FROM THE PASTOR

As we move through Lent towards Easter, we are equipping ourselves to both be and build what Martin Luther King called the Beloved Community. To that end, we are delving into practices that foster that aim. Our Lenten sermon series was inspired by the On Being, a nonprofit media and public life initiative. The information below comes from the grounding virtues that guide that work and our worship in this season. Our hope is that you incorporate these practices into your personal and corporate spiritual disciplines to better equip you as a citizen here on earth and in the Realm of God.

Grounding Virtues
What we practice, we become. Virtues are not the stuff of saints and heroes. They are spiritual technologies and tools for the art of living.

Words That Matter
We are starved for fresh language to approach each other. We need what Elizabeth Alexander calls “words that shimmer” — words with power that convey real truth, which cannot be captured in mere fact. Words have the force of action and become virtues in and of themselves. The words we use shape how we understand ourselves, how we interpret the world, how we treat others. Words are one of our primary ways to reach across the mystery of each other. As technology reframes the meaning of basic human acts like making and leading and belonging, the world needs the most vivid and transformative universe of words we can muster.

Hospitality
Hospitality is a bridge to all the great virtues, but it is immediately accessible. You don’t have to love or forgive or feel compassion to extend hospitality. But it’s more than an invitation. It is the creation of an inviting, trustworthy space — an atmosphere as much as a place. It shapes the experience to follow. It creates the intention, the spirit, and the boundaries for what is possible. As creatures, it seems, we imagine a homogeneity in other groups that we know not to be there in our own. But new social realities are brought into being over time by a quality of relationship between unlikely combinations of people. When in doubt, practice hospitality.

Humility
Humility is a companion to curiosity, surprise, and delight. Spiritual humility is not about getting small. It is about encouraging others to be big. It is not about debasing oneself but about approaching everything and everyone with a readiness to be surprised and delighted. This is the humility of the child. It is the humility in the spirituality of the scientist and the mystic — to be planted in what you know, while living expectantly for discoveries yet to come. The wisest people we’ve interviewed carry a humility that manifests as tenderness in a creative interplay with power.

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**Patience**

Like humility, patience is not to be mistaken for meekness and ineffectuality. It can be the fruit of a full-on reckoning with reality — a commitment to move through the world as it is, not as we wish it to be. A spiritual view of time is a long view of time — seasonal and cyclical, resistant to the illusion of time as a bully, time as a matter of deadlines. Human transformation takes time — longer than we want it to — but it is what is necessary for social transformation. A long, patient view of time will replenish our sense of our capacities and our hope for the world.

**Generous Listening**

Listening is an everyday art and virtue, but it’s an art we have lost and must learn anew. Listening is more than being quiet while others have their say. It is about presence as much as receiving; it is about connection more than observing. Real listening is powered by curiosity. It involves vulnerability — a willingness to be surprised, to let go of assumptions and take in ambiguity. It is never in “gotcha” mode. The generous listener wants to understand the humanity behind the words of the other and patiently summons one’s own best self and one’s own most generous words and questions.

**Adventurous Civility**

The adventure of civility for our time can’t be a mere matter of politeness or niceness. Adventurous civility honors the difficulty of what we face and the complexity of what it means to be human. It doesn’t celebrate diversity by putting it up on a pedestal and ignoring its messiness and its depths. The intimate and civilization-al questions that perplex and divide us will not be resolved quickly. Civility, in our world of change, is about creating new possibilities for living forward while being different and even continuing to hold profound disagreement.

These Grounding Virtues are resources in The Civil Conversations Project.

https://onbeing.org/civil-conversations-project/the-six-grounding-virtues-of-the-on-being-project/

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**Covid-19**

We have now been living with Covid-19 for a full year. We last gathered for worship inside the Meeting House on March 8, 2020. In that time, researchers and scientists developed multiple highly effective vaccines. Daily, we hear of more people inoculated, and give thanks to God each time for the skill and responsiveness of scientists, medical and community workers, along with members of the National Guard who make it possible.

