

## 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



# DEFEND CIVIL RIGHTS

**May 2022**

## CHURCH NEWS

For the next **Worship Lab on Sunday, May 15th @ 6:30 pm ET** (via Zoom), we will be joined by special guest preacher, **Rev. Paula Pettis-Garrett**. She will bring the good word from Isaiah 43:16-23. We hope to see you there! Learn more on page 8.

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In his new mental health column, Minister of Mental Health Thaddeus Shelton, Jr. shares some ideas about how our thoughts affect change in our lives.

**The Incubator**  
Where **ideas** take root...

## Our Team

### Co-Founder/Pastor

Rev Amie Vanderford, MDiv

### Co-Founder/ Minister of Mental Health

Thaddeus Shelton, Jr., MFT, CSAYC

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## Pastoral Reflection

# The Sanctity of Choice

by Rev. Amie Vanderford

There is much in what I am about to share that may be triggering, as the time for gently walking folks into the reality of this time is over. As a trauma informed pastor, this does not mean that I shy away from all things that are difficult to hear. Instead it means that when I see things that are harming people and causing trauma, I MUST speak out about it. Never in the history of humanity has silence EVER solved abuse, not even once. I have warned about the lack of care and true freedom for decades, and have mostly been written off as 'crazy, emotional, or hysterical.' And now here we are. Roe v Wade being overturned is not about abortion nor about being pro-life. It is about white supremacist power, and the enslavement of citizens to a minority rule that is done under the manipulation of God's name and scriptures. This is anything BUT Godly. It's about taking away all rights to privacy, and any strides made towards the liberation of people who aren't part of the original white male power structure. In this recent supreme court draft brief, there is language that argues for going back to the original constitution, you know the one where only European men were considered human. There is no mention of the humanity of women nor other non-European peoples. If this brief does in fact open the door to removing any constitutional amendment not discussed in the original constitution, what's next? The right to vote, the right to choose who we love and how we live, free equitable education for all people, and what else?

I stand by the radical love that Jesus proclaimed and I know he didn't die to be used to support centuries of systemic oppression! There is no logic nor actual MORAL high ground in any of this. The powers that be are serving fear of losing their control, and pitching tantrums like two year olds, but with the power to kill and destroy. This is not their world, and we are each a part of the divine! Every woman, every person of every race and culture, every disabled person, and every belief system is connected and created by the divine! If God gave us free will, who is any human (or group of humans) to take that away? This country was not founded on freedom for all! It was focused on freedom for rich, European men who didn't like paying taxes in their home countries to richer and more powerful European men, and everything else was manipulation. The power structures of today are showing us the true nature of their evil more blatantly than ever because their unchecked and unearned power is being threatened.

*"The powers in this country are fighting to enslave who God has set free."*

Diverse people groups have made strides, albeit not true liberation, and have the audacity to demand being treated with all of the dignity and freedom that our Creator endowed. God doesn't even force us to choose Godself, so no human has authority to step in to fill that void. The powers in this country are fighting to enslave who God has set free. It is anti-Christ and anti-gospel. We are not capitalist machines, we are humans created in God's image and called to be stewards, not rapists, of creation.

The absolute worst part is that this is being done in Christ's name. All of it. The powers and principalities proclaim they serve a God of saving love, while sowing only fear for the purposes of control. You cannot say you serve love while promoting hate, nor say you are 'pro-life' when regularly causing death and destruction to millions upon millions of already born humans. Don't believe me? Ask yourselves what structures we have in place to support mothers and children, and are they sufficient? Do we have affordable or even free healthcare? Affordable childcare? Paid maternity or paternity leave for an amount of time which will actually allow time to heal from childbirth and bond with our children? And ask yourselves why men are rarely held responsible for their role in creating new life and the responsibility it entails? Ask yourselves how there is always money for war, but never money for social support? The objectification and commodification of God's holy creation has been done with centuries of precision in programming on every level. I am beyond enraged that people have been lied to and manipulated under the banner of the good news of Jesus Christ! Do these changes in the law display the fruit of the Spirit (*Galatians 5:16-26*) or follow the law of love (*Leviticus 19:18, 1 John 4:20-21, Mark 12:31, Matthew 22:36-40*, etc etc etc)? Look at the condition of the people! And for what!? My heart is crushed because I see that all of these so-called 'pro-life' efforts are actually the suppression of peoples' freedoms including our God (not country)-given autonomy to choose our path, who we love, whether we will bear children or not, make decisions outside of the capitalist grind, or have the ability to vote for actual representation of our interests! The white supremacist notion that the USA is somehow the champion of morality, and chosen by God, while being the most violent and oppressive people in recent history is unconscionable... If we do not make dramatic changes in how we live and support each other today, it will only get worse. Even with this in mind, there are 'good, church folk' who would rather I tell you it will all be ok, even as so many people

refuse to change nor learn from history. I cannot do this. Neither could the Hebrew prophets nor Jesus himself. With free will, so comes the responsibility of that free will, as well as reaping the consequences of what WE sow. I remind you of the words Jesus shared from Isaiah when he began his earthly ministry:

**Luke 4:18-19:**

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to  
the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's  
favor."

