

THE JOURNEY OUT

WHAT DO NEW BEGINNINGS LOOK LIKE?



“SEE, I AM DOING A NEW THING. NOW IT SPRINGS UP; DO YOU NOT PERCEIVE IT? I AM MAKING A WAY IN THE WILDERNESS AND STREAMS IN THE WASTELAND.” ISAIAH 43:19



This year at the Pilgrim Center we have many New Beginnings to celebrate! Our theme verse from Isaiah 43:19 has been quite fitting as we mark new milestones.

Many of you joined us at the Fall Celebration on October 14th where we highlighted these new beginnings. (Simply being able to gather together again felt like a new beginning!) We celebrate the seeds of reconciliation being sown in South Sudan (see page 3 for more). We rejoice at the growing opportunities to serve refugees and youth in Uganda, and pastors in Burundi. Here in the US, we also celebrate our deepening partnerships with pastors in the Twin Cities who are eager to bring healing to their communities. It is truly a season of growth and new beginnings for us!

Even as we celebrate new beginnings, I am mindful that the road to new beginnings isn't always smooth. Even now, there are still divisions among communities and churches, friends and families. There is still a global pandemic.

Yet, we are still here. God is still faithful. Where does that leave us? Can we celebrate new beginnings even when we have not yet made it out of the wasteland? How do we move forward? *What do new beginnings look like?*

I can't offer a simple answer to any of those questions, but I know a few things to be true. One, God is the Great Way Maker (even when it seems like there is no way). Two, God's ways are not our ways. Three, God is able to transform us in ways that lead to true new beginnings. When I see the ongoing effects of suffering, I cling to these truths.

Recently, I participated in a training hosted by the Trauma Healing Institute. I learned that when someone has experienced trauma, it is important to process the pain before rushing to a new beginning. If we don't process the pain, we risk rushing in too quickly, which can lead to a false "quick fix" instead of a true new beginning. One way that we can process our grief and pain is through lamenting.

Psalm 13 offers a wonderful example of a lament. This psalmist begins, *"How long O Lord? Will you forget me forever?"* Wow. I don't know about you, but the question of *"how long?"* feels pretty relevant. I can think of many times in the last 18 months when I've asked God, *"how long?"* Perhaps there were times when you asked this question, too.

The Bible is filled with examples of men and women who lift up their pain to God in lament.

They are honest about how they feel (sometimes to the point of blaming God!) Through this training, I was reminded of something important.

WHILE LAMENTING MAY LOOK LIKE AN EXPRESSION OF DOUBT, IT IS ACTUALLY AN EXPRESSION OF FAITH.

We express our pain to God because God is listening. It is because of God's presence with us, not God's absence that we even bother putting our pain into words.

Sometimes we worry that our pain will overwhelm others, even those who love us. We don't ever have to worry about that with God. It is never too much for God to handle. It doesn't mean we are faithless. It shows we are faithful. This is the beauty of lament.

Lamenting is one way that we can take a step toward a true new beginning. When we lament, we invite God to transform our wounds. With wounds transformed, we can begin to more fully embrace the new thing God is doing in our lives.

During the training, I had the opportunity to write my own lament. In the process, I felt some of my own pain being transformed by God. This has opened up new space in my heart. Now that I've lamented, I have more room to perceive the Spirit moving. Because I'm no longer stuck in my pain from the past, I can more fully participate in whatever God is doing next.

It may seem strange to talk things "springing up" as winter approaches, but perhaps lament is like the winter that prepares the way for spring's new beginnings. What better season to lament than during the darkest days of the year?

Isaiah 43:19 speaks to God's ability to make a way in the wilderness. Friends, what wilderness are you in? What in your life needs to be lamented? Where can you invite God in to begin transforming your pain? God's deepest desire is to make a way in the wilderness. I pray that we all will perceive it.

ANNA JEIDE-DEWEILER, US MINISTRY DIRECTOR



AN UNBLOCKED HEART

**WHOM HAVE I IN HEAVEN BUT YOU? AND
EARTH HAS NOTHING I DESIRE BESIDES YOU.
MY FLESH IN MY HEART MAY FAIL, BUT
GOD IS THE STRENGTH OF MY HEART AND
MY PORTION FOREVER. PSALM 73:25-26**

This psalm recently became very personal and real to me. I sang it as I lay on an operating table while having emergency surgery on my heart in the midst of a massive heart attack. It has become my anthem for my unexpected profound "rebirth" in this *Year of New Beginnings*.

