

THE WINDOW

On a journey with the living Christ; connecting with God, others, and the world.

January 2024

Lamentations, Refugees and West Hills Church

Rene Padilla, Elder for Personnel

Much of my professional life centers on refugees, delving into aspects of their lives including understanding the complex reasons for their displacement, examining the psychological impact, evaluating legal frameworks for human rights protection, analyzing living conditions in camps, exploring educational opportunities, assessing healthcare accessibility, understanding social integration processes, investigating long-term economic challenges, and exploring efforts to preserve cultural identity. Constant exposure to traumatic narratives, dire living conditions, and refugees' profound struggles takes an emotional toll. Engaging with intimate details of displacement requires addressing my own vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and heightened helplessness. For a long time, I asked myself: *How and where do my professional and West Hills lives intersect?*

Refugees' lives may seem distant from a church congregation's dynamics, yet the Book of Lamentations, traditionally ascribed to Jeremiah, resonates poignantly with their struggles. This collection of poetic reflections, recounting the destruction of Jerusalem during the Babylonian conquest in 586 B.C., offers unexpected guidance on interpersonal relationships within a church community.

In times of profound loss, catharsis becomes essential for individuals and communities to cope with intense emotions. Lamentations, starting with deep sorrow over Jerusalem's devastation, provided the Israelites a channel for *expressing overwhelming grief, pain, and despair*. Similarly, validating refugees' sorrow recognizes the legitimacy of their emotions, fostering understanding and empathy. In congregational relationships, this underscores the importance of empathy and recognizing others' struggles. Acknowledging individual and collective challenges cultivates compassion within a congregation, forming a supportive community foundation.

Lamentations is not merely a venting of sorrow but also a platform for *spiritual reflection, repentance, and renewal*. The destruction of Jerusalem was perceived to be a consequence of the Israelites' disobedience and moral failings. Expressing deep sorrow became intertwined with a call to repentance, prompting individuals to reflect on their actions and turn back to their faith and commitment to God. For refugees, reflecting on the root causes of conflict and their displacement is essential for informed reconciliation efforts. In the context of church relationships, repentance involves acknowledging and taking responsibility for any of one's own actions or attitudes that may have fueled a conflict, willingness to admit mistakes, apologizing when necessary, and actively working towards reconciliation.

Finally, hope emerges as a powerful theme in Lamentations, signifying the *belief in the possibility of renewal even in the face of despair*. Jeremiah reminds the Israelites, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end, they are new every morning; great is [His] faithfulness" (v. 3:31-32). Although Lamentations envisions the restoration of the city of Jerusalem,

Lamentations, Refugees and West Hills Church, continued

this is only a symbol of reconciliation and a renewed covenant relationship between God and the Israelites. The struggles are not to be forgotten—instead, they are a powerful reminder of where God met them. The hope of a fresh start is a powerful motivator for refugees and displaced persons at various stages of their journey. “Trauma-informed” care is an approach that recognizes and responds to the ongoing impact of past trauma, emphasizing transparency and choice in communication, avoiding retraumatizing triggers, and developing paths toward healing and future dreams. Likewise, building community within a church congregation involves recognizing and addressing past hurts, working towards understanding the root causes of conflicts, fostering empathy, and implementing measures to prevent the recurrence of similar grievances.

The answer to my persistent question is not about how my professional and West Hills lives intersect. Instead, it is about where all our lives intersect: For the Israelites, refugees, and us as West Hills Church, the hope is in a deeper transformation of our relationship with God and each other that will be the foundation for justice, forgiveness, and sustainable peace in this world.

Spiritual Correspondence

Jana Prescott



1 Peter 2:4-6—*As you come to Him, the Living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to Him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture, it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.”* Now to who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who refuse to believe, they will stumble and fall.

So, where are you in Christ's calling to your life? Are you excited that Christ is with you, helping you grow stronger and stronger spiritually? Or are you stumbling spiritually, not sure which way Christ is leading you? To be quite honest, I know inside of me that Christ is leading me higher and higher toward Him, but there still is part of me that feels like He is still waiting: waiting for me to trust Him with all my heart. I'm really not sure how I can trust Him more. I guess all any of us “waiters” can do is trust Him to lift us up when the time is right. Just trust that we will not fall.

