

The Quarterly Magazine of Florence Christian Church

Abundant

Volume 1: Issue 1, Winter 2019



WELCOME!
NO...REALLY...WELCOME!!

WELCOME to Florence Christian Church's first issue of **Abundant** Magazine! We are excited to launch this new medium for communicating our mission and vision with our congregation and community! Inside each issue you'll find stories from staff, ministry partners and friends on topics of interest, learning opportunities and experiences of God's ABUNDANT love, grace and acceptance.

In our inaugural year, we will be focusing on the three core values of Florence Christian Church: Welcome Radically, Serve Boldly, and Form Faith Every Day. This first issue is all about WELCOME. What does it mean to experience the radical welcome of God in this place and for our lives? How do we share that welcome? What are some of the stories of welcome that have made a difference in someone's life? These are a few of the questions we will be exploring in the pages that follow.

Florence Christian Church celebrates God's Welcome Table of abundant love, grace and acceptance. This is our mission! We welcome ALL as God has welcomed each one of us! And how does God welcome? ABUNDANTLY! That abundant welcome is filled with God's grace, love and acceptance. And that is radical indeed! So think about what God's abundant welcome has meant to you...and what it can mean to others as you share that divine welcome with them.

Here's a hint: one of the ways that you can share God's radical welcome with others right away is by sharing this magazine with them. So read it...and then pass it along!

May God ABUNDANTLY bless you...
that you might be a blessing in 2019!



Pastor Susan Diamond

Photo courtesy of Susan Diamond

Abundant

The quarterly magazine of
Florence Christian Church

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Mission

Florence Christian Church celebrates God's welcome table of abundant love, grace and acceptance.

Core Values

... to welcome radically
... to serve boldly
... to form faith every day

Florence Christian Church on the corner of US 42 and Dixie Hwy. in Florence, Kentucky since 1831



Photo by Alireza Attari on [Unsplash](#)

The Welcoming Power of Listening

By Rev. Diana Hodges-Batzka

I can't remember how often I heard my mother say something like, "God gave us two ears and only one mouth so we can listen twice as much as we talk." Perhaps you have been told something similar. We should not listen just because we have two ears. No, we should listen first because we never know what we might hear.

Listening is an act of welcome and hospitality. Think about a time when you really felt that you had a good conversation with someone. I bet you felt listened to and heard. Part of the act of listening is sharing a welcome with someone by saying that they are important and inviting them into relationship with you. You do this by listening to them.

Some simple tips to better listening:

Put down or turn off the electronics.

This includes mobile phones, tablets, game systems and yes, even TVs. All these screens are distractions to someone being able to be fully present, including yourself. So turn off that TV. Turn that cell phone over. Cover that tablet. Become fully present to the person you are listening to.

The power of "Tell Me More"

I think these are three of the most powerful words in the English language. If you ask a question and only hear a few

words for an answer, but you want to continue to the conversation, simply say, "Tell me more." These nonjudgmental words issue an invitation to the person speaking that they are important to you and you are listening. They work with people of all ages! I've used them with our youngest children and our most elder adults.

Ask open ended questions

When engaging in conversations, asking questions is important. However, we often ask questions which have only two choices – yes or no – or only one factual response. These types of questions can limit conversation. Instead, ask questions which are open ended. Ask people why or how. Ask them to tell you a story. And open yourself to their responses.

So this year, commit to one of the most welcoming acts you can gift to another person – the gift of listening!

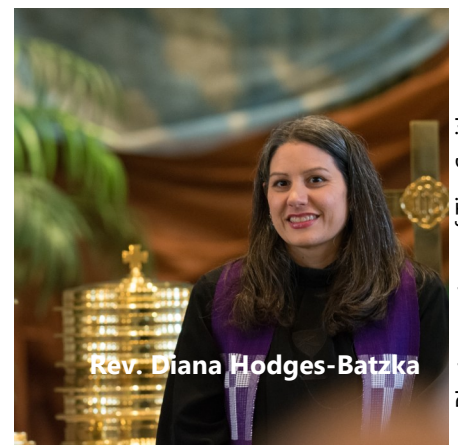


Photo courtesy of Tim Smith

Rev. Diana Hodges-Batzka

Radical Welcome is...

