

Introduction

The Why

We are living in difficult times. We name this to start a conversation about where we go from here. For those of you who attend the Worship Labs or watch the services on YouTube, you know that we address the context of the times and history in all meetings. We realize that some of you are only connected to us through this email list. As such, allow us to engage with you here about how we can heal and work towards easing the suffering in this world, while working to build a kinder, gentler world alongside it.

Our hope for this newsletter is to continue building beloved community and brave spaces to heal from trauma and disconnectedness. Please share your concerns, questions, and hopes to help shape the conversation going forward. Let's grow this as a monthly place to forge deeper understanding with one another.

Rev. Amie Vanderford

Co-Founder/Pastor



— OCTOBER —

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Awareness Month



Need Help? You Are Not Alone.

Call the 24-Hour Crisis Line (317) 920-9320.

OCTOBER 2022

THE LAB NEWS

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and during this month, we share a crucial Indiana Resource, [The Julian Center](#). They offer shelter, counseling, and other services for people experiencing domestic & intimate partner violence.

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Impediments to Safe Community

In this month's pastoral reflection, Pastor Amie discusses appropriation and appreciation, and how they affect the dynamics of safety in our relationships with one another.

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The Garden Lab

The fall crop is chugging along, our second kitten in the Meownistry has been neutered and given shots, and winter cat shelter prep has begun.

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In this month's mental health column, Minister of Mental Health Thaddeus talks about family system dynamics.

The Incubator
Where ideas take root...

Our Team

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A Monthly Publication of...



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Pastoral Reflection

Impediments to Safe Community

by Rev. Amie Vanderford

A few years ago, Thaddeus and I went on a trip to celebrate his birthday and visit old friends of mine from college. They were gracious hosts, letting us relax by their pool for our vacation time, even as they still had to go to work. On the weekend, their daughter, under age 10, had a friend over to go swimming, and so we watched them while the parents did other things. They were having all the typical kid fun, splashing each other, swimming, seeing whose jump got the biggest splash, and so on. At one point, there was an argument over a pool toy. Before we got a chance to intervene, we heard the boy, who was a guest at the pool, tell our friend's daughter that the floaty was his, because he, said: "I earned it!" Here he was, a guest at her house, where she was sharing everything with him, and he decided his taking the toy was how he earned it.

To appropriate means to take for oneself; take possession of; or to take without permission or consent. **To appreciate means** to be grateful or thankful for; to value or regard highly; to be fully conscious of; be aware of; detect.

Cultural and interpersonal idea appropriation extract the benefit from the long held traditions and/or hard earned experiences that are specific to a place and/or person over time. To appreciate is to honor both the experiencer and the value of that experience, and to appropriate is to extract value without care for the experiences of the person or group that led to it. If everything is derivative, then nothing has meaning, and hard fought for culture and ideas become watered down commodities for mass consumption and profit.

If that wasn't bad enough, appropriation has caused more harm than simple missed economic opportunities. While this reflection cannot bring the depth and details required to truly resolve these stories, they illustrate the importance of appreciation over appropriation.

"Which will I be: a competitor or a collaborator?"

In the case of North American Indigenous populations, it has been downright deadly. Have you heard about what happened to Indigenous youth in the last several decades at Christian residential schools? It made news recently that thousands of graves of these children were found in Canadian residential school grounds, and the same has happened here. Children were taken from their families under the guise of being "for their own good," while in actuality, they were taken from their loving families in order to strip them of their cultural languages, practices, and customs, and indoctrinate them into colonizer ways. Now that we have learned of the thousands who died at these schools, there is no way to say that these were all accidental. The genocide of the Indigenous populations and their cultures that began hundreds of years ago continues through today. With that in mind, can you begin to imagine why it might be offensive to those who have survived, and even managed to hold on to bits of their language and culture, to see their culture mocked and defiled through "sexy Indian princess" costumes? Not to mention white spiritualists and self-named gurus who are profiting off of burning sage and selling watered-down, sacred Indigenous practices that their people were orphaned and murdered for practicing?

What about Black fashion, hair, music, and dance trends? It is obvious that there is an extreme amount of talent, beauty, artistry, and ingenuity in Black culture, yet instead of us appreciating it, buying it, honoring it, and celebrating it, what do we do? We demonize this culture to the point of Black folks being fired from their jobs and mocked because their braids, locs, afros, and styles are 'unprofessional', and then with the same energy, white influencers who snatch these up will be hailed as fashion-forward, style ground-breakers, and rake in the cash without any of the racist consequences.

