothels. They told Lauran that they were setting up a project, to be called "The New Life Center", to be based in Chiang Mai, providing the young vulnerable women with educational and economic alternatives. As they were praying about the Center's future leadership, Lauran's name came to mind. They invited her to be its director. In that moment, Lauran knew why she was *not* in China, and why she *was* in Thailand. That very circuitous and painful journey took on meaning and purpose and she saw God's Hand in what became her lifetime Call and mission.

Lauran started commuting up to Chang Mai to work with the committee of the New Life Center and then became the director when the center opened in May, 1987. For 14 years she served in that role. There were no schools in many tribal villages when the center opened, and young, illiterate teen-age tribal girls were particularly vulnerable to being trafficked into prostitution. The Center's original purpose was to *prevent* vulnerable tribal girls from being trafficked. But soon after it opened, families began requesting help to get girls out of brothels that they'd been tricked into. In cooperation with the Thai government's special police, many rescues were fa-

cilitated and the girls were able to truly find a "new life" at the Center.

The New Life Center has evolved and changed over the years, as the needs have changed. Now, there are schools in tribal villages, so most children are literate. The current need is for higher levels of education, and so the New Life Center offers scholarships to 200-300 students to attend vocational schools and universities. There is also a small group home for 15-20 survivors of childhood sexual exploitation and abuse. Through the late 80's and into the 90's there was a huge outpouring of God's Spirit around the world, calling people into new ministries offering Hope and Healing with those who had been exploited and abused. Everyone was looking for ways that they could learn from each other about how to most effectively minister and Lauran was being invited to advise and consult.

In 1997, International Ministries gave Lauran permission to travel and consult with the growing numbers of organizations, while she was also directing the New Life Center. It quickly became apparent to her that she could not truly do both jobs well, and she felt strongly called to step back from the New Life Center, though she said that leaving the NLC was like "cutting off an arm". She moved to Prague, Czech Republic, in January, 2001, and began full time as a Global Consultant for "responses to human trafficking". She moved to The Netherlands in 2008, and in her nearly 20 years in Europe, traveled more than 2,000,000 miles all over the world, speaking, consulting and networking.

Today, Lauran is still travelling and consulting. In the last 39 years, the biggest change in her work has been the incredible growth in the awareness of the issues of human trafficking and exploitation. This has led to an exponential increase in the number of organizations engaged in the issues. Lauran was clear that it's best when "the movement grows always from the grassroots."

When people directly affected by and involved with human trafficking share their stories and their pain, and governments collaborate with them in developing legislation, real change is possible. And though she has spoken into some of the highest levels of government in various countries, she feels that her most important ministry is done when she is Christ's presence in very, very dark, hidden places.

Human trafficking isn't just something that happens abroad, it's very real here in the United States as well. Much of it here is the result of childhood sexual abuse, and dysfunctional family systems. Most of those working in prostitution in the US are also abusing drugs and alcohol--which is not necessarily the case in developing countries.

Lauran founded the International Christian Alliance on Prostitution (ICAP), for which she is also the director. Her work connects organizations on nearly every continent – in the last year she's been on six different continents in just 8 months. She is still doing consulting with organizations all over the world which combat prostitution, and she serves on the boards of five organizations which are addressing issues of sex trafficking. These organizations are all over the world, in South Sudan, in London, in Thailand, and in California, in addition to her work with ICAP.

"People ask where [human trafficking] is the worst. It's the worst where you are right now." If you want to get involved in supporting the survivors of trafficking, Lauran suggests finding out who the local organizations in your area are and supporting them. If you look where the darkest places in your own communities are, that's where the most help is needed. Sharing the light of Christ's love makes a difference. Prayer makes a difference. And if you want to help Lauran in what she does, helping these local, grassroots organizations will help her work.

Also "don't believe everything you see on the big screen about human trafficking. Talk to the people who are actually doing the work." If your church is interested in becoming involved in opposing human trafficking and exploitation, Lauran is happy to provide some guidance about how to get locally involved. You can also visit the International Christian Alliance on Prostitution website at <https://www.icapglobal.org/>, which has some excellent resources. Their next international conference is in November, 2025 at the Green Lake Conference Center--and you're invited!

To financially support Lauran, you can give through International Missions, or by supporting ICAP, and especially by becoming actively involved in the fight against human trafficking in your local community. You can reach out to her by email at [lauran@pobox.com](mailto:lauran@pobox.com).

## Reimagine the Church Conference, Sept 19-20 Online and in Denver

**When:** September 19 and 20, 2025

**Where:** In person in Denver & Online

**Cost:** \$200 in person, \$125 for online/recordings

**Keynote: Rev. Dr. Wil Gafney**

**Intro:** In a time of rising fascism, White Supremacy, and Christian Nationalism, the Gospel calls us to bold, liberative action. This conference equips attendees to embody liberative theology, build transformative relationships, and take concrete actions toward justice. Through skill-building, deep reflection, and collaborative organizing, we will strengthen our capacity to protect the lives and well-being of targeted communities—within our congregations, across faith traditions, and in solidarity with broader movements for justice. Together, we will sync up, skill up, and speak out.