By Stephanie Spellers

When I describe a church as radically welcoming, it means the community seeks to welcome the voices, presence and power of many groups – especially those who have been defined as The Other, pushed to the margins, cast out, silenced, and closeted – in order to help shape the congregation's common life and mission.

Few communities could achieve the vision of radical welcome in its totality. Radically welcoming communities are the ones committed to transformed life, a life that aims to be:

Hospitable: They seek to offer a gracious, warm space to all people, especially those who have been defined as "other," systemically disempowered and oppressed, pushed to the margins. In most mainline churches, that could include people of color, poor people, children and young adults, gay and lesbian people, seniors, people with disabilities, and many other groups.

Connected: They link to their neighbors, to their neighborhood, to brothers and sisters beyond their neighborhood with whom they actively practice what it means to embrace and be changed by Jesus.

Centered: They possess a clear, compelling sense of Christian identity. That self-understanding is based in part in their cultural and denominational heritage, but primarily in the unapologetic and clear call to live out the dream of God as they have discerned it in light of Scripture, tradition, reason, and their context.

Open to conversation: They attempt to listen carefully to, make room for, share power with, and learn from groups who've been silenced, closeted and disempowered, and they are open to genuine conversion and transformation based on this encounter with The Other. On the ground, that means they allow God's Spirit and the gifts of the The Other to enrich and transform their understanding of who is inside and who is outside, what ministries they undertake, how they select leaders, how they do business, how they worship, what they claim as their mission and purpose, and how they partner with other groups.

Intentional: They engage in training, research, active listening, strategic planning: some conscious, contextually appropriate effort that addresses individual, congregational, institutional, and systemic change. They realize radical welcome does not come merely as a matter of goodwill or a by-product of enthusiastic outreach programs.

Comprehensive: They recognize that the work cannot be left to a specialized ministry area, like the Outreach Ministry, the Social Justice Team or the Hospitality Committee; it is a way of being, and should eventually be cultivated by the chief leaders through formation, worship, mission and other areas of congregational life.

Becoming: They realize this journey is never finished, so they are always becoming, always looking beyond the congregation to see who has been left out or pushed out, always aware that the stranger's face is the very face of Christ.

Beyond diversity: They understand that radical welcome is not merely about diversity, evangelism, multiculturalism, inclusion, or getting it "right." It is simply, profoundly about being faithful disciples of the Christ who welcomed and still welcomes all.

Faithful: They honor radical transformation not as a necessary evil or as change for the sake of change, a response to misplaced liberal guilt or a church growth strategy, but instead because they are saying "yes" to God's gracious invitation to welcome as Christ welcomes.

Compassionate: They prioritize the work of creating "space for grace": small groups, forums and other settings where people can develop, express and hold their dreams and their fear of change, even as they deepen their commitment to radical welcome.

Real: They acknowledge they will not be perfect or consistently, radically embrace every group. A radically welcoming congregation is one where the members are becoming God's radically welcoming people.



Photo courtesy of Amazon.com

Stephanie Spellers, *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Other and the Spirit of Transformation*, 2006

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TIPS FOR HOSPITALITY IN YOUR HOME

1. Leave the front door unlocked or open so guests can walk in without knocking or ringing the bell. Don't let them wait outside in the cold, wind, rain!
2. Appeal to your guests' senses right away – music playing, wall plugs with a seasonal fragrance, décor tucked in corners or shelves that will catch their eye, so they have an immediate feeling of comfort and relaxation.
3. Try to have everything ready ahead of time – coffee ready to perk, ice available, serving utensils and dishes out, all dishes cooking or ready to be cooked. The table is set – usually with a gift/treat to take home. Then you can spend time with your company instead of in the kitchen cooking or organizing.
4. Create spaces so guests feel comfortable enough to help themselves to what they need – a glass for a different drink, a new eating utensil, a second helping.
5. Try to keep the dietary needs of each individual in mind when planning the menu.
6. No matter how prepared you think you are, there is always something you will forget or do wrong, so just keep a sense of humor!



Lynn Caldwell



Picture courtesy of Damian Wallace

The Matlocks pose for a picture in front of the Christmas tree at Florence Christian Church: (back row) Tashiana, Cassie, Thomas, Tavean, Lavell, (front row) Tianna, Mya, Elijah and Cordale

Meet the Matlock Family

I said, from the time I was young, that I wanted a bunch of kids and God gave them to me

Cassie, how did you and Thomas meet?

