

The Incubator

Where **ideas** take root...

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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



JUNE 2022

THE LAB NEWS

For our next two **Worship Labs** on **Sunday, June 5th** and **June 19th @ 6:30 pm ET** (via Zoom), we will be joined by special guest preachers, **Rev. Dr. Juan Rodriguez** and **Rev. Shelby Lewis**. Learn more on page 8.

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What If Our Salvation is Communal?

In this month's pastoral reflection, Rev. Amie Vanderford encourages us to re-imagine our interconnectedness so we might re-define what we find acceptable in our daily lives.

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The Garden Lab

Check out the progress in the garden!

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Personal Work

In the mental health column, Minister of Mental Health Thaddeus Shelton, Jr. shares ideas to overcoming the biggest obstacles to personal work.

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Our Team

Co-Founder/Pastor

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A Monthly Publication of...



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Pastoral Reflection

What If Our Salvation is Communal?

by Rev. Amie Vanderford

How might our lives shift for the better if we accepted the idea that Jesus came for communal, not individual, salvation? Far beyond working to change government and other human created structures, we might fundamentally change how we view and interact with each other. We might learn that we don't have to uphold unhealthy traditions, and that we are capable of breaking those intergenerational cycles. All new life comes from death, and we can bring life from the death of these systems. The end of 'normal' is not the end of the world, and, in fact, might prevent humans from some of the harm we are inflicting upon creation. Anything that doesn't serve us can be replaced through imagination and coming together.

Our current systems of power live by "survival of the fittest," and for them, fittest looks like rigging the system for certain groups through using violence and religious coercion. The idea that they earned it is totally false. Understand that competition, while culturally acceptable and even glorified, is not healthy for building community. Any time there is a winner, there is a loser, and this nurtures resentment, along with superiority and inferiority complexes (which lead to power struggles and violence on every level). Look what our culture rewards and what it disregards, and notice the choices one has if one wants to survive. In a recent sermon, I asked folks to imagine what they would do with their skills, talents, and dreams if a home and food was automatically provided. You see, much of the competition that is harmful comes in because when certain things are paid well, even as all services are truly needed, folks flock to money rather than what is collectively needed. Capitalism, and its outgrowths, has created a production/consumption/commodification culture that has made us all unhealthy, and has tried to remove our freedom to choose alternatives. Up til now -isms have been used to divide us for the profit and power of the few, so learning to respect and love across all diversity is how we can begin the path towards safely re-uniting. This is not a shallow process. We have been artificially divided for hundreds of years, and so it will take time to acknowledge the ways we have been harmed and have harmed others. Learning healthy accountability, especially for those of us who come from privileged groups, is a step that can't be glossed over.

When we look to nature, from our individual selves to the whole of the universe, we can see the process of how the smallest building blocks of life come together to make a new thing, and then harness the energy that comes from that

"It starts with a shift in deciding what is acceptable."

union to survive together. Look at what it takes to make up a human brain, not to mention the whole of one person. Look at the way our bodily systems come together to create each of us, and how this also mimics the complex systems of mutuality in nature. Nothing accomplished in this life is done alone, and all things build upon all other things.

The Body of Christ takes on a different meaning in this light. We are all part of each other, and my needs are intertwined with your needs. It is ok to want to grow and do better for ourselves, but let's live into an abundance mentality over a scarcity one. We are better together, and we can begin to focus on our special contribution to the big picture rather than seeking to destroy for personal gain. It makes sense to me why we are to love others as self. This is the only way for healthy interconnectedness. Refer to 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 which says:

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ."