On Tuesday, August 31st, after experiencing 24 hours of intensifying pain and discomfort, my wife Annette brought me to our local clinic. After some preliminary observations, the doctor suggested that I might need to go to the hospital to have my heart checked. Though in intense pain, I simply shook my head, no. However, after he took an EKG he insisted that I needed to go to the doctor and that he would call an ambulance. Again, I said no. (I come from a very long line of stubborn Swedes!) I said my wife could drive me, but she said no. The ambulance was called. Later the surgeon said that if she had driven me I would have died on the way. Most people having the intensity of heart blockage and distress don't even make it to the hospital alive.

On the trip to the hospital in the ambulance with the lights and sirens going, I had the unique perspective of looking out the back window from my gurney and watching what looked like the parting of the Red Sea as cars went to the highway shoulders to make room for us and my wife who was following closely in our car. Upon arriving at the hospital, I was immediately met by doctors who whisked me through the familiar halls of United Hospital, halls I had walked countless times when I visited ill parishioners, up to the surgical suite. There I was met by Dr. Muhammad Murad and his team, the leading non-invasive heart surgeon in the region who "just happened" to be on call and available to do my surgery.

After quickly moving me from the gurney to the table this amazing surgical team went to work on my heart, which it turned out had massive blockages in five major arteries. The arteries had to be cleared and multiple stents were inserted to keep them open. All was done through the arteries in my limbs without opening me up. My surgeon told me later that if they had had to open me up I likely would not have lived due to the level of stress already on my heart.

While they were working on my physical heart, I was awake the entire time. Under conscious sedation you are "aware but don't really care" about what they're doing. However, I was very aware and cared deeply about what I was experiencing on another level beyond the physical.



I found myself entering what some of the old mystics call "a thin place," where heaven is very near to earth. In fact, that thin place became completely permeable as I found myself leaving this earth.

It is difficult to describe what I experienced, but I will try to give some words, though they are inadequate. The first sense I had was being surrounded by an indescribable peace. There was no fear whatsoever, in fact I could not have found fear even if I had gone looking for it because it simply did not exist. Even as I was leaving my body I was completely at peace. In that place of peace I prayed a very simple prayer, asking the Lord if He would allow me to have more time here with my wife and family and loved ones. But either way, I knew that it was truly ok. Alongside that peace, I also found myself immersed in an ocean of God's love and an open sky of the light of the Lord. I still cry every time I think or talk about it.

**AS I LAID THERE ON THAT SURGICAL TABLE,
SURROUNDED BY GOD'S PRESENCE,
THE ONLY RESPONSE THAT I COULD HAVE
WAS TO WORSHIP.**

And so I began to sing, first an old chorus based on the words of Psalm 73 above, and then other hymns and songs as they came to me. At one point, they told me that they needed to go out and update my wife about what was happening and they asked me what her name was. The only thing I could think to respond was, "my beloved." Later, when Dr. Murad came to update us after my surgery he shared with my wife and family that when his patients are under conscious sedation they cannot lie. He said that he wanted them to know that during my surgery there were two things that I said over and over again, I professed my love for my wife and I just kept thanking God. He said, "Obviously your husband is a man of faith." When I thanked him for saving my life, he said, "No, it was God." Yes, to God be all the glory!

In my 61 years of walking this earth I have had the great privilege of experiencing His presence many times in profound ways. However, this experience exceeded all of those by a factor of 100 plus times. Having touched heaven, I can definitely agree with the apostle Paul when he said, *To live is Christ, and to die is gain.* (Phil 1:21)

**I NOW KNOW THAT WHAT I HAVE BELIEVED
AND PREACHED ALL OF THESE YEARS IS TRUE
AND REAL, MORE REAL THAN ANYTHING
WE CAN SEE HERE ON EARTH.**

I also know that God is truly good, not just because He spared my life, for even if I had died, which I eventually will, He is still good. And all is a gift.

My heart recovery continues. Due to the blockages my heart function had been severely compromised. When I left the hospital they told me that the lower part of my heart was "either stunned or dead." When I returned for a follow-up echocardiogram, 6 weeks after my heart attack, the report came back that my heart function had "totally normalized!" Again, to God be all the glory!

For the last several years when people have asked about our Pilgrim Center work I have described it as being a ministry of removing blockages so that the life-giving water that Jesus spoke of in John 7:37-38 may flow freely. I now understand more clearly than ever how important it is that those blockages be removed, whether they are burdens, bruises, baggage, bondages, or brokenness, in order for us to experience the fullness of life and for that life to flow through us! I believe God wants to do this work of transformation in each and every one of our hearts. Through His power we can each experience a rebirth. This is my testimony in this *Year of New Beginnings*!

