

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY



OCTOBER 2023

Volume 74

A Voice for Ecumenical Congregations and Christians Around the World

Number 1

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2023 Annual Conference held in Charlotte, NC



continued on page 7



President's Message

Abraham Wright

By the Renewal of Our Minds

The International Council of Community Churches survived well the initial 2023 track conference schedule. Despite the fact that some workshop hosts had to campaign for attendance because several competitive offerings were blocked in the same time frame, and the 2024 Conference Planning Committee will have to make modifications (this the Committee knew initially), the overwhelmingly pronouncement concerning the 2023 Annual conference is that it was a good one; some conferees added, "In fact, it was a very good one!" Some "excellent" comments also were in the mix. In fact, another 2023 conferee remarked that the right kinds of advertisement were in place, and that DeAnn made the operation seem "easy" when most of us knew it was a difficult task. With this kind of effective planning and execution of the same, I am confident that 2024 Conference in Kansas City, Missouri will be just as effective, and that I can count on you right now (or your proxy) to *be* in attendance. So my focus in this article is not the 2024 Conference but a larger concern that seems too often unspoken of in the body of Christ. That is lack of serious consideration of what the Church actually is and what it requires of us who are genuinely interested in being true to the mission of the Church, which is to go *out* and spread the gospel.

In Robert Frost's "The Death of the Hired Man," Warren defines home as a place where you have to go and "they've have to take you in." Mary, the wife, however, defines it as "Something you somehow haven't to deserve." In short Warren says it is the place where you can go and the family is obligated to accept you. Mary defines it as a place

where you can go with no biological strings attached, and the family welcomes you with genuine love. Mary also clarifies that once the individual being welcomed accepts the invitation, the right thing ought to be done. I like to think of the Church as something we do not deserve; but God, through his Fatherly love and redeeming grace and mercy and righteousness says to each of us, come, no matter what your condition is, and I will set you free; but, there will be some suffering and hardships along the way. I believe that each of us who are genuine believers in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ accepts that belief whether we fully understand or do not fully understand that suffering is redemptive.

Additionally, especially where church leadership, or more specifically "church stewardship," is concerned, there are administrative, moral, and ethnical responsibilities. Whether we learn them by natural inclination, from a leadership class, from the book of Romans, or by a combination of means, the call to exercise good stewardship is there; it is part of our response as good stewards of the grace God offers us freely. It's part of our response to God welcoming us into the body of Christ. If you don't believe it, turn to Romans 12. There Paul says that we must become transformed through the renewal of our minds. This includes sacrificing our whole body to God, which is the high form of genuine worship. It involves not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought, but growing in grace through *humility*, through moderation, through bridling our tongues, through doing what is right based on doing that which is pleasing to God, and by identifying our gifts (with

urgency) according to the grace that God has given us, by putting them to use for the good of all, especially others, so that the mission of the Church (the body of Christ) will be fulfilled inside and outside the Church.

Some of us do this, and we do it well; some of us do parts of it well. The part that we often neglect, especially when we think of bodies to which we are "united," is the finances. There, our priorities sometimes become nil. Then we begin to blame others and repeatedly refuse to face the reality that we did not feel that finances to a church body was high on our priority list, even though when we joined we pledged to support it; finances were part of that pledge.

Financial support is biblical. Even Jesus said give until Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. He also sanctioned the Widow's might because she gave all that she had. Further, Paul encouraged various congregations to support other congregations in need, including the Jewish congregation in Jerusalem. Then, Paul planned to ask the Roman congregation(s) for spiritual and financial support for his mission to Spain. Also, even though a parable, it was the gift from probably an "ordinary" boy whose lunch Jesus received and fed over 5000 individuals and then had some left.

I understand the struggle some congregations have, and I equally understand how Covid-19 further complicated those struggles. However, I further understand that if God calls us to plant a church, with gifted

continued on page 8



Executive Director's Message

Phil Tom

"Scary Times"

Greetings.