We are not powerless! We can change. We can educate ourselves to our toxic indoctrination, history, and current norms. We can choose love over fear. We can choose to support the whole of creation, not just our silos. We can choose what lifts all humans, and we can do it with the gifts God gave us as stewards of Their creation! We have to muster the courage from the deepest place of our souls, and join the work of people who have been truly fighting, and dying, for freedom for centuries. And let me be clear, I mean the oppressed groups who stake their lives and existence every day on trying to be free (as opposed to folks who serve the military industrial complex with good intentions under the false belief that they uphold and fight for freedom). People will say that voting is enough, but as we see today, this is not true. Keep voting, yes, it may postpone the worst for a few more years, but know that we have arrived at the time when we must do more. We must end any complicit involvement in these systems, including national strikes, a refusal to pay taxes without true representation, and going away from the individualistic, scarcity-minded, competitive values of 'our family/me vs everyone else'. We can then embrace the mentality that all of God's children, no matter their differences to us, are part of the human family. As we end support of existing structures, we must also proactively build new infrastructure and new 'norms' that are diverse, inclusive, and represent the true patterns of nature. Despite all of the obstacles to making change in this world, we can work together to build a kinder world. We are interconnected and so we must care for each other as ourselves. This is THE command of the God we claim to serve, so now we must do this with every fiber of our being, and with all of the gifts and talents that God endowed in us! This is God's true calling of each and every one of us who claim to follow Them, and anything less serves evil.



# the garden lab

Check out this season's progress, including the first radish harvest!

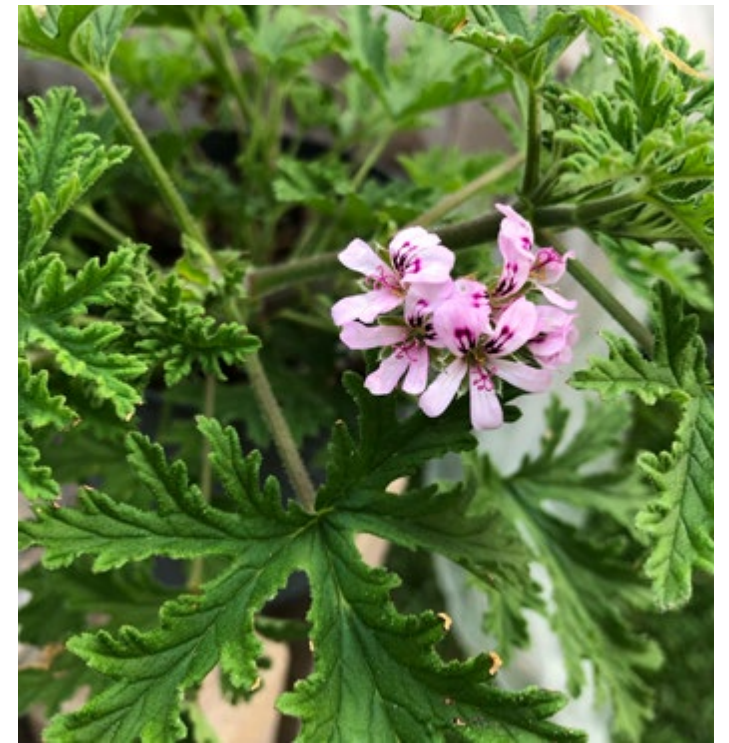
We have made great progress in the garden! The three raised beds are 95% planted, and we have already harvested the first round of French Breakfast and Cherry Bell radishes. Since this is our first time with many of these varieties, there have already been some surprises, including how huge, and how fast, the first potato plant has grown. We are watching it now to ensure it doesn't completely take over the peas and marigolds. We planted two additional potatoes in the third bed, that are only just now sprouting, so we will be keeping an eye on them, too. Next year we will likely move potatoes to individual containers.

The next phase is to transplant the nightshade plants (including Sweet Rainbow and Serrano peppers, four types of tomatoes, and two eggplants, along with some

basil and parsley), from their current greenhouse staging location into their individual containers in a sunnier location. One of the eggplant seeds never germinated, so we did end up buying two eggplant seedlings from a nursery so that they would align with the growth progress of the other nightshades. We have some young Yarrow and Milkweed seedlings that will be transplanted soon, and we are looking forward to seeing which butterflies and other beneficial insects will stop by to visit.

The process continues to be full of wonder and learning that brings us great joy!

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





## Mental Health

# Thought Life: The Way of Change

by Thaddeus Shelton, Jr., MFT, CSAYC

Thought life is important for Christians who follow Christ. In numerous scriptures, we are encouraged to use “self control,” which is a fruit of the Spirit, to manage our minds and emotions.

In Hebrews 3:1, God gives us a specific command that serves as an important principal of our tradition; “Fix your thoughts on Jesus.” As we continue to practice being more like Jesus, this practice reforms our thinking. As we practice higher thinking, it shapes our behavior, experience, and outcomes in life.