JIM OLSON, PCR PRESIDENT



On a trip to Africa, I received from the Lord this image, which has since become our prayer logo. Graphically it represents our calling to bring hope and healing through reconciliation by inviting the Lord to unblock hearts so that His river of living water can flow freely in and through us all.



PETER'S STORY OF HEALING

My name is Peter. I attended the PCR youth retreat in Juba. It has been tough for me to forgive my friends and family members whenever we disagreed over something. I would always seek revenge. But during these two days at the youth retreat, Jesus has changed my entire life. I now see the world in Christ's point of view where repentance and forgiveness are the right things to do. Jesus completely healed me. My heart is now light and peaceful. My own family members to this day marvel and ask, what happened to you at the retreat?

For a long time I was living in animosity with my sister-in-law. I stopped talking to her and I would not eat any food prepared by her. That was my way of revenge. Then my brother came from Uganda and invited me to the youth retreat. I did not know what it was all about but I went because I had missed my brother a lot for many years and I wanted to see what he was going to teach.

AT THE RETREAT, SOMETHING HAPPENED, I WAS TRANSFORMED.

I forgave my sister-in-law. I became a new creature. Two days later, I went back home a changed man. Immediately the next day I woke up early and knocked on the door of my sister-in-law. I got onto my knees and waited. She came out and saw me

kneeling. Shock and alarm overtook her face and no words came out of her mouth.

I opened my mouth and asked her for forgiveness saying "Please, forgive me. I have been rebellious and stubborn." We embraced with tears, forgiving and receiving forgiveness with each other. Other family members joined us and we had happy early morning reunion with lots of tears. My sister-in-law quickly prepared some food and we ate together as one large family. They asked me, "What happened to you, Peter, when you went away with our brother for two days?" I told them, "Jesus has changed me." I found out at the retreat that Jesus Christ died to reconcile us to God and has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation.

I believe that this ministry of healing and reconciliation is very important to each of us and to the peace of our country of South Sudan because we are locked in the cycle of revenge.

Look at me, I am an example of what the retreat has done. I don't know how many young and old people are locked in this cycle of revenge like I was. Now, I have committed myself to the ministry of reconciliation. More feet shall be washed and more ambassadors will rise in this nation.



Dr. Monica with retreat participants in South Sudan.

NEW BEGINNINGS IN SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudan is located in East Central Africa. The new country gained its independence from the Republic of the Sudan in 2011. Twelve million people live in South Sudan, with an estimated 4.3 million scattered as internally displaced people or refugees in neighboring countries.

In September 2021, Emmanuel Abdul (PCR Uganda team) and I led three healing retreats with leaders, youth and internally displaced people, bringing reconciliation and transformation to 96 participants in the city of Juba. The traumas of civil war, displacement due to droughts, flooding, insecurity and inter-tribal conflicts continue to plague the people of South Sudan. Instability due to civil war has been ongoing for decades. Everyone is hurting and in need of healing, including children, youth and adults.

Participants came to the retreats looking weighed down, stressed and unable to smile. The retreat facilitation team included local leaders from the host organizations ACROSS and the Episcopal Church. These facilitators continued to intercede in prayers for the participants as the retreat progressed. God was faithful and gracious to us. Retreat after retreat, the Holy Spirit showed up and did what only He can do. God allowed the servant team to witness the awesome transformation that happened to the participants. Amidst tears, sometimes with loud wailings, participants brought their burdens to the cross in small prayer groups. Hearts were healed in each retreat. The servant team was privileged to watch the joy and smiles of transformation on the faces of the participants. We were thankful to God, PCR and all PCR supporters whom God used to make this possible.

The participants thanked PCR and their donors a lot. They urged PCR to continue to reach every single South Sudanese with the message of reconciliation. Some of the participants said they have attended conferences about trauma before but have never experienced any like this. "This PCR retreat is what we need," they said. They declared, "Jesus has renewed and transformed us. We needed a reset, now we are ready to begin again. Our hearts are healed."

Three youth and one leader from the retreats joined us to volunteer in the next retreats. They wanted to reach out immediately. The facilitators were lucky to follow up on one youth name Peter who attended one of the retreats and was transformed. We are grateful to Peter for sharing his testimony with us.

REV. DR. MONICA YUGU, SOUTH SUDAN COUNTRY DIRECTOR

THE PILGRIM CENTER is called to bring hope and healing by renewing individuals, restoring relationships, and revitalizing communities through the ministry of reconciliation.

Our work takes us to places of historic and contemporary conflict and pain to minister reconciliation by loving presence, healing retreats, and peaceful witness.