Last month, a letter from a pastor in Arlington, IL, announcing his departure from pastoral ministry triggered numerous responses from clergy, lay leaders, and church leaders – **Departure: Why I Left the Church** - <https://www.restorativefaith.org/post/departure-why-i-left-the-church?fbclid=IwAR2YAVOaJbA1yHPnxXUFTJcedEN6afwchl3KgZG8CZBqx3a-IZYv77hpjHc>

Among the many responses to this letter, Rev. Dr. John Odom, the Executive Presbyter of the Mid-Kentucky Presbytery, posted this message. I share his message for your reflection and actions on how we, as clergy and lay leaders, continue to provide resources to support and equip our church leaders to respond to these challenging times for our ICCC family and the broader Church. The impact of clergy spiritual well-being impacts not only their families and ministries but also the spiritual well-being of our congregations. I welcome your thoughts and suggestions.

Phil

SCARY TIMES

By John Odom, General Presbyter

Boo! Scared you! No, I am not trying to rush Halloween, but I am sounding the alarm of some of the devastating statistics captured by both Barna Research concerning health trends for pastoral leaders in the Church and a Facebook post from the pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Arlington Heights who is resigning. I dare you not to gasp.

In just seven years, from 2015-2022, the number of pastors reporting 'Excellence' in the following well-being categories went into free fall:

- Spiritual well-being dropped from 37% to 14%;
- Physical well-being fell from 24% to 9%;
- Mental and emotional health plummeted from 39% to 11%;
- Overall quality of life dipped from 42% to 18%;
- Level of respect they felt from the community tanked from 22% to 10%;
- Level of 'true friends' dropped by 50% from 34% to 17%.

Now that I have your attention, let me share an additional cry for help. In 2015, 72% of pastors said they felt "very satisfied" with their job as pastors. In late 2022, just 52% of pastors were "very satisfied with their jobs." That's a staggering 20% drop over the course of six years—and it's a trend no session, no presbytery leader can afford to ignore. Between emotional exhaustion, chronic stress, and the ramp-up in pastors experiencing burnout, serving as a minister of Word and Sacrament has never felt more difficult.

Lest you think that your congregation and your pastor are special, in 2016, 53% of pastors said they were 'Very Satisfied' with their current Church. Today, only 38% say they're very satisfied with their current Church.

What can we do as sessions and a presbytery?

- take pastoral well-being seriously (We can't just write off these kinds of well-being drops to Covid alone.)

- offer help like the presbytery's pastors retreat on October 21 at Cedar Ridge Camp
- encourage those in the Board of Pensions to use their 6-free, counseling sessions through the Employee Assistance Program
- insist that your pastor takes all of their vacation and study leave time,
- regularly inquire about how your pastor gets support
- offer a YMCA membership as part of pastoral compensation

A whopping 63% of pastors do not currently avail themselves of a spiritual advisor, personal mentor, professional counselor, therapist, professional mentor, life coach, or any other form of personal support.

Since 1972, the month of October has been celebrated as Pastor Appreciation month. One month isn't going to solve the problem of pastor burnout, but maybe it can be a beginning salvo. Let me get the pastoral care brainstorming going:

- give your pastor one Sunday in October off and have a ruling elder preach, or have a hymn sing and no sermon, or have members of your congregation share their faith stories instead of a sermon
- write your pastor a thank you note, bake them a cake, give them a gift card, offer free babysitting, dog walking, invite them out to the movies

Because friends, as Paul reminds us, when one part of the Body of Christ is sick and in pain, the whole Body of Christ suffers. I pray that sessions will take these frightening pastor well-being statistics to heart and show your pastor love and support, this October and always.