Thomas and I met online, actually. Thomas came across my profile and contacted me. He said I seemed different than any other girl that he'd ever talked to. We talked back and forth on the website for a bit because I was reluctant to give out my phone number. One day, I gave in because he seemed to be a very genuine person and we had a lot in common. (To hear him tell it, it's because he posted a picture of himself shirtless!) So, he called me and we talked for about 4 hours! After a time of calling and texting back and forth, we decided to meet in person and we've been together almost 10 years since.

We got engaged in 2014 and married in 2016. I was working at a childcare center and Thomas came in and proposed to me in front of my class and coworkers...it was so sweet and so awkward because he was so nervous, which is very unlike him.

Tell us about your children and family.

Tashiana (age 13): Tashi is a kind hearted, mother hen. She loves art and reading and loves to try new things (except food!)

Tavean and Lavell (age 12): The twins are sweet and sensitive. They love to play video games and to play outside. It's hard to separate them because they are so much alike. They finish each other's sentences and know what the other is thinking. They wear their hearts on their sleeves.

Cordale (age 9): Cordale is sweet and energetic. He talks constantly and tries to get attention wherever he goes. He is very artistic...loves to draw, sing, and dance. He would give anyone the shirt off his back

Elijah (age 7): Elijah is a sweet little Momma's boy, but he is also just that... ALL BOY! He climbs anything he can, he's a Daredevil, he's adventurous (to an extent), hyper. But, he is also sweet and gentle, thoughtful, smart, curious.

Tianna (age 6): Tianna is like a candy coated marshmallow. She's hard on the outside, but once you get to know her and she gets comfortable, she's a soft little marshmallow. She tries to be tough, but she does wear her heart on her sleeve. She's very smart and loves to be helpful. She was born with a scowl and you definitely have to earn her trust and her smiles.

Mya (age 5): Mya is the baby of the family. She loves attention, she loves to dress and act like a princess, she is a diva. She's a Daddy's girl for sure. She knows what she wants and thinks she can use her cuteness to get it!

We are a blended family. When I met Thomas in 2009, he had Tashi and the twins. Cordale was a little peanut in his Mommy's belly. I was IN LOVE with all 5 of them!

About a year and a half into our relationship we got pregnant with Elijah, so I finally got to be a mom full time. My time with my step-children taught me what unconditional love is and I have always thought of them as my own babies.

When Elijah was just a few months old, I found out we were pregnant again with Tianna. Oh my, was I scared! I was just getting used to having one baby full time and then here comes baby #2 a year later. To top it off, two months before Tianna was born, we got custody of Cordale! So, within a year, I went from being a part

time step-mom to full time mommy of THREE itty bittys (age 1, 2 and new-born)! Thomas of course took this all in stride because he was a seasoned pro...

Fifteen months later, here comes Ms. Mya...our last baby. So, within 28 months we had 3 beautiful babies to add to our other 4 amazing kiddos and I wouldn't trade it for the world. I truly believe my calling was to be a Mommy. I said from the time I was young that I wanted a bunch of kids and God gave them to me the way it was meant to be.

"What we needed was a community of people who could accept us and love us despite our imperfections."

Tell us about how you came to be Ministry Partners at Florence Christian.

When we found Florence Christian, we weren't really looking for a church. Growing up, my family attended Catholic church off and on. We never really had a "home" and our attendance wasn't consistent. Because of this, I never had a sense of why it was important to belong to a church and to this day I am very uncomfortable speaking about my faith with people because of my lack of knowledge and experience.

When we met, Thomas was attending church in Newport, but it wasn't a place he thought he really fit. We went to a church together for a time, but it was not what we were looking for; it was too big and impersonal for

us. We stopped attending church altogether.

Then, my friend Tammy Sierra invited us to Florence Christian one day. After declining, due to transportation issues, she offered us a ride and I told Thomas I felt rude to decline again. So we went. We fell in love. From the time we walked through the doors, we felt welcomed, loved, and safe. Everyone was so kind, the sermon spoke to us and I knew we would be back.

So, even though we didn't really know it, what we were looking for in a church and what we needed was a community of people who could accept us and love us despite our imperfections in a small, intimate setting that would allow us to develop important relationships and really work on ourselves in our walk with Christ.