JOURNEY OUT CONTRIBUTORS:

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Rev. Dr. Monica Yugu, South Sudan Country Director
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PRESENCE: JESUS, WHO GOES WITH US

**IN THIS ISSUE, WE HIGHLIGHT OUR FIRST GUIDING
MINISTRY APPROACH: PRESENCE.**

I have long thought of life as a journey. As a progress through growing experiences. Growing through childhood. Loving your mother and your father. Making friends. People who see your soul. People who care about who you are – what you stand for. What you believe. How you live.

Marriage is founded on deep relationship. Building a life of trust with another person. The forming of a divine partnership, where a man is keeping a covenant with a precious woman, for life. Trusting, growing, experiencing.

The Church is meant to be like that. Starting with Jesus, then reaching out to others – brothers and sisters – who have found Him too.

I find my life now, in old age, a life of friendships. Of being with people I treasure, and love – who want to sit with me, talk with me, tell me their deep concerns. And always ending our time, over coffee, over lunch, over walking, with prayer.

I met today with a young man who just wanted to talk about life – his and mine, and what they've meant, together. It is high privilege.

The bond with the disciple group was friendship. It was an intimate tie of love and understanding, and caring, between Jesus and each one of them.

It was the basis of the whole enterprise – of building the Church and training its leaders – that began at the beach by Galilee at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. No headhunter served the enterprise. The carpenter from Nazareth came out of the hills and down to the shores of Capernaum and did the recruiting personally, one by one. No detailed application process. No online submissions. No down payment. No test scores offered or asked. It was a look in the eye, and a simple verbal invitation, "Come. Follow Me. And I will make you fishers of men."

Amazing: The School of Christ was rounding up its recruits one by one, called by the dean of students, the president of the seminary, Himself.

It was to be a personal relationship. "Andrew and Peter, I want you." You are being asked to come: to be with Me. To live My life, to see My work, to learn how to do it yourselves. It is a long journey. It asks your life. I'm calling you to leave everything... to be with Me. Out of our friendship you will see and learn. You will be molded for ministry. You will become My "band of brothers," the leadership corps of the NEW THING God is doing. It is high adventure. The risks are great. "Will you leave all for Me?"

No recruiting we know of today proceeds like this: Not even ministers are recruited like this in our day.

Jesus wanted people committed to Him – people having to take a chance, willing to live a life, and to learn as they went. And the final exam would be a question by the campfire, out in Caesarea Philippi: "Who do men say that I am?"

It was Peter's three years of watching Jesus that told him what he needed to know about this man. Who He was is what would make all the difference.

That was the foundation of the leadership of the Church. And it is the same for the Pilgrim Center's leadership into forgiveness, and healing, and reconciliation. We want people who will be present, who are willing to go and be with others. That's how we went to Rwanda, and Burundi, in the days following the genocide. We are not great people with all the answers. "We come to be with you and hear your hearts, and listen to your hurts. And we will wash your feet and humble ourselves before you, and ask for your forgiveness of us first."

It is ministry on our knees, offering our own wounds, as we hear their broken hearts. It is being there – as fully present as we can be.

It is that kind of ministry we invite you to share with us – for your healing, and ours, and the healing of the world, that we ask you to join in with us.

Bless you.
REV. DR. ARTHUR ROUNER, PCR CO-FOUNDER

PROVISION UPDATE

At the fall celebration we shared our goal of raising \$75,000 through a matching challenge.

Thanks to your generosity, we have surpassed this goal, raising a total of \$81,000. Thank you for providing this essential support!

The need for reconciliation continues to grow in the US and around the world. Because the Pilgrim Center relies entirely upon the generosity of individuals, your support has a direct and remarkable impact upon our ability to do this work.

If you would like to support this work, donations can be sent to PO Box 22086, Minneapolis, MN 55422 or made online at <https://pilgrimcenter.org/donate/>.



RECONCILIATION COURSES – JOIN US IN 2022!

On November 2nd, we concluded our six-week *Way of Reconciliation* course. More than 20 participants from the US and Uganda joined together to explore and experience the path to reconciliation.

**"I LEFT THIS COURSE WITH NEW WAYS OF
THINKING ABOUT RECONCILIATION AND HOW I
CAN PURSUE RECONCILIATION IN THOSE
RELATIONSHIPS THAT ARE FRAGMENTED IN MY
OWN LIFE." – JAMES**

We are continuing the journey in our *Becoming a Reconciler Course*, which will conclude on December 14th. If you have yet to experience these interactive and engaging courses, we encourage you to join us in a course in 2022! Please check the website for registration details at pilgrimcenter.org.