

# InSpire

## Backpacking at Philmont

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For those of you that don't know me, I'm Wes McBeth and I go to the 9:00 service, but during the summer I'm at the 10:00. Earlier this summer I had the cool opportunity to go backpacking at Philmont, which is a Scouting America reservation in New Mexico. While I was out there, I did a lot of hiking and not a lot of talking, which allowed me to have the opportunity to be closer to God. Our Philmont Ranger (who accompanied us the first 3 days of the 12-day trek) was very religious and he told us we should remember that this land is God's creation and to take care of it so it stays beautiful. I did exactly what he said and made sure to leave the land better than I found it. I feel like God heard my prayers because the rain held off until the last few days of our trip. What I miss about Philmont is the lack of people, pollution, and responsibilities. If I had the opportunity to go back to Philmont, I definitely would.

~ Wes McBeth



*Horseback riding*



*Mountain climbing*



*The Rev. Jo Belser*

*“...pessimism  
reveals a lack  
of faith in God  
about our  
church’s  
future.”*

## Is our church 3/4 full, or 1/4 empty?

*“...I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” (Jeremiah 29:11)*

Is there a subtle fear at Church of the Resurrection? If so, that fear might be that our community is nearing its end.

What may be underlying such a fear (if it exists) is that many of you seem to be evaluating where you are in this stage of your life. Some have decided to move. Elenora Gafton, for example, found that housing in Northern Virginia is now too expensive, so has moved to North Carolina. Several others are also considering moving. Then, too, 2 of our members died this year.

These decisions are a part of life. They also are not new. During COVID, for instance, at least 8 of our parishioners—all people of color—had to move from the area for work-related reasons. Others have moved since COVID, and some are just less able to be here. I miss each of them greatly.

There may be other factors at play. Some fear that our decisions about money or about political views will tear us apart. In the “money” camp are those who continue to believe that giving away large amounts of money through our Abundance Ministry is a prelude to closing our doors. There also, however, are those who believe that giving away the money that was gifted us by God is a strong statement of faith, one that will gain us new



money if not also new members.

Whatever your thoughts about our Abundance Ministry, I laud the goal of this effort, the ministry team that vets each suggestion, and the aid to our neighbors that these gifts are providing. I also know from people inside and outside our church that the existence of this ministry makes them think that we do not need operating income.

These are challenges, but challenges that we can face together now, as we have in the past. Our Treasurer and Finance Committee will meet later this month to begin our 2026 budgeting process earlier than usual. This is so that our Vestry can spend its September 16 meeting working on these topics. We will let you know more as these groups meet.

In the meantime, I want to reflect on the spiritual nature of fear and pessimism. Both can reveal a lack of faith in God. Pessimism is fear, hiding itself as discernment or judgment. While discernment and judgment are good, pessimism and fear tend to deny that God is in control, not us.

I believe that God wants both housing for our neighbors *and* this church here on Beauregard Street. Why? So many, many things had to happen *just so* to make the miracle of our current reality come to pass. Kat Turner said this same thing a different way recently; she said, “We were lucky.” Well, not only were we gifted with divine help along the way, our church’s address got changed to “Hope Way.”

*(Continued on page 7)*



## A pilgrimage of presence

### *Honoring Pauli Murray and Dean Cecil Woods at VTS*

On Pentecost Sunday, June 8, I attended a Forum led by The Rev'd Canon Dr. J. Lee Hill, Jr., Canon for Racial Justice and Healing in the Diocese of Virginia. He spoke powerfully about the upcoming Racial Justice and Healing Pilgrimage, a journey of truth-telling, lament, and hope.

While I chose not to join the group physically, I realized I could make my own pilgrimage: to the Bishop Payne Library at Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS). After conversations with Coral Childs, I decided to marry two of my favorite subjects—The Rev'd Dr. Pauli Murray and archival research—into a personal journey of discovery and reverence.