And lest we think that is the extent of it, let's talk about cannabis. If you want a deep dive into racial policing and the racist bent of the U.S. criminal justice system, read *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander. Cannabis possession has filled the prisons with folks who were obviously not criminal masterminds, nor cartel or pharmaceutical level drug dealers, but simply carrying enough cannabis for their own use. Although white and other populations use cannabis at the same rate, the prison population is filled with Black and Brown cannabis users at a much higher rate. If that is not heinous enough, look now at which populations are profiting the most from legalized cannabis sales: also the white population.

This racist, capitalist culture teaches people to be untrustworthy, and this is a hindrance to building safety in relationships with one another. This culture prioritizes loving objects and using people, rather than using objects and loving people. Mutuality is the cure, yet the selfishness, individualism, survival of the fittest, racist, hunger games level competition encouraged under 'The American Dream' is counter to the cure.

Hearing a good idea from someone else, and then profiting off of it, makes you a competitor, a problematic one at that. Hearing an idea, and finding ways to support the person or group with the idea, makes you a collaborator. So instead of falling into the programming of our culture and always seeking to profit without effort, what about asking this question to determine your actions instead: Which will I be: a competitor or a collaborator?

Thaddeus stepped in with the kids at the pool that day, and reminded the boy that he was a guest at her house, and that he did not earn anything. She had invited him to come play at her house, so he just needed to enjoy sharing and say thank you instead. In a culture of takers, God calls us to be grateful collaborators! This is loving, and honoring the labor of, our neighbors as ourselves.



the garden lab

The purple sprouting broccoli seedlings have been transplanted to the raised beds. The kohlrabi and beet seeds that were planted are struggling, but growing. Moths ate all the kohlrabi leaves, and so we weren't sure if they were going to survive; however, it looks like the leaves are trying to re-grow now that it's getting cooler. The mustard green and kale seeds planted last month have sprouted, and while the baby kale was initially decimated by moths, it's now re-growing leaves. The radishes are coming along nicely, but we are still waiting to see if the turnips, spinach, and leaf lettuces will germinate.

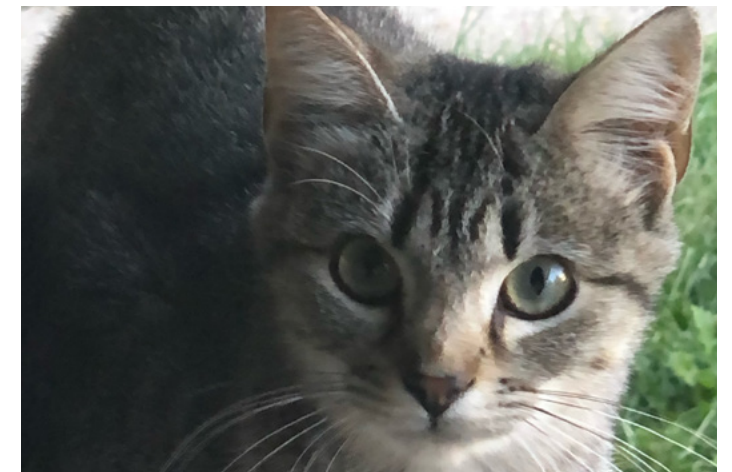
In Meownistry news, the kitten we mentioned last month has become another permanent fixture. His name is Meowilyn, and just this month, thanks to Meownistry

donors, we got him neutered and vaccinated. He is a sweet boy, and his favorite things to do are eat, cuddle, give hugs, and purr constantly. In the Blink tradition, once he settled in, he brought home a kitten (at the end of September), and now she is on the list to be taken in for shots and getting spayed. "Stretch" is still a bit skittish, so her appointment won't happen until November. We like to give them time to get settled in before putting them through their first vet visit. We began building winter cat shelters with the help of one of our Meownistry supporters.

As always, if you want assistance getting your first plant(s) going, we are happy to help! Simply send us an email, info@thelaboratorychurch.org and let us know what you need.



In the Mews: Meownistry attendance is up, and winter shelter prep has begun!



Mental Health

Real vs False Community

by Thaddeus Shelton, Jr., MFT, CSAYC

There are several different possible configurations when it comes to family structure. The most recognized and traditional form of family structure is based on blood relationships. On the one hand there is the group of humans with whom we share common ancestry and/or genetic traits. On the other, there are folks who we feel mentally and emotionally connected too so deeply that they absolutely feel like and are considered to be family. These folks are typically people we feel closest, most comfortable, or safest with. Funny how things work —because sometimes blood relatives don't feel as close, comforting, or safe as some of the non-relative people in our lives.