If we are to manage our mind and emotions, we first have to learn how to re-program ourselves. In a cybernetic sense, our conscious thoughts are like software drivers, telling our components and CPU how the program (us humans) “should” function. Imagine the conscious mind as the transmitter and the subconscious mind as the receiver. Everything we take into our minds and hearts, whether the negative or positive, programs our conscious thinking, and this creates a reality that our subconscious accepts as true. As believers, we want to take control of our conscious thoughts because

they program our minds, and this affects what we manifest in the world.

This is why the human mind is instructed by faith to remain focused on Jesus/ the Holy Spirit (which is Sophia/ Wisdom). If you feel that you are not getting what you want out of life, maybe you might consider changing your focus. You see, what we focus on takes up psychological space, and as finite beings we can only take so much.

That brings us back to “thought life” and the fruitfulness of Spirit-focused people. From the way I understand it, “thought life” is concerned with the moment-to-moment spiritual walk/practice of believers. This sounds a lot like the definition I use for religion. Even though we tend to think of our religion simply as our preferred faith orientation, at The LabOratory Church we view religion as the daily activities surrounding that faith.

In psychology, some say it is our thoughts that drive our feelings, and then our feelings drive our actions. Isaiah 55:8–9 says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.” In the

song “Our God Reigns,” it talks about our God being steadfast and unmovable. Unlike God, our minds are in a constant state of movement. As a result our thoughts and emotions tend to ebb and flow.

In the garden story there was a prohibition on knowledge, as if God knew the corrosive damage certain thoughts would have on us. Our thoughts, and what influences them, matter to us and to God. As people, we often get caught in feedback loops: when thoughts play on repeat in our minds. We might observe how when we’re “in our own heads,” we can show up as a drone (on automatic pilot). Sometimes we’re so deep in thought about the things of this life that we forget the comfort contained in relationship with God.

By now you might be thinking “well, how can we interrupt the loop instead of it interrupting us?” First, consider our inputs, are they coming primarily from this world, or from the Spirit? Next, the inputs that do not serve us, we can cut them off. This will allow more space for the input of the Spirit, and this creates better programming of our subconscious, which will then be reflected in our lives.

This reminds me of the words from Isaiah 26:3: “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.” It seems that Wisdom is offering peace in exchange for attention, care, concern, and relationship.

What if we practice positively framing and reframing the thoughts that bring us down? Now, I’m not suggesting you walk around talking to yourself, I am, however, asking you to speak life into every situation in every moment through faith in the Spirit. We have heard it said “what our hearts ask for we will receive,” this means our speech directs our behaviors and environment into consistency with our prayer intentions. So let’s check in with ourselves and make sure our thoughts and actions are trending towards God, and the world is made better by at least one more person. These redirections can improve our lives and give us rest in places that were not previously restful. **Shalom.**





## Guest Speaker

# Rev. Paula Pettis-Garrett Preaching at The Worship Lab May 15th

For the next **Worship Lab on Sunday, May 15th @ 6:30 pm ET** (via Zoom), we will be joined by special guest preacher, **Rev. Paula Pettis-Garrett**. She will bring the good word from Isaiah 43:16-23. We hope to see you there!

Rev. Paula Pettis-Garrett is an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). She serves as Associate Pastor at Avon Christian Church in Avon, IN. Rev. Paula graduated from Christian Theological Seminary in 2018 with a Master of Divinity Degree. She is also a licensed clinical social worker, earning both bachelor's and master's degrees in social work from the Indiana University School of Social Work. In 24 years of field work, Paula has worked in a wide variety of settings and with a vast diversity of individuals.

She has been married to Rev. Steve Garrett for nearly 25 years and they have three children, J'Niah (pronounced: J' ny a), Nia (pronounced: Nee uh), and Steven, Jr., and one grandson, Ryan. In her downtime, Rev. Paula enjoys reading, binge-watching crime dramas, and having fun with family and friends.





## 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

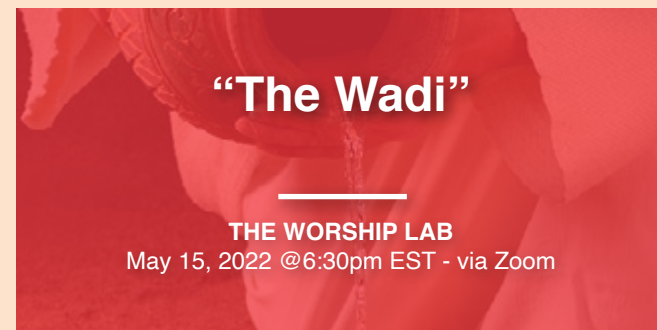
Link your **Kroger Plus card** to our 4KEEPS Mobile Pantry, and we'll receive a percentage of your total grocery bill as a donation. There is no cost to you, and it won't affect your other Kroger Plus card benefits!

#### How to link the card to The Laboratory Church:

- Log in to your account: [www.kroger.com](http://www.kroger.com)
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- 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](http://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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### Next Issue: June

Stay tuned to learn about next month's guest preachers for The Worship Lab!



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