



February 2023

HOW DO WE DISTINGUISH THE TRUTH OF LIFE?

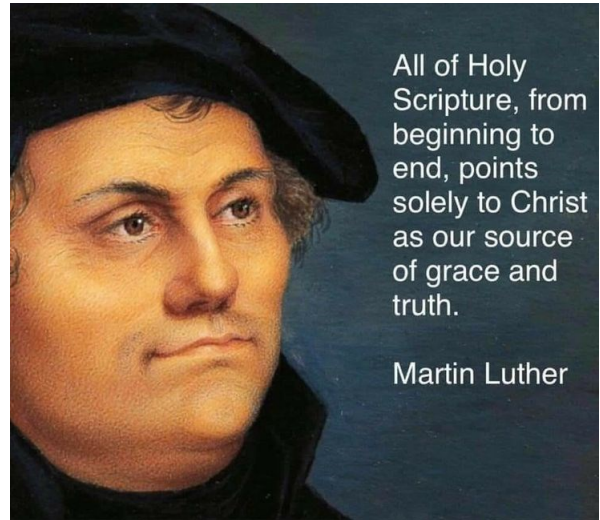
As I prepare for my last presiding at Grace in the month of January, the 15th by the way, I am so clearly aware that one of the great challenges of human life is being able to discern where exactly truth lies, and how does one distinguish just what that truth might be. Luther pointed us to scripture, but now, and back then, those who had read the very same scripture seemed to reach different conclusions. The reformation was a journey into those differences with the sad ending that it was not possible to reach agreement about what was meant. Instead of coming together and finding common ground and living and trusting each other we humans figured out ways to demonize the other and simply create cavernous separations that have lasted for centuries.

Over recent years I have come to hear and see Christians, and others who see the world we live in so differently, that maybe that's why we are exploring the galaxies. It's clear that we can't live here in harmony. Maybe we can find some place else. As we moved towards a huge change and challenge to our lives associated with illness, I saw the differences more starkly, to the point that I wondered if it was hopeless. Many friends and acquaintances have wondered the very same thing. Is the only option we can find the one of solidified hate, violence, and mayhem. Or do all of us have to live on our own planets, separated from each other in such a way that we can never come together again?

As we read scriptures, and particularly at this time between Advent and Jesus' baptism by John we realized that "It's the witnesses stupid!" What I mean is all my life I have found and been blessed by mentors, guides, people who stood for things I cared about, and in scripture I discovered the very same thing. None of us born to perfection, save our Lord and savior. None of us could even get close to the help and love we found as we learned about and encountered those who might be guides. None of them perfect, for sure, but there are and were and will be witnesses in this world that may help us find our way.

They typically do not come with three piece suits, superman outfits, or a red hat. They certainly don't carry guns, aren't threatening or troublemakers. They might be smart, but smart in a certain way. Not by acing every test, but in understanding a level of depth that is surprising, unexpected, maybe remarkable. It could be someone who looks and acts strange,

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All of Holy Scripture, from beginning to end, points solely to Christ as our source of grace and truth.

Martin Luther

yet that person calls us to a place of accountability, of understanding, of rightness and of righteousness. They typically are not wrapped in robes of power, or threat or harm. They, those among us who are wise, who have been there and done that, and want to help and to share... these are the ones who we might follow.

The ones that speak with warmth and interest, with no ulterior motives, and no needs for control. This man who comes out of the wilderness, calling us to repent, is one such person in our lives as Christians. He is not looking to have power over us, nor is he expecting everyone to try and look like or act like him, rather he is one who is a witness to something else; to someone else.

When I think of the people who have been like that for me, Arleah, Charlie, Dahli, Desmond, Dietrich, Dorothee, Edie, Fred, Henry, Howard, John, Jean, Jimmy, Judith, Keila, Langston, Margaret, Martin, Maya, Morrie, Nelson, Peter, Santiago, Scott, and Tom... to name a few. They truly have been witnesses to the truth in my life... it is those relationships that reinforce and strengthen, that hold up to us something that we must know to live.