In therapy there can be a lot of conversation around the sometimes dysfunctional dynamics of blood relationships versus the seeming functionality of chosen connections. Like so many dominoes, when standing side by side as individuals people exist "in perfect harmony"... until they don't. In the classic song "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing" by The New Seekers, they are calling

for a world that is fully connected, functioning, and supportive of all people.

One example that comes to mind is the commitment of marriage: where people agree to behave as family even until death. Though the agreement toward the greater good is not a marriage, it is a life long commitment to the best interest of self and other, just like a marriage. In fact, the word nuptial indicates the taking up of relationship with another based on intentional agreement that is both sacred and secular. In the marriage arrangement people become family simply by agreement/practice, and the courts recognize this arrangement as valid.

When preparing for this article, I was prompted again to look at the nuclear family unit and it's current cultural value over the larger human family. This seems counter to the broader unity offered as the body of Christ. In the agreement between 'good neighbors' we see real community in the microcosm. Is it really possible for people to behave

as good neighbors outside of the environment that is normal? The human body is symbolic of the global family and the greater body of Christ. In the body of Christ no one part is left out or alone, and in the global family we all share in the body of humanity. The body of Christ is much more like chosen family model rather than that of common ancestry or bloodline because we are all brought into the spiritual fold as a member of Christ's body.

So that's the rub: Almighty God prefers the collective body of humanity functioning as chosen family above the deification of "my family " and "our families" because this premise is used to divide and conquer. You see, God intends for us to figure out and abide in the obvious, and that is being neighborly is just not enough, not even close. We have to function as an interconnected system just as the other systems exist in nature. Understand, our Creator will not be mocked by our polite niceties with one another. We will become a healthy, connected human family either voluntarily or by the blowing winds of change. So will we work voluntarily or will we wait in silos with only those who agree with us until there's enough trouble that we have no choice but to be come together?

Interestingly in relationship work there's a similar concern with the function or disfunction of family systems. It's our choice, we can practice showing up as family now, whether blood relative, or in chosen community, or we can wait for hard times to come when working in community is required. We need genuine, loving, and supportive cooperation with one another now!

Until next time,
Shalom.



There are many ways to support The LabOratory Church and Stay Connected

Ways to Support

Support the work financially through any of the giving links at the end of this newsletter.

Volunteer to help at the **4KEEPS Mobile Pantry** and/or **Garden Lab**

Participate in the mentoring program: **Project L.E.A.S.T.** (Love Everyone As Self Training)

Donate or lease farmable land for our use

Link your **Kroger Plus card** to the 4KEEPS Mobile Pantry, and we'll receive a percentage of your total grocery bill as a donation. There is no cost to you, and it won't affect your other Kroger Plus card benefits!

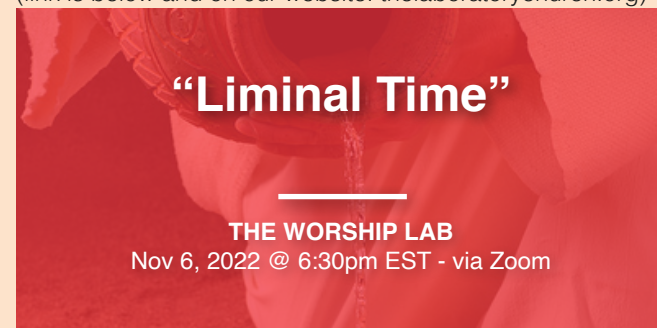
How to link the card to The Laboratory Church:

- Log in to your account: www.kroger.com
- Scroll to and then click on **Community > Kroger Community Rewards**
- Click on **Search for your organization**
- Search by NPO number GS580 or "The Laboratory Church"
- Select the organization and click Save
- Your **Donation Summary Status** should display as "Enrolled."

Ways to Connect

Attend **The Worship Lab** via Zoom on the **1st & 3rd Sundays** of the month @**6:30 pm ET**

(link is below and on our website: thelaboratorychurch.org)



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We want to hear from you!

Via the QR code, please share your questions, concerns, and hopes to help to shape the conversations going

Support our mission

Looking to get involved!? All are welcome & encouraged. See below for ways to contribute!



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At **The LabOratory Church**, we couldn't do the work we do, without financial support from people like you.

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Stay Tuned for the November Issue of *The Incubator!*



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