ICCC OCTOBER 2023

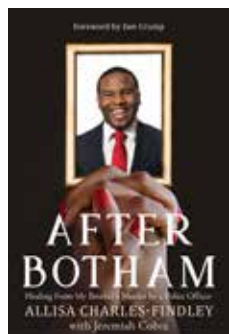


Book REVIEW

By Rev. Kenneth N. Nelson

2023 Theme: ***Call to Fellowship (1 John 1:3 ESV)***

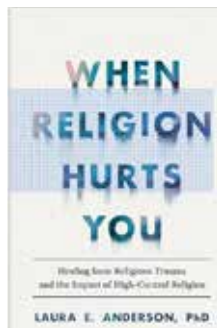
Welcome Back! We pray all is well with you and those you care about. This year we pray that sharing captures the idea of fellow from 1 John 1:3. We pray that these reviews will not only call you to fellowship but also involve you in fellowship. This month we start with some engaging books from Publisher Weekly.

**After Botham: Healing from My Brother's Murder by a White Police Officer**

Allisa Charles-Findley, with Jeremiah Cobra. Chalice, \$19.99 trade paper (196p) ISBN 978-0-827-20113-2

In this wrenching debut, Charles-Findley recalls the 2018 murder of her brother Botham Jean by a white police officer as he sat at home in Dallas, Tex., watching a sports game. In the surreal, dizzying days afterwards, Charles-Findley struggled to process the loss ("it wasn't really Botham who was killed but someone who looked like him," she told herself), while law enforcement downplayed his death, calling it "an unfortunate accident."

Charged with murder, police officer Amber Guyger, who said she'd entered Jean's apartment believing it was her own and shot him thinking he was an intruder, went to trial in 2019 and received a 10-year prison sentence. Still, peace of mind remained elusive for Charles-Findley, as the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and other Black men and women played out across television screens and social media, igniting "the trauma of losing Botham all over again," and spurring her to cofound the Sisters of the Movement initiative, which is dedicated to lobbying for police reform. Interweaving the account with poignant memories of her brother—his gentleness, his love of music—Charles-Findley wades into the complexities of grief that persist long after headlines have faded, the internal battles it gives rise to ("I am not quite where I want to be with God"), and the injustices of a country in which the deaths of Black people "have been relegated to casualties of war." It's a powerful tribute.

**When Religion Hurts You: Healing from Religious Trauma and the Impact of High-Control Religion**

Laura E. Anderson. Brazos, \$19.99 trade paper (240p) ISBN 978-1-58743-588-1

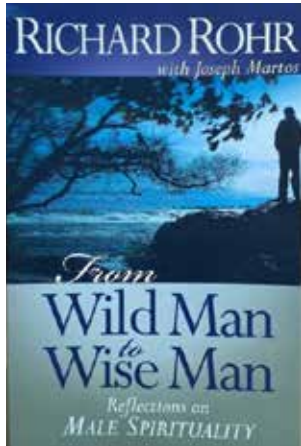
Psychotherapist Anderson draws from personal experience, doctoral research, and her counseling career in this sensitive debut guide to recovering from religious trauma, a phenomenon that "resides in our bodies in the same way [as does] trauma from war, developmental trauma, or sexualized trauma." The survivor of a strict and authority-obsessed Christian upbringing, Anderson offers straightforward guidance on the nature of religious trauma, including its physical and emotional symptoms (flashbacks, hypervigilance, chronic pain) and why strict belief communities are simultaneously so hard to stay in and break free from—for one, their "dynamics of... control are such that individuals are required to live, act, and think in specific ways or endure life-altering consequences." Rather than proposing a structured recovery program, Anderson pinpoints areas of improvement for sufferers, including regaining self-trust, connecting with one's body, and embracing a full range of emotions, through such practices as adopting flexible boundaries and dismantling harmful internalized beliefs about the physical self (for example, "I am not healed from physical illness because I have unconfessed sin... in my heart").

Anderson strikes a smart, balanced tone—though she highlights how society's generally proreligious attitude can complicate healing, she takes care not to push for atheism as a "solution," and encourages a gradual healing process that looks different for everyone. It's an exemplary guide to an understudied issue.

