

## Enews for 2/21/2024

### *Just by Chance*

Lent is a season where we are invited to enter an intentional time of spiritual development as we focus on the holy mysteries of life, death, and resurrection. Some find that giving something up for this season helps them ponder that mystery. I have not found that to be a helpful discipline for me in large part because I've felt like if something was worth giving up for Lent then it should be worth giving up period. Instead, I have preferred to do something new that helps me focus on those holy mysteries in a new way as I prepare for Easter. This year I have chosen to read three books that help me focus on these mysteries in our life together as a presbytery.

The first book is *Wounded Pastors* by Carol Howard and James Fenimore. This book is specifically written for pastors to, as the subtitle says "Navigate Burnout, Find Healing, and Discern the Future of Your Ministry." With that said, it is an excellent resource for church members to read (especially those on Personnel Committees or the Committee on Ministry!) to understand the unique pressures that your pastor experiences so that you can be a contributor to creating healthier ministry in your congregation. [The publisher offers a number of resources to go along with the book including a personal inventory for pastors and a list of seven ways congregation members can support their pastor all of which you can find here!](#)

The second book is *Gone for Good?* By Mark Elsdon. This book, as the subtitle says, is about "Negotiating the Coming Wave of Church Property Transition." I have challenged the presbytery's Administrative Ministry Committee to read this book with me so that we can help churches that are struggling with their buildings think creatively about how those sacred spaces can give new life to their communities. Mark Elsdon is the founder of an organization called Rooted Good that helps congregations think about these issues. [Follow the link to see what they are doing and then stay tuned for more information as Bryce, our associate for Vital Congregations, is working on ways that we can engage with these questions as a presbytery later this year.](#)

The final book is *The Art of Gathering* by Priya Parker. This book comes from outside of the church world by someone who works in the fields of strategic planning and conflict resolution with a range of secular institutions (universities, political movements, NGOs, etc.). From that experience, she shares a number of lessons that the Church can learn about (again as the subtitle says) "How We Meet and Why It Matters." In Greek, the word for Church is Ecclesia which means "the gathering" or "the assembly." Our identity in Christ is uniquely tied together by our gathering (in worship, in prayer circles, in presbytery meetings, etc.) so it is beneficial for us to stop and ask how and why we gather. [This book was written a few years before the pandemic when the question of how we gather was suddenly upended so in addition to the book I commend Parker's website which has some helpful reflections on how these last few years have challenged us to think about these questions in new ways.](#)

If any (or all!) of those sound interesting to you, I invite you to read them along with me during Lent. If you do, let me know and I will pull together some discussion groups after Easter so that we can share what we learned together.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not also share my favorite Lenten devotionals for this season. For those of you who enjoyed the art, music, and poetry from Biola University's Center for Christianity, Culture, and the Arts, I have good news! [You can click here to find their daily Lenten devotion as well!](#) Also, for those who appreciate both a little church history and some tongue-in-cheek humor about our faith, [I commend Lent Madness from our friends in the Episcopal Church.](#) It offers daily reflections on the lives of those who have lived and died in the faith to inspire us to do the same and it does so in the style of a March Madness bracket! Whatever disciple you dedicate yourself to in this season, I hope that it draws you closer to Jesus Christ and his Way in the world.

May the Peace of Christ be with you,  
Barry