Remember, after Jesus' resurrection (John 21:15-19), he said feed & tend to my sheep three times before saying, "Follow me." Christianity is meaningless if it doesn't do exactly that. Building community and taking care of each other is the totality of why we are here. When we try to do everything ourselves and for only ourselves, we get trapped, stuck, isolated, and desperate. When we think it's my family against the world, we are pressured into relationships and kids that might not be a good fit, nor happen at the best time. If we are all cared for in our basics, we can be liberated to find the right relationships and the right work that fits our gifts and what the world needs. The way of healing and building together is the healthy way to the unity that allows us to create new systems that are networks of compassion rather than systems of control and oppression. When we learn to share, and see all people as miracles of God's creation and part of our own family, no one is left behind. None of this is new, Indigenous peoples know well how to live in healthy community with one another and the land. There is no love without justice and equity. When we can see that the shift starts with our thinking about what is acceptable and what is needed, when we critically analyze what we have now, and the consequences of what we have now, we can begin to figure out what we need instead! When we 'go along to get along,' things don't change. Now it's time to heal and rebuild. It's a long journey, and every step that brings us closer, also gives us fuel to keep going!

It all comes down to creating a true and just safety network that makes food, shelter, and care a basic human right, and not a privilege. Even if someone doesn't have a cash paying job, or has health challenges or disabilities and is unable to contribute in ways we expect... all people should have these basics. Violence would decrease, and compassion would increase if we weren't pitted against one another for our basic survival. And because interpersonal conflicts will still happen, we simply learn to hold each other accountable rather than burn folks at the stake. We ask why someone is in pain and help soothe the reactivity. We learn to embrace differences rather than condemn them. **We use our creativity to discover what serves us and the community** versus just going along with unhealthy social norms.

Acts 4:32-35:

The Believers Share Their Possessions

32 Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. **33** With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. **34** There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. **35** They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

In cultures around the world, multi-generational family dwellings, along with "the village" caring for the children and elders, are the norm. We can do this with non-relatives, too! We can share land with multiple small homes, and we can buy apartment buildings together and lower living costs. We can grow food at every home, like the victory gardens from World War II. There is more to gain when we come together. This is the work of all communities, to share and build together. Keep your eyes open to your context and find ways to plug your particular skills into existing networks. It is so hard to break the individualistic notion of "I must do it alone," along with the added challenge for those who want to join others, but are aware of the dangers of cooperating with folks trained by competition culture. We must keep finding ways to build safety and trust despite all of the ways we have harmed one another. I will share more specific paths towards doing this in subsequent issues, including how to address our biases and blocks in order to become safe enough to join with existing networks. *It starts with a shift in deciding what is acceptable.*