People are covid-weary, but the covid is not yet weary of us. We must remain vigilant; hope is in sight. With each vaccine administered, we get closer to resuming in person worship and gatherings. As Roy Wood Jr. put it, “Let the vaccination be your salvation from your isolation!” When you wear a mask and get vaccinated, you are doing this for more than just yourself. Jesus taught us to love our neighbors as ourselves and to care for the most vulnerable among us. This means protecting your neighbor from sickness and harm.

Observing these simple practices demonstrate your respect and care for others. This is loving your neighbor. Some people are unable to get vaccinated, therefore those of us who are able do so in order to protect those who cannot. You might believe that this virus won’t affect you, however, taking precautions serves to safeguard those around you. As Christians we are to demonstrate our love of God in our care for others. Wearing a mask and getting vaccinated are ways of living this love.

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(Covid-19 continued)

As a trio of ethicists, Matthew Arbo, C. Ben Mitchell and Andrew T. Walker, observed:

"If by the minimal burden of wearing a mask, we can potentially protect others from grave illness, then it seems we have a moral obligation to wear a mask. The same can be said for COVID-19 vaccinations. If by being vaccinated we can protect others from illness, then we have a corresponding obligation, given our Lord’s command to love neighbors, to be vaccinated. Vaccinations not only protect me, but also protect other vulnerable members of society."

Some are leery of vaccines. Given the experience of minorities in the hands of the medical community, this wariness is warranted. At the same time, this virus disproportionately affects these same communities. While Black, Latinx and Native American people are dying from COVID-19 at almost three times the rate of white people, according to the CDC, they are currently receiving fewer vaccinations per capita. Around the world, churches have become vaccination sites in order to address this inequity.

All vaccinations released to the public in the United States go through safety testing before being licensed by the FDA and recommended for widespread use. Given the stakes with this virus, scrutiny was particularly intense. As Christians, we should be mindful of what we put into our bodies and how we care for our bodies. Scripture doesn’t discuss vaccinations, but does speak about being faithful stewards of what God gives us. We are called to investigate, make informed decisions, and not take our life for granted. This is a good case for preventative care and the COVID-19 vaccine. If you need help making an appointment, church folks are willing to help you out.

There is a lot of confusion and misinformation concerning COVID-19 vaccines. Individuals may have personal reasons for temporary or indefinite refusal. You have the right to decline precautions or vaccination, but must accept the repercussions, in your own life and in the lives of others. Be aware of any agenda that exists to harm public health and the common good. Don’t make decisions based on fear. God gives us minds and science and good counsel to inform our actions. Verify that the information you rely on is sound and certifiable. Evaluate evidence from reliable sources, then pray and seek wisdom. In the midst of all the confusion about vaccines, Christians don’t have to be confused. Receive the gift of vaccines as an act of love and service to God and neighbor.

Rhode Island Hospital/Lifespan, Johns Hopkins
accelerating paid Covid-19 clinical trial enrollment in Provi-

Rhode Island Hospital/Lifespan Brown Emergency Medicine and Johns Hopkins University are halfway to having enough people in a clinical trial to know whether giving the blood plasma of someone who’s recovered from Covid-19 to someone exposed or newly diagnosed can prevent them from getting a bad case of the disease. We could know within a month of full enrollment if these treatments are effective at making the disease easier to live with.

To speed up discovery and hopefully find another treatment faster to complement vaccine rollout – and to contribute to understanding of how plasma has the potential to be one of the most effective and responsive treatments against variants – researchers are doubling down on enrollment in Providence.

Providence is one of the prioritized trial locations because of Rhode Island Hospital/Lifespan Brown Emergency Medicine’s ability to do more blood transfusions.

The researchers are hoping you have some time to chat so they can explain:

- Why plasma if we have vaccines? How convalescent plasma could fit into the broader treatment arsenal, and why it’s important to rural and low-income areas (and countries)
- What’s involved? Including details on the health coverage and access to top medical staff that’s available to all participants
- Plasma and variants: How the body responds to viruses, and what that means for plasma’s possible role in treating emerging virus variants.

Would you be game for an interview? Alternatively, might you have space to share the details below on trial enrollment in an update to your readers?