#### **A trailblazing legacy**



Pauli Murray completed her theological training at VTS in the mid-1970s, making history as the first African American woman to train for the Episcopal priesthood there. She lived at the Seminary Walk apartments and remained in Alexandria

for several years following her ordination in 1977.

Her time at VTS was deeply formative. She preached, wrote, and reflected on inclusive language, gendered liturgy, and the spiritual foundations of justice. The Bishop Payne Library now houses the *Pauli Murray Collection*, including sermons, personal letters, and theological writings that reveal her prophetic voice.

*To think of oneself as a child of God is a liberating experience—it is to free oneself from all feelings of inferiority. (From “Light of the World”)*

#### **A quiet but courageous collaboration**

I became especially fascinated with Murray's relationship with G. Cecil Woods, Dean of VTS from 1969 to 1982. Woods was known for encouraging inclusivity and liturgical reform at a time of great transition in the Episcopal Church. His collaboration with Murray created space for her groundbreaking theological vision.

In a letter from 1976, Murray wrote: *Bearing pain for Christ's sake does not mean that I shall participate in my own degradation. It means that I must witness to the equality of all humanity before God in words as well as deeds.*

Woods responded not just with administrative permission but with pastoral care, allowing Murray to engage the seminary as a place of liberating theological exploration. Together, they navigated difficult terrain—gendered language, ecclesial reform, racial equity—with grace and conviction.

*Her theology emphasized the 13th Amendment as the spiritual cornerstone of liberation, not the more commonly cited 14<sup>th</sup>—an audacious reimagining of justice.*

#### **A beacon, not just a sanctuary**

Murray's sermon, “*Light of the World*,” delivered in chapel during her time at VTS, stands out as a gem of prophetic clarity. Her call for the church to be a beacon of justice echoes through the seminary halls even today. The impact of her voice extended beyond VTS—Ruth Bader Ginsburg would later cite Murray's legal scholarship in key gender equality cases.

Dean Woods didn't simply make room for Murray. He nurtured the soil in which her theology—rooted in liberation and belonging—could flourish. Their quiet collaboration marked a pivotal moment in Episcopal history: a prophetic witness in service of a more inclusive church.

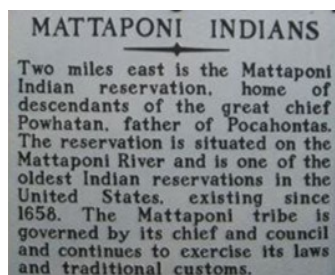
~ David Ewing



David Ewing

*“[Murray’s] call for the church to be a beacon of justice echoes through the seminary halls even today.”*

## How you can participate in the diocesan pilgrimage



**MATTAPONI INDIANS**  
Two miles east is the Mattaponi Indian reservation, home of descendants of the great chief Powhatan, father of Pocahontas. The reservation is situated on the Mattaponi River and is one of the oldest Indian reservations in the United States, existing since 1658. The Mattaponi tribe is governed by its chief and council and continues to exercise its laws and traditional customs.



**HISTORIC SLAVE TRAIL**



IN MEMORY OF THE AFRO AMERICANS WHO SERVED AS SLAVES AT MOUNT VERNON THIS MONUMENT MARKING THEIR BURIAL GROUND DEDICATED SEPTEMBER 21 1983 MOUNT VERNON LADIES' ASSOCIATION



LAUGHTER

Most of us at Church of the Resurrection have opted out of the Diocese of Virginia's first Racial Justice and Healing Pilgrimage. To be held on Monday through Friday, September 22 through 26, this pilgrimage will begin and end each day in at the Roslyn Retreat and Conference Center in Richmond. It will be girded with prayer and discussion about each's day's events as the pilgrims visit places in our diocese associated with enslaving people.

Although many of us would like to participate, the main reason we have opted to out is that the pilgrimage may be more physically demanding than we can manage. And yet, there are ways that we can "participate" from afar.

On Sunday, September 22, we will send our two pilgrims (Rev'd Theresa and Verleah Kosloske) off with prayer at each service. Then, we can be with them in Spirit throughout the week, both in prayer and by remaining aware of where the pilgrims visited that day.