SHARE YOUR COMMENTS. Remember, please share your thoughts at ICCCNOW@sbcglobal.net by the end of the month. And let us know if we have your permission to quote or paraphrase your comments. *Thank you for your feedback and have a blessed month.*

Greetings men of the ICCC

How quickly the months are going by since our Annual Conference. During the Conference meetings of Samaritan Men, the ICCC's men's group, I was asked to finish our study of Richard Rohr's book on male spirituality, **From Wild Man to Wise Man**. So, let's do that this Fall. We'll begin with a review of the first ten chapters (each is only a few pages), then pick up with chapters 11, 12 and 13 on the "Father Hunger", "Father Wound" and "Grief".



Our schedule of 7 pm Zoom gatherings in which to reflect together on the readings is as follows:

- Oct. 17 ➡ Chapters 14 & 15
- Oct. 31 ➡ Chapters 16, 17 & 18
- Nov. 7 ➡ Chapters 19 & 20
- Nov. 28 ➡ Chapters 21 & 22
- Dec. 5 ➡ Chapters 23 & 24
- Dec. 19 ➡ Chapter 25

You are invited to participate even if you have yet to read the book. Our discussions are stimulating, enjoyable and well-worthwhile. The link to our Zoom meetings is:

Rev. John Hardman-Zimmerman

The Zoom link for the workshops are
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82087374279?pwd=U0E5dGxZQkUvQlV4U2xnWlE5NXJsdz09>
Meeting ID: 820 8737 4279
Passcode: 437296

Consider what else you would like to see happen in or through our men's group. Let me know your ideas and suggestions.

The peace of Christ to you all, my friends.

Rev. John Hardman-Zimmerman
 ICCC Samaritans President

Jesus Calling

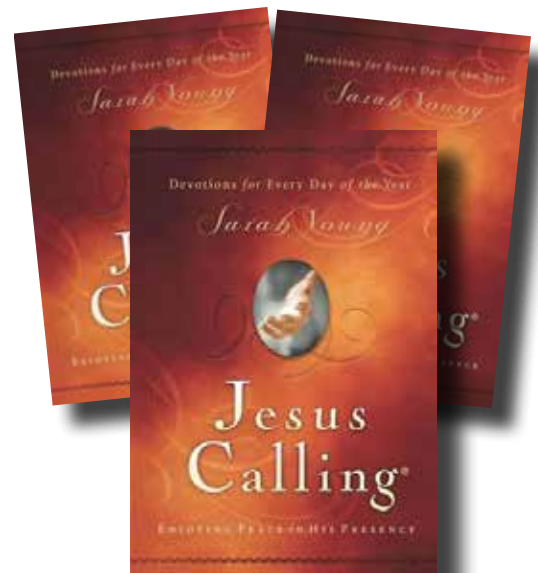
If you were at Annual Conference, you saw there was a Book Study session covering the book **Jesus Calling**.

If you are interested in purchasing the book, we still have some left! The cost is \$17.00 (book \$12, shipping and handling \$5), made payable to the ICCC. Mail to ICCC, PO Box 846, Longmont, CO 80502

"For many years, missionary Sarah Young kept a prayer journal, recording her thoughts and prayers. Then she decided to start listening for what Jesus might be saying to her in her daily journey."

The journey she started encouraged her heart, along with thousands of others the world over. Her meditations became the now classic devotional, Jesus Calling: Enjoying Peace in His Presence. These 365 days of readings share the words and scriptures Jesus laid on her heart to share. As you read these words of inspiration and encouragement you'll be brought closer to Jesus presence, experiencing His love and peace."