the garden lab

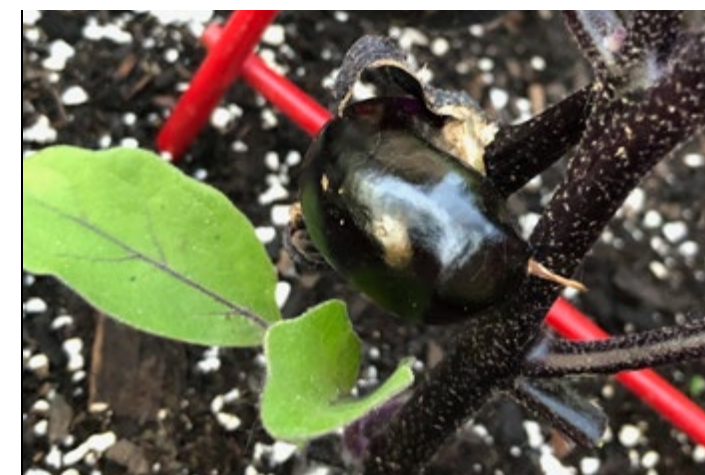
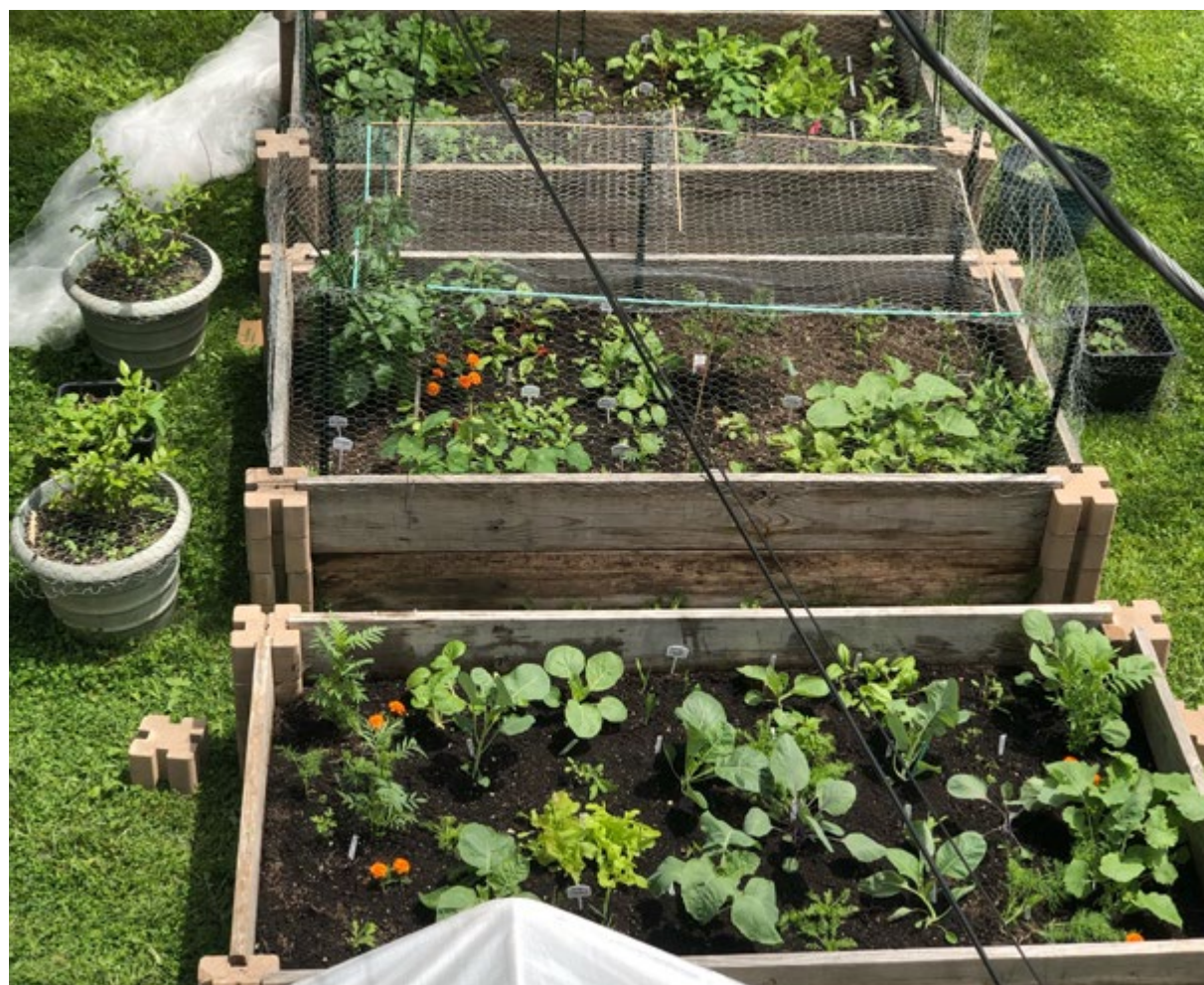
We have the nightshades transplanted to their sunny location!

The raised beds, along with the containers for the sun-thirsty nightshade plants, are all planted! The flowering herbs and companion plants are also transplanted and growing. While only a few have started flowering, such as the lavender, they are gearing up for a good show and will hopefully draw all of the butterflies and bees! The dramatic growth of the brassicas are amazing to watch, although we noticed that a couple of early hot days caused the Bak Choi and a couple of the spinach plants to 'bolt,' so we simply harvested them early. The green and Romanesco broccolis and cauliflower plants are thriving, and soon will begin to show their fruit! There is an eggplant growing on one plant, with two more flowers forming, and the purple basil are getting taller each day. The tomatoes had a bit of struggle upon first transplanting because they had to endure a couple of unseasonably hot days followed by some very

chilly, rainy days. To help them recover, on subsequent sunny days we covered them with opaque paper to lessen some of the shock and watered them every morning. Thankfully they seem to have recovered now!