We know that this cannot approach the spiritual rewards of the pilgrims themselves, as their ventures will give them new connections in community, discussion, and prayer throughout the week.

And yet, we can only do what we can do. So, here's *your* ONLINE pilgrimage assignments:

- Monday, September 22, read about the [Mattaponi](#) and [Upper Mattaponi](#).
- Tuesday, September 23, read about the [Richmond Slave Trail](#).
- Wednesday, September 24, "visit" [Mount Vernon](#) and [Alexandria](#).
- Thursday, September 25, "visit" the [University of Virginia](#) and [Charlottesville](#).
- Friday, September 26, visit the house cellar and [south yard dwellings](#) at James Madison's plantation at Montpelier.

We will have the opportunity to gather on Zoom each night at 7:30 to 7:45 pm that week for Compline to pray for our pilgrims as they explore the often-untold chapters of Virginia's racial history, and for racial justice and healing. In this small way, we too can participate in the pilgrimage.

[Zoom link](#)

Meeting ID: 819 3667 8708

Passcode: 776175

~ Rev'd Jo Belser

## The Alexandria City Remembrance Project

The Alexandria City Remembrance Project continues to move forward uncovering and revealing the City's full history, including its role in enslavement and the domestic slave trade, the contributions of free blacks and contrabands, the terrors of the Jim Crow era, the hard work of civil right leaders, and the connections to the present day. These efforts offer opportunities for education and reflection.

Throughout the year, Resurrection's Racial Justice and Healing Team offers community opportunities for education, reflection, prayer, and action.

In August, we invited you to attend events at Resurrection as well as those sponsored by the City of Alexandria, and events at St. Martin de Porres Episcopal Church.

On Thursday, August 7, we watched and discussed the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project's "Resolved, Never Again." This documentary includes the City's truth-telling work and pilgrimage to the Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama. We discussed the role of this work in our faith lives at Resurrection and its impact across the community.

On Friday, August 8, members of our Racial Justice and Healing Team attended the annual remembrance of Benjamin Thomas, lynched in Alexandria 126 years ago. Dr. [Steven Hahn](#), winner of

the Pulitzer Prize in History spoke about this Nation's long relationship with political violence, racial terror, and the perpetual struggle to fulfill the promise of democracy made in the Declaration of Independence, and the U.S. Constitution and the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. This lecture was held in the Shiloh Baptist Church worship center because of its historical connection and importance to the story of Benjamin Thomas, who was lynched in Alexandria on August 8, 1899.

We will watch and discuss "Vigilantes Inc." on **August 21**. The evening will begin with a potluck dinner at 6:00 pm before the movie. The film explores voter suppression efforts during the last several years and their connection to our nation's history. It includes the experiences of people whose names were removed from voter rolls by others and the actions that we can each take to ensure we and others are not removed. The Episcopal Church understands voting rights suppression of eligible voters as a denial that everyone is made in image of God.

St. Martin de Porres's Racial Justice Ministry will offer the final three episodes of the miniseries "Roots" on Sunday evenings at 5:00 pm on August 10, 17, and 24 for viewing and discussing. Bring food to share. Drinks and desserts are provided. This event is at the Olivet

Campus on Franconia Road.

Looking ahead, beginning with September 8, the Racial Justice and Healing team will offer Centering Prayer in-person at Resurrection, each Monday from 6:00 to 7:00 pm. Centering Prayer is a method and discipline that can open us to a deeper relationship with God. We will provide information about Centering Prayer, what it is and what it is not, in the weeks ahead.

Each time we say the Confession and receive Absolution, we recall the things we have done, and the things done on our behalf. We ask for the strength and courage to live out the new life made visible through Jesus and the Resurrection. Please join us in the tangible work that exemplifies this in our community.