December Session Notes

Session approved:

- 2024 Communion dates to be held the first Sunday of each month and Maundy Thursday
- Calling of a Congregational Meeting for January 28, 2024, for the purpose of:
 - o Approving Minutes of 2023 Congregational Meetings
 - o Presenting the 2023 Annual Report
 - o Presenting 2023 Year-end Financials, the 2024 Budget
 - o Voting on Pastoral Compensation

Reviewed:

- o 2024 Stewardship & Capital Campaign Report
- o West Hills Church 2024 Budget Summary & Comparisons to Prior Years

January - February Calendar:

- o 1/16 Incoming Elders observe Session Meeting
- o 1/28 Ordination and Installation of new Elders and Deacons
- o 1/28 Annual Meeting, A.K.A. Super Supper
- o 2/6 InGathering (new Elders & Deacons participate fully)
- o 2/20 Session Meeting (new Elders participate fully)

January At A Glance

At West Hills our mission statement . . . On a journey with the living Christ; connecting with God, others, and the world, provides us with the framework for how we live our lives. Here are notable activities this month in the life of our church, seeking to connect us to God, others, and the world.

Sundays:

- Crosswalk Kids and Youth check-in at 8:50 a.m. in the lower level welcome area.
- Currently, the study “Abide—Living in Connection With God” is at 9 a.m. in the Chapel until February 4.
- Worship at 10 a.m. is livestreamed and in-person. Following worship, join us for fellowship in Geneva Lounge. For those not attending in-person, we welcome you to watch the service by livestream at: whcomaha.org/live

Monday Evenings - Bible Study Fellowship (BSF) for Men, Women, and Children/Teens studying the book of John. Preregistration is required, go to: bsfinternational.org

Tuesday Mornings - Men's Bible study meets at 7:00 a.m. in the large conference room #182. The group studies the scripture passage for the upcoming Sunday sermon.

Wednesday Mornings:

- Women's Bible study at 9:30 a.m. in the Chapel studying a video series where Pastor J.D. Greear walks through the second half of Paul's letter to the church in Rome.

Wednesday Evenings:

- Interactive Worship Space from 6-8 p.m. in the Youth Chapel.
- Women's Bible study at 6:30 p.m. in the Chapel on “Children of the Day” by Beth Moore.
- Men's Bible study at 7 p.m. in the large conference room #182.
- Emerging Adults Small Group from 8-9:15 p.m. for anyone 18-30 years of age. This group meets in the Youth Chapel.

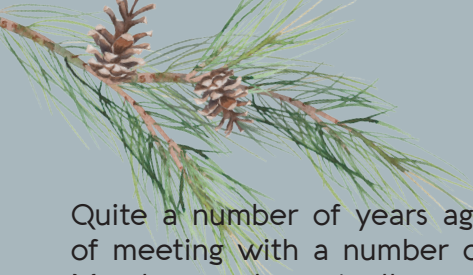
Thursday Mornings - Men and Women Bible study meets in the Chapel at 9:30 a.m. on “Comparing the Gospels.”

January 18 - Sloppy Joe Ministry drop-off at the church. Come between 9-4 to the north circle drive and drop your cooked sloppy joe meat and hamburger buns in the bins.

January 25 - Men's Night at Brazen Head stop by anytime after 5:30 p.m.

January 28 - Super Supper (Annual Church Meeting)

Chili Cook-Off for dinner begins at 5:30 p.m. and Annual Meeting at 6:15 p.m.



West Hills Church History

Gloria Zinn

Quite a number of years ago I had the pleasure of meeting with a number of West Hill's Charter Members and eventually wrote a story about their memories from the beginning of West Hills Church, circa 1959. I thought our readers, who may not have read that article in the Window, would enjoy reading about some of their memories. I also have included memories from a number of current church members who recalled the changes at West Hills after the 1983 addition.

In 1959, Don Duly, the first minister, had an office next to the Sanctuary, which is our current Chapel. His office was the small closet we now use to store the audio video equipment. It was also used on Sundays for one of the Sunday school classes. During the Christmas season church volunteers organized a live nativity scene, "using a real baby in place of a doll to represent Jesus." Members made the creche, costumes and "everything connected to the nativity." Hundreds of cars from and around Omaha would drive by, and Bruce Workman recalled "it was great advertisement for our growing church!" Walt Kunold shared that there were times "when there wasn't enough money for the pastor's salary, as well as times when we had to decide what bills to pay." During one "very lean time" Pastor Duly told the Session "We need the church more than I need my salary this month." On Pledge Sunday, many recalled, "If you didn't turn in your pledge cards two Session members would be visiting you that afternoon, and before they left your house they had a signed pledge card in their hand!" These Charter Members emphasized their total commitment to make sure West Hills Church would grow, "no matter what we had to do to make it survive."