You can find out more on the website: <https://reimaginethechurch.org/> and you can register [here](#).

# “Strangers No More!”

(Leviticus 19:34)

## 2025 Evergreen Annual Meeting October 9-11, 2025 Olympia First Baptist Church

### Basic Schedule

**Thursday Evening:** Clergy (Ministers' Council) & Laity Gatherings

**Friday:** Welcome Plenary, In Person Workshops, Friday Night Worship

**Saturday:** Business Meeting, Online Workshops, Olympia Experiences, Saturday Night Worship, Event Ends

**Sunday:** Join in worship at a western Washington Evergreen Church

### Featured Preachers



**Rev. Dr. Gina Jacobs-Strain**, General Secretary of the American Baptist Churches-USA



**Rev. Dr. Angela Barker-Jackson**, VP of Institutional Advancement of the Berkeley School of Theology

### Registration Fees

**Online:** \$50

**In Person:** \$100 (+\$10 for Thursday Gatherings) *Limited Scholarships are available*

### Workshops

We're going to have three great workshops which will be offered In Person on Friday afternoon, and Online on Saturday Afternoon.

**The Road from Strangers to Stranger No More!** - Rev. Doug Avilesbernal—Learning how to cross cultural and other divides to help make those unknown to us our friends, allies, and siblings.

**How to Discover Who Our Neighbors Are**—Rev. Sam Kim—Learning how to assess your neighborhood so you can target ministry appropriately.

**Building a Secure Financial Footing for Your Church**—Rev. Ricky Barlow, Robert and Darrell Simmons—Leveraging resources to help the church have the finances needed for sustainable ministry.

### Hotels & More Information

<https://ea-abc.org/annual-meeting-2025>

### Register Now!

<https://forms.office.com/r/HSmyKKYCMM>





SAVE THE DATES



*Retirement*  
**CELEBRATIONS**

HONORING

*Pastor Jim Hopkins*

**RETIREMENT BANQUET**

FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 12, 2025

**SCOTT'S SEAFOOD  
GRILL AND BAR**

JACK LONDON SQUARE

CHECK IN 5 - 6 PM  
DINNER AT 6 PM SHARP

**ALL ARE WELCOME**

\$150 PER PERSON, RSVP AT

[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/PASTORJIM](https://tinyurl.com/pastorjim)

[RETIREMENTBANQUET](#)

BY AUGUST 25TH

**SPECIAL CHURCH  
SERVICE & COFFEE  
HOUR CELEBRATION**

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 14,  
2025

10.00AM - 2.00PM

**LAKESHORE  
AVENUE BAPTIST  
CHURCH**

3534 LAKESHORE AVE  
OAKLAND, CA 94610

**ALL ARE WELCOME**



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Email: [office@ea-abc.org](mailto:office@ea-abc.org)

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[www.facebook.com/evergreenabcusa](https://www.facebook.com/evergreenabcusa);

Instagram, and Twitter @evergreenabcusa  
#ebaabc

Return Service Requested

Evergreen Notes, the newsletter for member churches, ecumenical partners, national affiliates, and friends of the Evergreen Association of American Baptist Churches is published monthly. Please submit articles by the 20th of the month prior to expected publication. You are encouraged to copy and/or reprint information and articles for your congregation and community.

Building Bridges, Resourcing Churches & Translating Our Unity

## Mission Statement

Being a culturally diverse people who are one in Christ and who value the liberties of our American Baptist Heritage, the Evergreen Baptist Association will **Build bridges** between communities; **Provide resources** to equip member churches to share Christ and teach God’s word; and **Translate our unity** to the world.

**As seasons change from summer to fall, may God’s blessings stay with you!**

## Save these Dates!

We’ve got some great events coming up within our region. Please mark your calendars so you can make sure to participate in these fantastic coming events!

### Retirement Celebrations for Rev. Jim Hopkins, Sept 12 & 14

Please see inside for more details and how to participate!

### Evergreen Annual Gathering, Oct 9-11 at Olympia FBC!

Our Annual Gathering at Olympia First Baptist Church will be top notch, with great featured preachers, wonderful workshops, excellent Olympia Experiences, and fantastic fellowship and food. See inside for details!

## September Calendar

### *All of September is National Suicide Prevention Month!*

**September 4—Eid-e-Milad an-Nabi—** Celebrated as the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Islam.

**September 12—Rev. Jim Hopkins Retirement Banquet—**See inside for details!

**September 14—Special Church Service and Celebration at Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church—**Celebrating Rev. Jim Hopkins and his ministry at LABC and

beyond!

**September 19—Talk Like A Pirate Day—**Arr, matey!

**September 22—Hobbit Day—**the birthdays of both Bilbo and Frodo Baggins

**September 22—Autumnal Equinox—**The beginning of Fall.

**September 24—Rosh Hashanah—**Jewish New Year