

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER | CHURCH OF THE LAMB, PENN LAIRD, VA



Abiding Together This Fall

August is a big transition month here at Church of the Lamb. We say goodbye to our new friend and interim pastor Ben Sharpe. At the same time, we welcome back the Whitfield family from their three-month Sabbatical, anticipating great stories, fresh insights, and rapid reintegration into our church family life together. We also begin saying goodbye to summer escapades, cherishing our fresh crop of memories, as our younger members return to their school rhythms. And we as a church body gear up to return to our spiritual formation groups for adults and Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) for the kids. Officially, these begin the week of September 10. But in August, our leaders get some extra training and preparation time as we anticipate with joy the work that God has in store for us this year.

Mid-August, we will provide a list of all the group options available at Church of the Lamb this fall. Begin praying now that God will show you how He wants you to participate in "Abiding as Disciples of Christ" with your spiritual community this year. While we all have different personalities, seasons of life, and time available for this, we all need community if we are to grow in our discipleship. God designed us to need each other. As Paul writes, "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all

have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another (Romans 12:4-5)." This even applies to introverts!

That said, some of us tend to overcommit, feeling pressured to sign up for every good thing that comes our way. Others are terrified of commitment because of the sacrifices that might be required. But as you seek God in discernment day to day, do so through the lens of Jesus' words to the frantic Martha in Luke 10, "few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

What do you "need" in this new season? What will help you grow closer to God and to His people? How will you practice abiding in Him? Where are you being invited to trust Him more? Please take some time to pray about your fall schedule. Talk it over with someone who loves you. And then—choose "what is better".

Zoe Hansen

Interim Director of Spiritual Formation

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."



Abiding in Action

What is God teaching me about abiding in His kingdom? Somehow the thought of abiding seemed easy to me—picture peaceful, rolling vineyards, Italian sunsets, sweet delectable fruit. Abiding in God, as the spreading obedient branches of grapevines, seems a safe place to be. Little did I know how naïve my simplistic view of abiding really was.

Last year I encountered some trials at work that challenged my faith and sent me searching for the safety of an abiding presence with God in deeper ways than I had before. What I found, though, was anything but safe—as C. S. Lewis says (and I paraphrase), “God is not safe, but He is good.” So I’ve been digging into the idea of abiding for the past year or so as a way of grounding.

To uncover this concept of abiding, I tried the practice of Lectio Divina with the John chapter 15 “I am the vine, you are the branches” passage. Dwelling on the passage certainly brings out a fresh richness on the symbolism of vines and abiding, which left me hungry for more, so I started reading Beth Moore’s book, *Chasing Vines*. In it she explores the vineyard metaphor, every component of which is richly drenched in meaning. She introduced me to the word *terrior* meaning “place, setting, soil and climate”. How important to consider where God has planted me in the work He has given me to do.

Nowhere is the power of place—of feeling rooted, and experiencing the trauma of being uprooted—more clear to me than in the hearts and lives of my foster daughters. I’m hoping others in the church may join me in this journey of sharing our homes and lives with those who need to find their true home in God. So many of you have come alongside me in the fostering journey and celebrate with me when they do come to join the family of God. I want my abiding soul to ground them too.



One aspect that God has been opening my eyes to appreciate is the connectedness among the branches. While the connection to the Vine is most important, I have come to truly appreciate afresh the connectedness of us all as a church family. Having a small group to lean into the book of Hebrews deeply together has rooted me and helped my abiding journey. I’ve also been blessed to meet together with a small group of women in the church supporting each other as we seek God and struggle to translate our head knowledge of faith into heart and hands. I’ve clearly seen that abiding isn’t meant to be done in isolation.

Nothing seems to be more important than learning how to abide. I’ve been working on a *rule of life* now for awhile, inspired by the book we all read in small groups, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Peter Scazzero. He encourages the use of the Daily Office and practicing the Sabbath, spiritual disciplines which form the trellis to strengthen and shape the branches as they grow from the Vine. It is His work in progress: to add a richer Sabbath to “stop, rest, delight, contemplate,” and a consistent Daily Office to deepen/sharpen my attention to abiding in the moments of the day.