As for the animal contingent, the squirrels have managed to breach the beds' chicken wire fencing a couple of times, but thankfully Thaddeus is as relentless at repairing as they are at invading. The neighborhood cat, Slink, has been little help in this area, although he does continue to enjoy the catnip plant and his daily feeding at The LabOratory CatBNB! His presence is always enjoyed anyway.

The mental health and physical benefits of caring for God's creation continues to be a blessing to all involved! 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.



Mental Health

Overcoming the Biggest Obstacles to Personal Work

by Thaddeus Shelton, Jr., MFT, CSAYC

You have heard me speak about the importance of doing our personal work, and so today I want to break down how to overcome some of the biggest obstacles I have noticed for folks who begin this journey. Let me first define personal work as the actions that individuals take to break unhealthy cycles and pursue self-improvement in all areas of life.

Lack of self-awareness can show up in multiple ways, and noticing blind spots can be a real challenge. Furthermore, people's ability to study self is hindered by the conditioning to focus outward rather than on things inside of ourselves. As a result, the question becomes: are we willing, able, and ready for deep self examination, or are we repulsed by what we see in the mirror? To notice areas that might benefit from change, it is necessary

to spend time paying attention to our actions and reactions in the areas of mind, body, and spirit even while acknowledging it can be a scary process. Holding these uncomfortable realities is a great part of the early engagement in our personal work. As we notice when we have feelings that are inconsistent with our actions, we can think about what we can do differently to honor ourselves and return to consistent wholeness. Some conditions present challenges to this work, and may require outside assistance from mental health and medical professionals.

In this culture, there is a strong tendency to speak when we need to be listening. What if because we have two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and one mouth, this is prompting us to look, listen, and breathe twice as much as we speak? God ensured even less talking by creating a dual use for

the mouth, because it also takes in food. When thinking about the will of God for our lives, we can look for cues in nature, and this is a form of observing and listening on a grand scale. If we are loud in our mind, body, and spirit, we can miss the quiet pull of wisdom. After all, the Spirit speaks to us in a still, small voice.

Dishonoring personal boundaries is also an unhealthy cultural norm. Popular culture dictates that we try to fit in and get along with the larger social expectation without questioning whether it is healthy to do so. In therapy, the extreme practice of fitting in is called people-pleasing, and it goes against our own well-being. Let's examine Romans 12:2, which says, "Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will."

"When you're green, you're growing, and when you're ripe, you're rotting." - Zig Ziglar

God is calling us into mutually uplifting, edifying, and productive relationships with one another, and relationships that can be held in this formation are naturally sustainable. As we learn to base all relationships on love of neighbor and mutual care, we begin to find relational boundaries that honor God, self, and others.

We often forget that our learning journey is lifelong. Motivational speaker Zig Ziglar said "when you're green, you're growing, and when you're ripe, you're rotting," and this notion has stuck with me since the 1980s. Over time, we have learned more about the brain's ability to change. In recent years, psychology and neuroscience have caught up to the idea that our neuro-pathways absolutely can be regenerated and changed when we make different choices. In other words, we can re-wire ourselves! This means that reading, writing, and seeking new experiences can all have a positive effect on brain health. Revelation 21:5 seems to confirm this, as it declares, "He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

There are many actions we can take to become healthier in relation to one another if we are willing to start with ourselves. **Shalom.**