Let's not think that we can't find the truth in our lives. We can, but we need to look for it. It is there. In the darkest places... just as the case that John called people to repent and come to the waters to wash themselves clean. And though he had no idea why Jesus would want to be baptized by him, he did as he was asked, he did what he was told. Jesus was as us in every way... and God gave public assurance through the flight of a dove and his word that Jesus was his son, and he was clear that this would be a living out of the truth on earth in the midst of the lies, the noise, the search for wealth and power, and here, from the sky we are assured that John was a witness and that we may be so, too.

Let us share our witness with others... in doing this we may find the truth that is life.



PASTOR'S MESSAGE: LOOKING FOR TRUTH AND WELLNESS

I hope you enjoy some of the pieces in this issue. I want to thank Nilda in advance for jumping back into the role of helping this issue get done, as Judy is moving towards the end of the largest challenge to face us in our 49+ years together. As of this writing she's had the chemo and her stem cells have been returned. Now the work really begins; and the prayers help that happen. We will be together for the last weeks, and I pray for a triumphant return... or, alternatively, and fully acceptable, a process of slow but steady healing that may remove the fear, the anxiety, and the uncertainty that we have lived with going on a year.

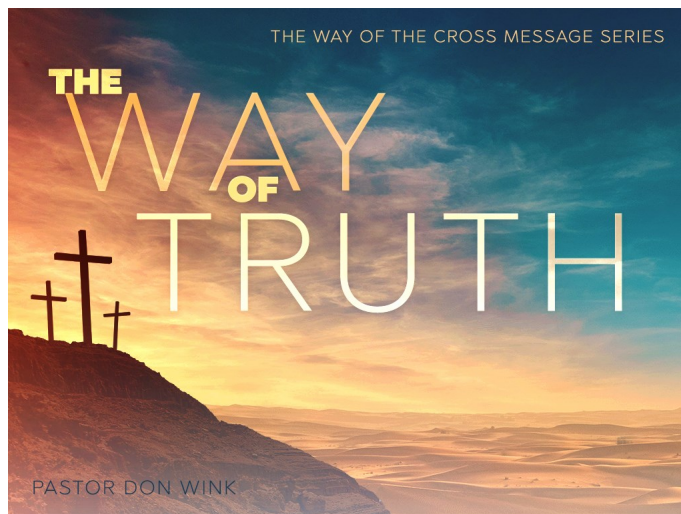
We are also in a new year, with ugliness still floating all around us, that threatens our way of life and our way of being. The words and articles you'll find here, we hope, will generate useful and important thinking for all of us as we draw from those who are on the front lines. I'm particularly taken by Akeem Jeffries' speech following the 15 no-votes, and the period where our government itself faltered.

Listening to poets, and the poetics, those who have seen where we may have not, and the hope for Grace as we continue to look for ways to be "truth" or "healing", or "welcoming" or more in our church. We have a lot of folks cheering for us, as we cheer for them. GHIAA continues to be a way to work together in ways that call us to have it be about us, not about you and me. May Darrell and our core team be part of showing the world these truths. I'm amazed that already decisions have been made to encourage forward movement on initiatives for the year.

Our relationship with Wheeler continues to grow, and our ideas about how to do more and different things through teamwork, relationships and joint hopes and dreams may lead us forward.

At the same time, we also realize that some will leave us as they have done their work and are ready for a well-needed rest. We were thankful for have spent time with "Rudy" Lewis in his last days, and are thrilled that Don Larsen presided at his funeral at Grace while I was occupied in Boston.

Let's trust in the truth and follow our mentors and become witnesses for others. I'm not done. Nor is Grace. Nor is our faith. We have all that we need.