I highlighted this thought from Scazzero that our goal is “union with God in Christ, transformation into His image, and the freeing of our hearts from anything that stands in the way of Christ living in and through us” (p. 199). That seems a clear representation of the fruit of abiding.

I love this term that Ben used in one of his recent sermons—radical generosity. Maybe that’s abiding in action? I see it as the action verb form of abiding, trusting God to work through us even when we are weak. I get to witness radical generosity through my work in Kenya through a great spirit of hospitality from those who have so little but give so much, a joy-filled people despite famine and drought. Nasaruni Academy and High School are the outgrowth of God’s design and my own *terrior* on the other side of the world. I feel deeply privileged to be on global mission with Him serving young Maasai girls as they seek to know Him. As I participate with Him in His work here in the Valley and with our brothers and sisters in Kenya, I learn about God’s abiding love and radical generosity through those very ones I serve.

Michelle Cude

Michelle is a Professor of Teacher Education at JMU and lives on a farm in Elkton. She loves sharing about her work in Kenya and about her passion for fostering kids in community. You will usually find her at church accompanied by kids she has chosen to love.

Enjoying Jesus in the Atrium



Hundreds of years ago, after a night of prayer, a woman heard God's invitation: "Enjoy me." What if, when we considered our life with Jesus, we started there? Before all the doing and learning, there is being.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd environments (atria) are spaces where being precedes doing. When children are 3–6 years old, the environment created for them and the ways their catechists (adults in the atria) interact with them show them who the Good Shepherd is. They hear how he wants to be close to them, to lead them and call them by name. The call to obedience comes later when children are a bit older, but first we long for them to hear, "Enjoy me." The atrium is a new Eden where children walk in the garden with God for a few hours.

I realize this can sound fluffy and hypothetical. What does it mean to enjoy God? In the atria it looks like being free to create art, nurture plants, learn to be slow enough to hear God by physical actions like hand washing. (This sounds strange, but it's beautiful—ask a catechist about this!) And then there are the presentations that relate to liturgy and the Scriptures. You need to visit an atria to experience them for yourself, but I will share a story that might give you a glimmer.

In the spring of 2022, when one of the seven-year-old boys wanted to work with the Last Supper materials, I lit the candle and read the words of Scripture to him. The boy then carefully took each of the 13 figures out one by one and set them all around the little wooden table with the bread and wine on top. He asked me to read another booklet too. It simply stated Jesus' words about his gifts to us: "This is my body, given for you. This is my blood, shed for you." The boy snuffed out the candles. He replaced all the figures, one by one into their box. Jesus stood alone and then at last joined the others. Over the following weeks, the boy asked me to do this with him multiple times.

Remembering his slow intention as he set up each piece fills me with a sweet joy. I truly believe he received something precious from Jesus during his times meditating on this important moment of Jesus' life. Does he understand theories of atonement or grasp the nuances of how the Eucharist "works"? No. And he doesn't need to. He has Jesus. He heard what Jesus said. He knows the gift isn't just for the 12 guys in the box. It's for him. It's for me, observing then and remembering now. It's for you, entering this memory with me. Perhaps he received something entirely different. Perhaps he simply enjoyed the silence and heard the words of Jesus. I don't know; he didn't tell me. That is between him and God. I'm the matchmaker with the privilege of introducing the child and God. Then I step back and let the Holy Spirit do the real work.

We are all hungry for Jesus (famished, really). We encounter him in many ways: Scripture, prayer, by being with him in creation. Add the atrium to your list. Yes, I am seriously suggesting that every adult in our church visits an atrium to work with the Last Supper (or other) materials. I have a picture on my wall at home of a wooden figure of Jesus with his hands open, flat in front of him. I sat on the floor before this figure during one of our catechist trainings, placed the bread on one hand and the chalice on the other, then sat and looked at Jesus. I keep that picture because his eyes so intently tell me that these are for me, that he is for me, that he wants to be with me.