Guest Speakers - June

Rev. Dr. Juan Antonio Rodriguez Preaching at The Worship Lab June 5th

I was born in Puerto Rico, raised in New York City, but, I "GREW UP" in Indiana. Both, my grandfather, Tomas Rodriguez, and my father, Bernardo Rodriguez, were lay Disciple preachers in Puerto Rico and New York. My childhood church home was Primera Iglesia Discípulos de Cristo en Brooklyn. I served for 30 years as the organizing Pastor of Iglesia del Pueblo-Hope Center in Hammond, Indiana. This 1981 new church start, now Hope Christian Church, is a predominantly multi-cultural congregation which has become a growing urban ministry center seeking to serve the diverse community which surrounds it. I also served as pastor for First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Hammond for the last six years of its faithful 100+ years ministry (1986-1992). I have also served as Pastoral Psychotherapist Intern in Park Ridge, IL (1989-1992), and as Adjunct Professor for Field Education at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago (2007-2010).



For five years (2012-2016) I had the privilege of serving as Regional Minister for the Florida Disciples of Christ Regional Church. Together we worked toward the creation of a barrier-breaking bridge-building regional church ministry. I retired from regional ministry in December of 2012. Beginning in January of 2018 through August 2020 I served as Chaplain with Orlando Health hospitals. In 2019, I served as Interim Regional Minister with the Christian Church in South Carolina and in 2020 as Interim Lead Minister with Arise Christian Church-Orlando. In 2021, I relocated to Robin Run Village in Indianapolis.

I have been married for 50 wonderful years to Sonia Isabel Colon Rodriguez, a powerful life-long Disciple leader, former educator, and now realtor.

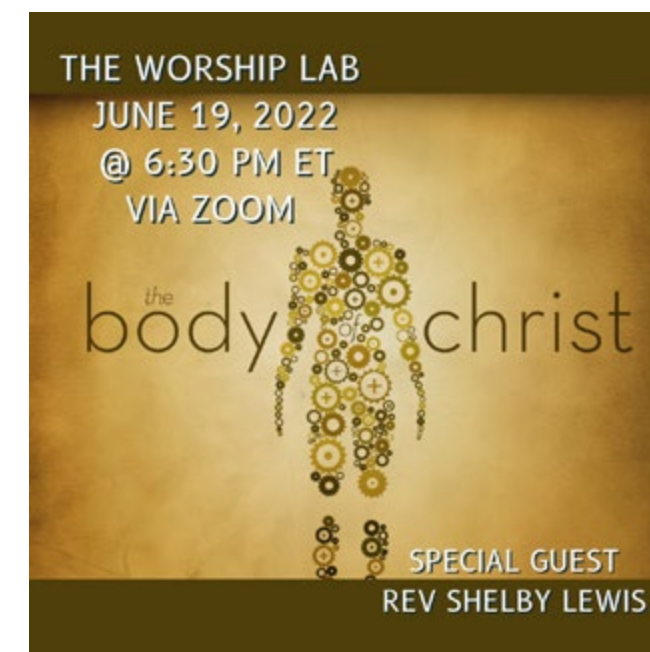
- I am committed to building community.
- I believe that openness and respect go far toward insuring that individuals feel safe to learn, grow and serve.
- I believe in speaking the truth in a spirit of love.
- I believe in continuous consultation and collaboration.

Rev. Shelby Lewis Preaching at The Worship Lab June 19th

Rev. Shelby Lewis is an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and a recent graduate of Vanderbilt Divinity School. She currently serves as the interim youth pastor at Nashville Korean Presbyterian Church in Nashville, TN, and provides independent consulting services to churches and individuals aiming to make churches more accessible for people with disabilities. During her time at Vanderbilt, she composed her Master's thesis on equitable, intersectional leadership models that center neurodiversity in faith communities. Her written work has been published in Justice Unbound, the Elon Pendulum, and on a personal website and portfolio. She lives in Nashville with her two rescue cats, Lucius and Violet.



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

Ways to Support

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

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

Participate in our 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 our 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)



Share this newsletter with friends you think might appreciate it, and/or on your social media.

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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 forward, and if/how you have been impacted by our work.

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.

To make a donation, please visit any of the links below or contact us with questions.

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Next Issue: July

Stay tuned to learn about our upcoming film screening!



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