~ The Rev'd Theresa Lewallen



*The Rev'd.  
Theresa Lewallen*

### Join us in prayer for our immigrant neighbors

Wednesday, August 13, 7:00 pm, Interfaith Immigration Prayer Service (on Zoom) led by [Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy](#)

VICPP will host a virtual prayer service focused on welcoming and supporting the immigrant community. Hear about the shared call to welcome the stranger from various religious traditions and listen to testimonies from those who have experienced being newcomers to the United States. [Register](#) to receive the Zoom link.



## A peek ahead at Sunday Forums

Kat Turner has been watching the public television series *Renaissance: The Blood and the Beauty* and it has caused her to think about King . So, come to Forum on October 12 to hear what Kat has to share with us.

Meanwhile, here are the other Forums currently contemplated or scheduled, with the caveat that some might change:

- 8/17, **Joshua**, Rev'd Jo Let's explore what's happening in the Middle East today in light of the Book of Joshua
- 8/24, **Jacob**, Linda Goff will lead us in thinking about the Jewish patriarch Jacob
- 8/31, To be announced, (still working on it)
- 9/7, Homes for All, Rev'd Jo will report about the October 19 Homes for All assembly: what it hopes to accomplish and who's going to attend.
- 9/14, Psalms, Rev'd Katherine is going to help us think about the Psalms
- 9/21, Reserved for conversation about our September 16 Vestry meeting, where we begin to budget and set our stewardship goal for 2026
- 9/28, Rev'd Katherine will tell us about Latino ministry



*Title slide of a recent Forum, led by Linda Goff*

### Clergy & Staff

#### Rector

[The Rev'd Jo J. Belser](#)

#### Deacon

[The Rev'd Theresa Lewallen](#)

#### Priest Associate

The Rev'd Katherine V. Ferguson

#### Pianist

Michael Lewallen

#### Bookkeeper

Holly Zarazinski

#### Parish

#### Administrator

Angie Armwood

#### Sexton

Beltway Cleaning, Inc.

## Garden update and invitation to join



*Our newest garden steps*

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Vestry for supporting the installation of steps to replace the gravel path on the right side of the garden. The steep incline

had made the original path difficult to navigate—and to work from—so this improvement is a welcome change. The new steps now mirror the extended left-side path added last year.

The garden continues to offer joy, not only to those who tend it, but also to those who come to sit, reflect, and meditate. It's a delight to see individuals from both The Spire and Goodwin House spending time there regularly.

That said, a few of us who began working in this garden more than five years

ago are beginning to age out due to the physical demands. We'd love to welcome new hands and fresh energy into this space.

Whether you're an experienced gardener or simply curious to learn, your presence would be truly valued. If you're interested in joining our next group effort, please share your contact information with me at [cpmim@yahoo.com](mailto:cpmim@yahoo.com). Come give it a try—we think you'll find it rewarding.

~ Carolyn McDonald & David Ewing

## Is our church 3/4 full, or 1/4 empty?

*(Continued from page 2)*

I think that name was meant for us. God knew that we would need hope now. This is because God brought us to this place and God does not abandon those he calls. God keeps his promises.

In Mark 9:14-29, a father brought his ill son to Jesus and said, "...if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." Jesus responded by saying, "If you can?"... Everything is possible for one who believes." In response, the father cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Pessimism undermines our faith in Christ. However, it is possible to decrease our pessimism and increase our faith. The first step is by recognizing who we are, individually and corporately, in Christ. We are loved by Christ and called by Christ.

Church of the Resurrection, for example, was called by Christ into this new life on Hope Way. Look around you and notice how many new people our church has; see the building  $\frac{3}{4}$  full instead of  $\frac{1}{4}$  empty. Then get prepared to invest anew in this enterprise that we have been called into creating, this enterprise in which you have already invested your earthly life.



*What do you see?  
Something lost or hope for our future.*

I hope that something in these thousand words will cause you to reflect on God's promise to us and our faith in that promise. If words won't convince you, how about a picture (see above) and a prayer or two (see below)?