~ Christianbook.com



Sharing Joys with

- **Metropolitan Community Church**, Chicago, IL celebrated their 103rd Anniversary and Victory on Sunday, October 3rd. **Rev. Leon Perry** has been Senior Minister there since 1996. *"Faith in God and in God's people has brought Metropolitan Community Church this victory."* ~ Rev. Perry.
- **Rev. Dr. Sharyon Cosey** and **ABBA Church of Renewed Faith** family, Chicago, IL as they celebrated their church's 16th Anniversary on September 17th.
- **Rev. Dr. Wendy Childress**, Founder and CEO for **WC Ministries**, which recently was awarded a Joe V. Hotchkiss New Church and Church Renewal Grant to continue its ministry.
- **New Covenant Community Church**, Akron, OH as they install the **Rev. Bradley Rito** as their new Senior Pastor on October 1st.
- **Palisades Community Church**, Washington DC and **Rev. Ryan Thrasher**, Senior Pastor, as they celebrate its 100th anniversary on October 22nd. **Sandra Roberts**, ICCC Regional Trustee, will be representing the ICCC family at this celebration event.
- **Rev. Kyle Hug** and **Bridgeport Community Church**, Bridgeport, MI. Kyle will be ordained as Bridgeport's new Senior Pastor on October 29th.
- Retired **ICCC Chaplain Emeritus Derek Ross** has accepted a new calling to teach at Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA.
- **Antioch Community Church**, MO as they celebrated their heritage of 166 years as a church in September.

**Sharing Concerns with**

- **Rev. Dr. Michael Donahue** and his father, **Ken Donahue** who underwent surgery.
- **Rev. Lorna Hart**, whose sister **Annetta Duarte**, passed away September 12th.
- **Rev. Tim Meadows**, who is undergoing hospital testing.
- For the families of **Rev. Harry Fooockle** and **Rev. Stephen York** and their congregations on the passing of Revs. Fooockle and York.
- For the family of **Virginia Shotwell**, wife to the late **Rev. Dr. Ralph Shotwell**. Virginia was 98 years old when she passed away on August 10th. *"She was a force of nature who could teach us all something about living life to the fullest, loving each other with all our hearts, and embracing death as but the next opportunity to give and receive love."* ~ Jo Ann Kaplan, daughter.
- **Lonnie Miller**, **Wilson Memorial Union Church**, Wachung, NJ as she faces health challenges.
- **Rev. Arturo Lewis**, **Emmanuel Community Church**, Ridgewood, NJ as he faces health challenges.
- **Revs. John and Sue Hardman-Zimmerman**, as John continues to be at his father's side in Pennsylvania as he continues care in hospice.

**ICCC Resource About Raising Funds for your Congregation**

Did you know that ICCC has a resource that provides ideas on raising funds for your congregation/center/community? It's titled Fundraising 101, and you can download it from our ICCC webpage at <https://www.icccnow.org/council-other-agency-resources/>.



"Conference 2023" *cont'd. from p. 1*

by Jerry Brown, VP for Conference Planning

WOW !!! What an amazing conference we had this summer. I couldn't believe how great it was.

I'm an optimist, and I always expect and look forward to a great Annual Conference. But this year's event was beyond my expectations. I couldn't believe how great it was.

I was a little anxious about the new format; and admittedly, we do have a few bugs to work out. But we know some adjustments we can make to make the next conference even better (thanks to those who turned in evaluations). Even with a few hiccups, I couldn't believe how great it was.

I'd heard that Dr Clifford Jones was a great preacher. He has a huge church in Charlotte, and I was looking forward to hearing his message. But the Q/A, one-on-one sessions with him were outstanding; what an opportunity to learn. I couldn't believe how great it was.

I'd heard that Shane Claiborne was an engaging speaker. But the stories and insights he shared were deeply moving and inspiring. And the one-on-one with him was enlightening as well. I couldn't believe how great it was.

The Mission events I could attend were uplifting and encouraging. There are so many opportunities for us to share God's love through our generosity to those in need. We all are truly blessed, and need to share those blessings. I couldn't believe how great it was.

The luncheons and fellowship and trip to the Billy Graham Library were heart-warming. The musical offerings in the evening were especially inspiring (thanks Bruce Jones and Imagine Church). It was a fantastic time of reconnecting with dear old friends, and making new ones. What an amazing faith family we have in the ICC, it was so good to come together again. I couldn't believe how great it was.

If you missed it, you certainly missed a wonderfully inspiring week of faith, family, fellowship, and growth.