What a Peaceful Transition of Power in a Democracy Looks Like, What a True, Eloquent Leader Says and Does

Hakeem Jeffries in the Midnight Hour of Our Fragile Democracy and Its Survival



(Photo by: Win McNamee / Getty Images)

As if irony could not pile itself any higher with an even a greater irony than what we just witnessed over four long days of Republicans coming to near-fisticuffs with each other over who would be Speaker of the House — a House full of members who *still deny the results of the very election that elected them to that House in 2020* — and now, *two years to the exact hour*, a Black Congressman from Crown Heights in Brooklyn, stands at the Speaker's podium in the U.S. House, gavel in hand, ready to turn it over to the discombobulated, dysfunctional “winning” party — but first he had a few words to say — in one of the greatest speeches in the history of the United States Congress...

Mr. Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY):

Let me begin by acknowledging the distinguished gentlelady from the great state of California, the iconic, the heroic, the legendary Speaker Emerita Nancy D'Alesandro Pelosi. And without question in my mind, Speaker Emerita Pelosi will go down in history as the greatest Speaker of all time. Throughout her time in Congress, she's been a legendary legislator, a fabulous facilitator, and a no-nonsense negotiator. We know that Nancy Pelosi is a woman of faith, a loving wife, a mother of five, a grandmother of nine, a defender of democracy, a voice for the voiceless, and a powerful champion for the children, the climate, Charm City, California, the Caucus, the Congress, the country, and the Constitution. Thank you, Madam Speaker, for all that you have done. It's an honor to stand on your broad shoulders...

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*Now, the Scripture says in Galatians, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest **if we do not give up.**”*

Over the last two years, House Democrats, in partnership with President Biden and our colleagues in the Senate, have been hard at work on behalf of the American people, getting big things done. We passed the American Rescue Plan, saved the economy from a deep recession, put shots in arms, money in pockets and kids back in school. We passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to create millions of good-paying jobs, fix our crumbling bridges, roads, tunnels, our airports, our sewer and water systems, our mass transportation systems and ensure high speed internet access in every single community. We passed gun safety legislation for the first time in 30 years that will save lives and make our communities safer. We passed the Chips in Science Act to bring domestic manufacturing jobs back home to the United States of America and ensure that our work force has the skills to succeed in the 21st century economy. And we passed the Inflation Reduction Act to strike a dramatic blow against the climate crisis, set our planet on a sustainable trajectory forward, lower energy costs, strengthen the Affordable Care Act, lower health care costs and drive down the high price of life-saving prescription drugs for millions of Americans. It was one of the most consequential Congresses in American history. President Biden gets the job done and the ‘D’ in Democrat stands for ‘deliver.’

So over the next two years, as we begin this 118th Congress, let us continue to fight for lower costs. Let us continue to fight in this Congress for better paying jobs. Let us continue to fight in this Congress for safer communities. Let us continue to fight in this Congress to defend Democracy. Let us continue to fight in this Congress to put and protect the public interests. Let us continue to fight in this Congress for economic opportunity in every single zip code. And let us continue to fight in this Congress for reproductive freedom.

[Boos and shouts of derision from the Republican side of the House]

*Because as Democrats we do believe in a country for everyone. **We believe in a country for everyone.** A country that provides for the poor, works for working families, makes sense for the middle class, stands up for senior citizens, innovates in the inner city, strengthens suburban communities, helps out the heartland and revitalizes rural America. We believe in a country with liberty and justice for all, equal protection under the law, free and fair elections and yes, **we believe in a country with the peaceful transfer of power.***

We believe that in America our diversity is a strength, it is not a weakness. An economic strength, a competitive strength, a cultural strength — our diversity is a strength. It is not a weakness. We are a gorgeous mosaic of people from throughout the world. As John Lewis would sometimes remind us on this floor, we may have come over on different ships, but we're all in the same boat now. We are white, we are Black, we are Latino, we are Asian, we are

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Native American, we are Christian, we are Jewish, we are Muslim, we are Hindu, we are religious, we are secular, we are gay, we are straight, we are young, we are older, we are women, we are men, we are citizens, we are dreamers, out of many we are one. That's what makes America a great country. And no matter what kind of haters are trying to divide us, we're not going to let anyone take that away from us, not now, not ever.