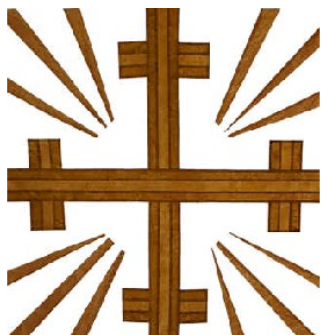
The picture is of Al Tiedemann (who now lives in Fredericksburg) serving Communion to a much younger Emma Payne. At the time, we were worshiping in Immanuel Chapel at Virginia Theological Seminary. In the background are tuna cans for our food pantry. I am showing you this photo because it shows our love,

and love lives on and begets new love.

Now for the prayer:  
*Lord, I admit that at times I wonder what the future of our beloved Resurrection Community will be, and even what MY future will be. But today I cry out, "Help my unbelief!" Thank you for your love for me and for this church that you have nurtured into new life. I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

Then, too, you can pray the apostles' prayer, "Increase our faith!" (Luke 17:5)

*~ Rev'd Jo Belser*



## Church of the Resurrection

2800 Hope Way  
Alexandria 22311-2220

### About InSpire

*InSpire* is the monthly newsletter of the Church of the Resurrection, describing the people of our congregation and our faith journey together. The following individuals contributed to this issue of *InSpire*:

- The Rev'd Jo Belser
- David Ewing
- Lea Fowlie, editor
- Lenore Funkhouser, photos
- The Rev'd Theresa Lewallen
- Wes McBeth
- Carolyn McDonald

Church of the Resurrection serves the people in the Beauregard Corridor of the City of Alexandria, home to many recent immigrants. In April 2021, Resurrection completed an eight-year mission to provide 113 units of affordable housing to its community.

## Prayer opportunities coming soon

### Centering Prayer

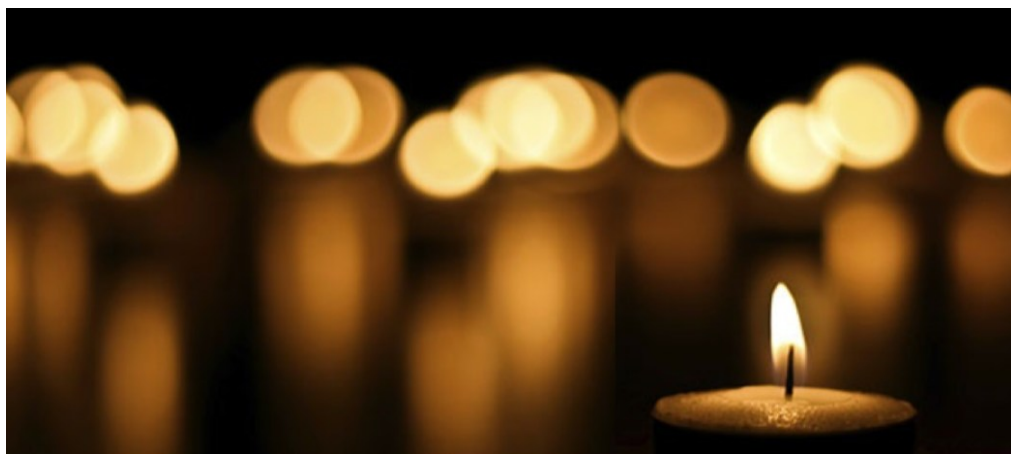
A form of silent prayer that aims to quiet the mind and open oneself to God's transforming grace to deepen one's relationship with God.

Every Monday at Resurrection, 6:00 to 7:00 pm, beginning September 8

### Taizé Prayer

A form of prayer that uses simple, meditative chants. Taizé services foster a sense of unity and contemplation.

First Wednesdays at Fairlington United Methodist Church, 7:00 pm, beginning September 3



### Prayer for immigrants

Led by Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy

Wednesday, August 13,  
7:00 pm, Zoom (Register: <https://tinyurl.com/4w5j6buy>)

### Prayer for our pilgrims

Compline with prayers for our racial justice pilgrims

Daily, September 22 –26, 7:30 pm, Zoom (<https://tinyurl.com/4z83jbju>)