By 1983 it became obvious that an addition needed to be built for the overcrowded church. The children's nursery was also in dire need for more room so in an effort to "save money" many of the men in the church volunteered their time and equipment to "build an addition to the nursery." After it was completed many members donated cribs, blankets, toys, and other needed supplies for the nursery. Members also purchased the large wooden cross for the new sanctuary, which you may gaze upon every Sunday as you sit in your pew. In this 1983 new Sanctuary there was also a balcony in the back. John Good shared that the balcony hung "pretty low" and the stairs, to the North and

South of the Sanctuary, were "fairly steep" so members were not interested in "climbing up to the balcony." The church Bell Choir "occasionally performed from the balcony on Sunday mornings, and even the choir once in awhile." However, it became evident that the balcony was rarely used and was removed. Ron and Charissa Wells shared that the removal of the balcony coincided with the expansion of the "old Geneva Lounge." When you are enjoying your coffee and cookies on Sunday morning you may not be aware that the area was once used as a Courtyard, and even housed a large fireplace. The dirt floor was covered with thick pavers, which members could purchase during this renovation to "help with the cost". The Wells recalled the Courtyard being used for Sunrise Easter Services, all-church picnics, holiday events, as well as "church activity kickoff events." Charissa recalled the fireplace, which was located on the East wall, with doors on either side leading into the Sanctuary, was used for a youth event and "a few confirmation class recognition breakfasts." Ron recalled the Courtyard had been created "especially for large outside gatherings." Linda Springsted's daughter, Kelley, has a large picture of the family in the courtyard after celebrating her wedding at West Hills. However, when the church experienced "years of cold and/or rainy weather events were moved inside." Apparently for bees it also became a favorite gathering site, and after a few members experienced bee stings, the Courtyard was dismantled "with members encouraged to take pavers home they had purchased" and the large area became the enclosed Geneva Lounge we now enjoy, along with offices and the copy room.

To look back where we have been, especially during this time for needed improvements, it is very evident that the growth of West Hills Church came from many very dedicated members who were committed to making it through the rough times as well as the good. Apparently they never gave up. As one of the Charter Members remarked: "West Hills is where our commitment stayed from the moment we joined, not in who might be in the pulpit at the time, but the idea of staying faithful to our church and to one another on this journey with Christ." You can't argue with that when you look back at all the accomplishments of so many.

Renewed Realizations

Ginny Jansen, Deacon of Caregiving Outreach

When I think about the beginning of a new year, my thoughts always go to resolutions. Of course, while I have great intentions, many times I fail to follow through. Goals of exercising more and losing weight or being more patient with my family and friends or even setting aside more time for devotions are wonderful—but it is so easy for time to get away from me. Each day needs to start with a renewed realization that I can't do it on my own. I need God's help to reach any of those goals.

As we have worked together through the Capital Improvements Campaign process, we have also discussed ideas of how to move West Hills forward. Our Session and staff will be studying the various suggestions made at those gatherings and determine a focus going into the future.

While I agree that we need to be looking at ways to further reach out into the community and ways to increase our membership, I hope that we won't lose sight of who we are. Relationships are so important.

We recently participated in Chili and Caroling after a break of several years due to Covid. I was amazed at all the smiles and conversation (and great food) during the lunch portion of the day. I was even more amazed at the faces of the homebound members we visited. In more than one instance, I overheard that person proudly tell others around them that we were from "MY" church. The time spent to stop and sing a few songs made them feel like an important part of West Hills.

My grandchildren are another example. Through relationships they have made participating in Crosswalk, VBS, Community Nights, Nature Sense, Cookies and Cocoa, Calvin Crest weekends, and even going back to events like miniature golf and Nerf night, they look forward to coming to church. They look for certain individuals and will ask if they can go say "Hi"—or will comment that they didn't see a special person. They have huge smiles when I tell them that someone asked about them.

The Caregiving Deacons have been sending notes to those who submitted prayer requests. That is a little thing, but it is another way of connecting with each other.

Thank you to the volunteers who serve coffee and provide treats for our services. Relationships are made or reinforced during the minutes before or after worship.