This is the United States of America — a land of opportunity. The fact that I'm able to stand up here today is another data point in that narrative. I was born in a Brooklyn hospital, raised in a working class neighborhood in Crown Heights, grew up in the Cornerstone Baptist Church, started off in the cradle roll department, somehow survived the violence of the crack cocaine epidemic and wound up here in the United States Congress as the highest ranking Democrat in the House of Representatives. America — truly a land of opportunity, government of the people, by the people, and for the people. So on this first day, let us commit to the American Dream. A dream that promises that if you work hard and play by the rules, you should be able to provide a comfortable living for yourself and for your family, educate your children, purchase a home and one day retire with grace and dignity. Let us commit on this first day to lift up the American Dream for every single person in this nation.

Now I recognize that this is a moment of transition. As we transition from one Congress to the next, from one majority to the next, from a year of accomplishment to a year of ambiguity — a moment of transition. The American people, understandably after the events of this week, recognize that the Congress is at a fork in the road and are asking the question, what direction will we choose? On this first day, I do not pretend to answer that question on behalf of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. But we do extend our hand of partnership to you. And want to make clear that we extend and intend to try to find common ground, whenever and wherever possible on behalf of the American people — not as Democrats, not as Republicans, not as Independents, but as Americans.

*But I also want to make clear that we will **never** compromise our principles. House Democrats will always put:*

American values over autocracy.

Benevolence over bigotry.

The Constitution over the cult.

Democracy over demagogues.

Economic opportunity over extremism.

Freedom over fascism!

Governing over gaslighting.

Hopefulness over hatred.

Inclusion over isolation.

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Justice over judicial overreach.

Knowledge over kangaroo courts.

Liberty over limitation.

Maturity over Mar-a-Lago.

Normalcy over negativity.

Opportunity over obstruction.

People over politics.

Quality of life issues over Q-Anon.

Reason over racism.

Substance over slander.

Triumph over tyranny.

Understanding over ugliness.

Voting rights over voter suppression.

Working families over the well-connected.

Xenial over xenophobia.

“Yes we can” over “You can’t do it.”

And — Zealous representation over zero-sum confrontation.

We will always do the right thing by the American people.

So let us not grow weary of doing good for the American people will reap the benefit of the harvest if we do not give up.

God bless you. God bless the House. And God bless the United States of America.

And with that, the new Speaker took over, having promised to look deep and hard into Hunter Biden’s Laptop.



(Photo by: Chip Somodevilla / Getty Images)

GOD WANTS ALL PEOPLE TO BE HIS

- The people of God is a community
- There is a place for every person
- We are meant to live in communion with God



**HIS WORDS.
YOUR JOURNEY.
TOGETHER.**



WENDESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2023

"Brothers and sisters, the journey of faith begins whenever, by God's grace, we make room for the restlessness that keeps us awake and alert. It begins when we are willing to ask questions, when we are dissatisfied with our daily routine and take seriously the challenges of each new day.

When we step out of our comfort zone and decide to confront the uncomfortable aspects of life: our relationships with others, unexpected events, projects needing to be undertaken, dreams to be realized, fears to be faced, physical and mental sufferings. At such times, deep in our hearts, we find ourselves before the irrepressible questions that lead us to seek the Lord: Where do I find happiness? Where do I find that fullness of life to which I aspire? Where do I find a love that does not fade away, a love that endures even in the face of frailty, failure and betrayal? What hidden opportunities are present in the midst of my crises and my sufferings?

God, however, is always there, there within our restless questioning. In that questioning, we "seek him as the night seeks the dawn... He is present in the silence that troubles us in the face of death and the end of all human grandeur. He is present in the longing for justice and love deep within our hearts. He is the holy mystery that responds to our yearning for the Totally Other; a yearning for perfect and consummate justice, reconciliation and peace. That, then, is the first place where we can encounter the Lord: in restless questioning. Do not be afraid to enter into this restless questioning, for that is the path that leads us to Jesus."