How has Florence Christian Church brought "abundance" into your lives?

Florence Christian has brought abundance to our lives because we have a safe place to grow our faith. While we are fed spiritually, we also feel that we have a strong support system to help us through struggles we have.

I feel that we contribute to the abundance of the congregation by serving the church in any way we are able.

Thomas as I are both greeters, where we can help members, as well as new comers feel the love and acceptance that our church strives for. I also serve as a greeter for Worship and Wonder, help with the school supplies drive as a super shopper, and try to help in other capacities when I can.

What spiritual practices does your family share?

Our family attends church regularly and serves in any way we are able. We practice faith at home by reading and talking about Bible stories, as well as praying before meals. We teach our children the importance of giving both our time and resources.

What does Health Ministries mean?



By Phyllis Reed

"Health Ministry emphasizes the wholeness of body, mind and spirit in congregations. Healing, health and wellness are promoted among the members as well as the people in the surrounding community. It is a cooperative effort which may include members interested in health and wholeness, hospitals and other health agencies in the community."

Health Screenings

Education - promoting wellness and spiritual support – integrating faith and health

Assisting in advocacy and finding resources

Listening, personal health counseling, advocating personal responsibility

Training and coordinating volunteers

Home, hospital, shut-in visitation

**Retrieved from Good Sam Health Ministries website 1/2/19*

Florence Christian Church has a rich history of ministering to the health needs of the church family. Recently, a year of wholeness was our focus. For years, we have provided visitation with treats for shut-ins, meals for those in medically urgent situations, hospital and nursing home visits, caroling at Christmas, support and

counseling, shower ministry, recovery ministry, food distribution and more! We built senior housing and provided daycare for our community!

What is your passion? What is your need that we have the potential to meet? Please share your input. We will continue to provide monthly blood pressure screenings and topics of interest, but we are so eager for your input. Please call or email your interests, concerns and needs. 859-620-9646 or pbreed49@yahoo.com

BE WELL and BE IN TOUCH!!

Your Health Ministries Team



Phyllis Reed

Photo courtesy of Tim Smith

NEW Library Resources Available



Do your New Year's resolutions include:

Getting your monthly finances in order?

Teaching your kids about money?

Retirement or college financial planning?

Then consider borrowing a book from our NEW Financial Peace Library located in the small conference room in the office wing. ANYONE is welcome to borrow a book for 1-4 weeks regardless of prior participation in our Financial Peace University program.

For a complete list of recommended books and those available from Florence Christian Church, please stop by the church office or request more info from Maleah Rhodes (mrhodes@qualtheon.com).

**Here's wishing you & your family
Financial Peace in 2019!**

A Healthier Home This Winter

By Glenna Galbraith

During the winter months, we spend so much more time indoors. At the same time little fresh air makes it into our homes. In an effort to keep our interiors healthier, here are a few suggestions from EWG.org that will accomplish that.

Vacuum often - at least twice a week to control dust. If you can, vacuum using a machine with a high-efficiency particulate air, or HEPA, filter, making sure to clean the filter regularly.

Choose bathroom cleaners that do not contain troublesome ingredients, such as ammonia, bleach and quaternary ammonium compounds - all of which have been associated with negative health effects, including rashes, allergic sensitivity, asthma and reproductive toxicity.

Stay away from laundry products that don't list their fragrance ingredients on the label, because those ingredients may give off toxic chemicals. Even laundry sheets, for instance, release VOCs. Also, make sure your dryer vents outside your home and is cleaned regularly. This prevents excess humidity, which can lead to allergenic mold and mildew.

Choose your pillows wisely. Polyurethane foam releases VOCs, sometimes for years. "Memory foam" sounds better, but it's just another type of polyurethane foam, with more chemicals added for density. So-called plant-based foam is also mostly polyurethane, typically made with a small percentage of soybean or castor oil mixed with petroleum chemicals that emit volatile organic compounds.

Get in the habit of vacuuming your mattresses once a week using a vacuum with a HEPA filter. This is particularly important in your kids' rooms as a way to control dust and microbes released into the air when your child moves on his or her mattress.

Visit ewg.org for more information.

"The environment is where we all meet; where all have a mutual interest; it is the one thing all of us share."