I know that I am just scratching the surface. Our staff does so much for all of us. Volunteers are valuable. I am sure that there are many activities happening that I don't even know about. Our building is a busy place.

I guess what I am trying to say is that while I do believe it is important to make a strategic plan for the future, I hope that we don't forget who we are. While we need to look ahead, let's build on a solid foundation. I hope that we all continue to make new connections and to strengthen the relationships that already exist. We have a great place to start as we reach for the stars.



Joy, Joy, Joy!!

It was December 17—the third Sunday in Advent. The focus of this Sunday was JOY! It was certainly a joyful day—the worship service, Chili lunch, and many of our West Hills Family visiting and singing for our Homebound. It all created a very special day.

Esther and Danny Miller expressed, so well, their feelings of this special time. *“Thank you, West Hills family, for expressing Christmas wishes. What a treat to have the carolers come and also deliver the creatively designed stockings filled with useful goodies. Thank you also to those who sent cards and well wishes—you are appreciated and missed. A blessed Christmas is prayed for each of you.”*

Many thanks to all who planned this event, prepared the meal, created and filled stockings, wrote cards, all who participated and sang. You brought this wonderful tradition back to West Hills—we were blessed to be a blessing!

The Caregiving Ministry Team



Bible Quiz compiled by Gloria Zinn

1. In choosing good leaders, what were the three qualities Moses identified? A) wisdom, popularity among the people, wealth B) strong leadership skills, willingness to do anything, wisdom C) good reputation, understanding, popularity among the people D) wisdom, experience, understanding
2. Who was the husband of Hannah and Peninnah? A) Eli B) Isaac C) Elkanah D) Elisha
3. Which prophet was used by God to restore a dead child to his mother? A) Elijah B) Hazael C) Obadiah D) Elisha
4. Which king of Israel was born in Bethlehem? A) Saul B) David C) Solomon D) Jeroboam
5. Why did Israel split into two kingdoms? A) a schism over who would reign B) a schism over taxation C) a schism over land values D) a schism over property rights
6. Who was Athaliah in the Old Testament? A) daughter of Ahab and Jezebel B) mother of Jehoahaz C) massacred all the members of the royal house of Judah except Joash D) only queen of the Southern Kingdom of Judah

7. Which prophet foretold of Christ's birth in Bethlehem? A) Hosea B) Nathan C) Joel D) Micah
8. What two Old Testament figures symbolize the law and the prophets at the Transfiguration of Jesus? A) Moses and Elisha B) Samuel and Aaron C) Moses and Elijah D) Enoch and Moses
9. Which Gospel writer records more miracles than does any other Gospel? A) Mark B) Matthew C) Luke D) John
10. Which of the four Gospel writers tell us how old Jesus was when he began to preach? A) Matthew B) Mark C) Luke D) John
11. After the resurrection how many days did Jesus teach and minister to His disciples? A) 30 B) 25 C) 100 D) 40
12. In what town did Jesus preach for the first time? A) Bethany B) Nazareth C) Jerusalem D) Galilee

****Answers are on the back page.**

Table Talk 2024 by Patti Brownlee

Mark your calendars! Table Talk will resume for three more gatherings during the first half of the new year. If you have become a "regular" Table Talk attender, we hope you will be able to continue coming. If you haven't been to a Table Talk yet, perhaps a positive resolution for 2024 would be to come to one and give it a try.



Tuesday, February 27 - Karen Jarvis will be sharing food for thought on the topic of change.

Tuesday, March 19 - Theresa Hamer will be sharing food for thought on our worth in Jesus - we are more than "enough" in Him.

Tuesday, April 30 - Kathy Padilla will be sharing food for thought on the topic of joy.

More details to come, but for now, please know that a place at the table will be prepared for you. **All are warmly welcomed!**

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



JANUARY

3-Nancy Chesire
5-Greg Kuhn
6-Rick Westcott
13-Steve Burgess
Les Peterson
14-Grant Thomas
24-Trink Traudt
25-Linda Fouts
27-Rorric Barnes

30-Boyd Dingman
Jill Nelson
Trent Zimmerman
31-Mike Bridgman
Priscilla Powell

FEBRUARY

1-Linda Lavelly
2-Sheryl Overby
4-Suzanne Kuhn

6-Steve Dostal
7-Becky Anders
11-Terry Bloes
17-Bridget Backer

*The complete list of
February birthdays will be
in the February newsletter.*