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Covid-19 Clinical Trial Accelerating Enrollment in Providence: Rhode Island Hospital/Lifespan Brown Emergency Medicine and Johns Hopkins University are halfway to full enrollment for two Covid-19 treatment and prevention studies and seek paid volunteers to help find another new treatment faster.

You may be eligible to participate if you:

- Were tested for Covid-19 no more than 5 days ago and were positively diagnosed, still have symptoms, but haven’t been hospitalized
- Were in close contact with someone who has Covid-19 no more than 3 days ago, but don’t have any symptoms

This clinical trial will determine whether giving people antibodies via a blood transfusion is effective at treating early-stage coronavirus and in preventing those exposed to it from catching the disease.

Who: Individuals over age 18 who meet the criteria above. Additional screening details are available at covidplasmatrial.org.

Where: Trials are being conducted on-site at Rhode Island Hospital/Lifespan Brown Emergency Medicine (55 Claverick St, 2nd Fl, Providence, RI 02903).
(Covid-19 Clinical Trials continued)

**Will participants be compensated?** Yes. More details are available via the website or phone number below. Healthcare will be provided.

Intriguingly, proving plasma is effective in an outpatient setting could open up its outpatient use for other diseases, too.

**When: Enrolling now. If you think you’ve been exposed, or are newly diagnosed and have symptoms, contact Johns Hopkins at [888-506-1199](tel:888-506-1199) or [www.covidplasmatrial.org](http://www.covidplasmatrial.org) – if too many days pass, you may not qualify to participate.**

**Do I qualify?:** Call [888-506-1199](tel:888-506-1199), or visit [www.covidplasmatrial.org](http://www.covidplasmatrial.org) to take the enrollment questionnaire.

**Why does this trial matter?** This is the first U.S. multi-center, double-blind, randomized clinical trial to assess the effectiveness of convalescent blood plasma as an outpatient therapy. Antibodies are one of the best options being tested for treatment and prevention. If this option is deemed effective, it would be one of the lower-cost options for treating and/or preventing coronavirus illness worldwide, compared to vaccines, which might be too costly for some populations and countries.

**Why do we need this research if vaccines are on the way?**

1. Plasma doesn’t need cold storage. If it’s proven effective, it could be a solution in rural areas with smaller hospitals and clinics, worldwide.
2. Unlike vaccines, treatment with plasma doesn’t need production ramp-up time. The collection and distribution network for plasma are already regulated and stable.
3. The body adapts faster than a lab can. Plasma might be the solution we need to new variants.
4. Since this treatment carries no intellectual property, it can be provided at a lower cost than a proprietary drug or vaccine.

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**America for Christ offering 2021**

The America for Christ (AFC) is one of the four annual offerings of American Baptists USA. Thanks to AFC contributions, American Baptist Home Mission Societies supported communities distressed by the devastation of COVID-19 last year, as the pandemic swept our country and Puerto Rico. They also helped families who lost homes to floods, wildfires and storms, along with children living on the edge because of poverty. These are just a few of the ways this offering helps to minister to those in need. Please help continue to bring healing and hope to communities, families and children in 2021 by supporting this year’s America for Christ Offering. You can donate by writing a check to FBCIA with AFC on the memo line or by donating online and writing AFC in the notes area. Thank you for your continued support of our outreach programs.
ANNOUNCEMENTS

Video Link for Sunday Service: If you would like to watch the Sunday worship services Jamie and Stephen create, go to Stephen’s YouTube Page 3pigsfly. There you will find both the current weekly offering, as well as past services from prior weeks. Susan Lepore will also be posting them to Facebook and our website at www.fbcia.org.
Page link: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLInI4s_X9s3mWz9phDdiOliag7eqRshvGF

Zoom Coffee Hour: Please don’t forget to join us on the First Sunday of each month at 11:00 am for a Zoom Coffee Hour. We begin in a Zoom room with all participants then we divide into random small groups to meet and chat. Some groups may have members and friends we may not know because they sat on the opposite side of the church from us. It’s a great way to meet and greet new members and new friends. The link will be sent out along with the service info.