Becoming a catechist changed how I see and am with children. I don't want them to achieve something in the atria. I don't want them to "make me proud" because they know the "right" answer. I want them to encounter Jesus. I want them to learn to be with him before they are asked to do anything for him. With all my heart, I want them to hear, "Enjoy me." And honestly, I want to keep hearing that too.

Kelly Ostergren

Director of Operations
and trained CGS Catechist



Why We Care About the Land the Way We Do

God installed the first humans as lords of creation and told them to “be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.” Now, He certainly meant that they should have babies, but He meant a great deal more than that: He wanted to exercise their authority, governing all created things so that they flourished and produced abundance and beauty. The critical thing to notice is that this command never gets amended, replaced, or rendered obsolete. God still intends for us to rule wisely and justly, to call all the created things under our influence to fulfill the purposes for which they were designed.

This is hard work, and typically we humans have found it much easier to abuse or abandon our authority than to exercise it creatively. At times, we rule harshly, extract value, lord it over those less powerful, and dominate. At other times, we remain passive, leave the earth barren, and surrender our domain to other rulers or the whims of nature. In both instances, creation suffers, which is why Paul tells us that the creation groans, eagerly awaiting the day when our redemption will be complete—because its redemption will coincide with ours. Thus, the proper question for each Christian is this: Are the areas, the people, the places, the resources under my domain being ruled well? Are they flourishing? Which areas have I dominated or ruled harshly? Which areas have I abandoned to decay or dilapidation?

As you might imagine, the answers to these questions have weighed heavily upon our vision for the Abbey—Church of the Lamb’s effort to this renewed life on our property—and upon the Land Team, which leads our efforts to flesh out this vision. Three implications (for the moment) spring to my mind.

First, we do not imagine our property as a pristine, untrammled wilderness free from human cohabitation or the marks of our cultivation. This would be to remove the human element and abdicate our throne. Nature preserves inspire awe and wonder, and they have their place testifying to God’s singular power, but they are often harsh and uninhabitable. By contrast, Eden was a garden and a home, two places where human rule should be evident. We’re trying to turn our

property into a beautiful home fit for God’s people and his creatures to abide together.

Second, to rule appropriately requires that we encourage the subjects of our rule to become their most authentic selves by embracing their created identities and contributing their unique gifts. Put more simply, you might say we respect the “pigness of the pig.” When the pig is set loose to do the things God endowed him to do, he works miracles: he turns food waste and wood chips into rich compost; he aerates the soil; he digs up stubborn roots—all while turning himself into delicious bacon. When the pig is abandoned to his own devices, however, he builds a sty. Our job is to recognize his gifts and our ecosystem’s needs and organize his labor to produce beauty and goodness.

Last, the implicit assumption of the Genesis account is that it’s possible to establish symbiotic systems where different components mutually support and benefit one another. In Eden, there was no scarcity mindset; the flourishing of one part of the ecosystem did not entail the detriment of others. We’re conducting a symphony at the Abbey, telling each “instrument” what notes to play and when. And when we assume that God created all the creatures, plants, and people and that they each have a proper role to play, we can view all of them not as obstacles to overcome but as opportunities to exercise our rule. A fallen limb isn’t a barrier to our paths;

it’s a misplaced wood chip that could become bedding for chickens, who will turn it into compost for gardens, which grow tasty tomatoes with which we may feed to our neighbors or sell, reinvesting the profit back into the land, all while creating warm friendships and testifying that folks should taste and see that the Lord is good, and His mercy endures forever.

Blessings,

Daniel Zimmerman

Director of the Abbey

Meet Church of the Lamb Member: Ryan Martin



I live in Harrisonburg and am a Shenandoah Valley native. I was raised conservative Mennonite, and in 2020, I felt like I was ready for a change and began visiting different churches. The first Sunday that I attended Lamb, I immediately felt very welcomed. While I am grateful for my Mennonite heritage, I am really enjoying learning more about Anglicanism. At Church of the Lamb, I help with the Sunday morning setup and have been a part of the Crossroads Farm Parish Group.

I’m currently employed at Valley Structures, but in my free time, I enjoy working out in the gym, playing various sports, and the occasional short hike.