Lady Bird Johnson



The purpose of the Green Chalice Program is to encourage and assist local congregations/Disciples Of Christ Offices and Assemblies who wish to live out their faith by caring for creation.

Start the new year by forming faith every day!

BIBLE 101 - Wednesdays, 7 PM in the Well, Jan. 30 through Mar. 20 (except Ash Wednesday, Mar. 6). Join us for a special 7-week faith group led by Pastor Diana. We will explore seven topics central to the Bible: canon, history, testaments, gospels, genre, interpretation, and grace. Cost is \$7 for your journal. Scholarships are available. If childcare is needed, please speak with Pastor Diana. This curriculum is also appropriate to older teens.

PRIDE AND HEBRON GROUPS - Engage with your neighbors to discuss the joys and challenges of the Christian experience. Alternate Wednesdays, 7 PM at members' homes in Hebron, KY

TABLE TALK - Third Thursdays, 6:30 PM at Pastor Susan's home in Independence. Share a meal and topical discussion each month with friends and neighbors.

MARY/DEBORAH - Fourth Mondays, 6:30 PM in the Well. Led by Glenna Galbraith, this group explores more deeply Half-Truths! They are simple phrases. They sound Christian—like something you might find in the Bible. We've all heard these words. Maybe we've said them. They capture some element of truth, yet they miss the point in important ways.

ADULT OPEN DISCUSSION - In the traditional Sunday School model, experience fellowship around discussion topics with fellow Christians. **Early Birds** - Sundays at 9 AM in the small conference room. **Adult Discussion** - Sundays at 10:30 AM in the large conference room. **Listeners' Class** - Sunday mornings at 10:30 AM in the Listeners' Classroom, Lower Level. **Adult Discussion** (family friendly) alternate Wednesdays at the McLemore home in Hebron.



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It was the Sunday that changed our lives forever!



**Tyler Parrish, Jayden and
Brandon Releford**

By Brandon Releford

Tyler and I adopted our little girl in August, 2017. Jayden Kayleen Parrish-Releford. We both felt it of utmost importance to raise our child, with Christ in the center. I was raised in a Pentecostal background, where same-sex relationships were an act of the devil, and Tyler was raised in the Baptist church, where it too was not acceptable. We found ourselves lost and floundering when it came to our relationship with God and the struggle to find a church that would not look at us in judgement. I knew what it felt like to hear that someone in the church didn't want to associate with me because they didn't want others to think that they were okay with my "lifestyle." Tyler and I both lost our church families, and really just grew closer as a unit, not really having many friends.

I received a phone call from my sister-in-law at the end of October, 2017.

She was going on and on about this church and how wonderful everyone was at this Trunk-or-Treat event. She mentioned rainbows and unicorns, and the rest was history. It took us a little while to acclimate ourselves to the idea of attending a church that was as accepting of everyone, as my sister-in-law described.

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience."

-Colossians 3:12

Finally, Tyler and I got up on the first Sunday in April, 2018, got Jayden ready, and decided to come to church at Florence Christian Church. When we walked in, we felt welcomed and loved from the start. The style of worship was not what we were both used to, but it was an awesome experience. Have you ever gone to Walmart and noticed while shopping,

what others may have on? Be honest with yourself, and admit, you might have cast a bit of judgment on a person for wearing something that was not similar to your style? It happens. That Sunday morning, we walked in, the only thing I noticed people wearing were things that Colossians 3:12 speaks about. I could see families clothed with kindness, and humility. I heard the pastor speak about the outreach of the church, which meant that the church was clothed with compassion. I could see the gentleness and patience of those working in the children's ministries and welcoming Jayden with open arms. I could see nothing that didn't draw me closer to the cross. Florence Christian Church is not just a church, it is a safe haven for people from all walks of life. It helped clothe our family a little more with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. It was the Sunday that changed our lives forever!



Abundant Love, Grace & Acceptance

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Florencechristian.org



If everyone understood themselves through the Enneagram, there could possibly be world peace...or at least a great deal more humor and understanding in the world.

~Phyllis Reed

Friday, March 22 - Saturday, March 23

Thomas More College Biology Field Station, California KY

Led by Phyllis Reed and Linda Mika

Learn more: florencechristian.org/enneagram-journey

Space is limited. Sign up by March 10