But, here's the good news: You'll have another opportunity to join us next year in Kansas City. I know all of us here at Antioch Community Church are looking forward to welcoming you to our home here in KC. We're anxious to make next year's conference even better, more exciting, encouraging, and enlightening. We will focus on Paul's advice to the church in Rome, that we should at all times and in all situations, **"Be patient in trouble, joyful in hope, and prayerful always."** *Romans 12:12*

Join us in KC!



PASTORAL
SEARCH

Full-Time Minister

Pembroke Township, IL- Minister/Pastor- St. Anne Woods Chapel Community Church-Non-Denominational. St. Anne Woods Chapel Community Church is prayerfully seeking a full time Minister who is called by God, ordained, and dedicated to the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Status and qualifications will include:

- Must hold a degree from an accredited seminar or Bible college.
- Must be an ordained and/or licensed minister.
- Must have a minimum of 3-6 years of experience as a minister or minister assistance.
- Must have great leadership skills, ability to reach out to the youth, and open to growing the ministry.

Duties:

- Coordinating with the church secretary to prepare a weekly bulletin.
- Conducting weekly adult bible study.
- Preaching the weekly sermon on Sunday mornings.
- Teaching weekly Sunday School class
- Administering the Sacraments of communion and baptism.
- Officiating at all weddings, funerals, and other ceremonial occasions as needed.
- Participating in community events.
- Works with the deacons and board regarding the future of the church.

If interested in the position, please submit the following information listed below to stannewoodschapelc@gmail.com. Please submit documents in a PDF format only.

- Cover letter that includes salary expectations, a little information about yourself, and why you believe that God is calling you to apply for this position.
- Resume
- Copy of Ministerial License and/or Certificate of Ordination.
- Degree from seminar or bible college
- Three references which would include one personal reference and two professional (minister/pastor) letters of preference.



THANK YOU to a 2023 Annual Conference Sponsor
People's Community Church, Berea, OH

Gifts have been received for the following:

In Memory of:

Mary M. King from Eloise M. Crenshaw
 Elizabeth St. Angelo from Mary Tatone
 Tom Friedberg from Bob Harris x2
 Robert R. Fread from Robert A. Fread
 Gary Batey from Bruce Merton
 Beatrice Harris from Bruce Merton
 Beatrice Harris from Rev. & Mrs. Leroy McCreary
 Tom Friedberg from Cynthia Friedberg
 Serena Smith from Sandra Roberts
 Ralph Shotwell from John Woodcock
 Harry Fooockle from Bob Harris
 Vermelle Barnes from James W. Jones
 Harry Fooockle from Bruce Merton
 Virginia Shotwell from Carolyn Willey

In Honor of

Rev. Chris Hopkins from The Center
 Rev. Carol E. Parrish
 Percy Bright, JR from Marion E. Bright

Thank You

JORDAN SCHOLARSHIP

Hey Family, the Jordan Scholarship Committee is looking for applicants.

- ✓ Any High School Seniors seeking higher education?
- ✓ Anyone thinking about going back to school to finish working on your goal?

Contact DeAnn for an application, questions or concerns.



President's message cont'd. from p. 2

stewardship, God will enable that God-planted church to strive, one step at a time, even in the midst of turmoil, if we are true to our gifted calling, or he will enable us to plant another. It's part of the history of Christianity because God does the leading by going ahead of us; and if we do his will, he will remain beside us, no matter how bleak things may appear at times.

I have a genuine ministry friend at our sister church in Baltimore, Maryland whom I have not seen in three years; but if I were to see her at this very moment, one of the first things that would come out of her mouth is, "Abraham, it takes money to do ministry." And indeed it does. So in renewing our minds this year, I invite us to reframe our thought similar to this: Am I giving my best support to the organization(s) to which I pledged and am I able to give if I were to shift my priorities based not on how it benefits me personally but how it helps to fulfill the mission the organization? If I don't financially support the mission of the organization, can I genuinely claim that I am a faithful member with the same rights and privileges as others? And finally, if I refuse to reframe my thoughts by considering several options to do that which pleases God, can I honestly say that I am a good steward of the gift(s) God has graciously given to me?

Abraham