Pope Francis

NONVIOLENCE IS CHRISTIAN LOVE IN ACTION: A CONVERSATION WITH JOHN LEWIS

By John Dear

November 15th, 2022

In 1995, I spent an afternoon speaking with civil rights activist and Georgia Congressman John Lewis (1940–2020), one of the world’s greatest teachers and practitioners of nonviolence. Below is an edited excerpt of our conversation.

John Dear: John, let me start by asking you: What does nonviolence mean for you and how did you get involved in and committed to the life of Christian nonviolence?

John Lewis: I grew up in rural Alabama during the 1940s and 50s. I grew up in a Christian home, where there was a great deal of love. At an early age, I came to appreciate the philosophy and discipline of Christian love. So, I view nonviolence as Christian love in action. It is a part of my faith. It is believing that love is the most powerful force in the universe—and somehow, some way, you have to live it.

JD: Tell me how you got involved in organizing sit-ins against segregation in restaurants and how you formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

JL: I was deeply inspired by Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968) and Rosa Parks (1913–2005). When I was a young child in Troy, Alabama, I would visit Montgomery, about fifty miles south. I saw signs which said, “white men, colored men,” “white women, colored women,” “white waiting, colored waiting.” Segregation was the order of the day, and I resented the system of segregation. I wanted to do something about it.

So, as a student in Nashville, I started studying the philosophy and the discipline of nonviolence. I got involved in a series of what we called sit-ins and I emerged as one of the student leaders. I literally grew up on a lunch-counter stool when I was nineteen years old in 1959.

In 1960, we started sitting in on a regular basis, and I got arrested and went to jail. That was a great triumph, because jail sort of became a way out. I grew up at a time in the American South when young blacks were not supposed to come in contact with the law. You were supposed to stay out of jail. It was a bad thing to go to jail. But there was something redemptive about going through this process. I remember being beaten and a lighted cigarette being put out in my hair. I was thrown off a lunch-counter stool before I was arrested, and I had the power, because of my belief in Christian love and nonviolence, not to strike back.



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JD: How about the first Freedom Ride? What were you trying to do there? What happened?

JL: On the Freedom Ride, we were out to test a decision of the US Supreme Court, outlawing segregation in the area of public transportation. So, it was an effort on the part of thirteen of us, seven whites and six blacks, to ride a bus from Washington, DC to Jackson, Mississippi, and on to Louisiana. We were using all of the public facilities, not just the bus: the waiting rooms, the restrooms, and the lunch counters.

I will never forget: The night before we left, we had dinner at a local Chinese restaurant in Washington, DC. I had never had Chinese food before. We were sitting there eating, and someone said, "You should eat well tonight because this may be like the Last Supper." Little did we know, as we traveled into Virginia, through North Carolina, into South Carolina, through Georgia, into Alabama, one of our buses would be burned and people beaten, and later a group of us would be beaten by an angry mob at a Greyhound bus station in Montgomery. I was left lying unconscious, bleeding, at a Greyhound bus station in Montgomery in the year 1961.

JD: Perhaps one of the turning points in our country's history was the famous march from Selma. You were one of the leaders of that march on Sunday, March 7, 1965, and you were severely beaten. Tell me about that day.

JL: Well, the Selma march was an attempt to dramatize to the nation and to the world that people of color, not only in Selma, but throughout the state of Alabama and throughout the South—

eleven Southern states really, from Virginia to Texas, in the old Confederacy—that these people wanted to participate in the democratic process. They wanted to register and to vote.



eleven Southern states really, from Virginia to Texas, in the old Confederacy—that these people wanted to participate in the democratic process. They wanted to register and to vote.

But on that day, when 600 of us marched through the streets and came to the apex of the Edmund Pettis Bridge, we saw a sea of blue: Alabama state troopers. They told us, in so many words, that this was an unlawful march, that we should disperse and go back to the church. In less than a minute or so, they said, "Troopers, advance!" They came toward us, beating us with nightsticks and bull whips, trampling us with horses, and using tear gas.

I was at the head of the march, as one of the march leaders. I was hit in the head with a nightstick, and I got a concussion right on the bridge. But it was the turning point, because there was a sense of righteous indignation when people saw nonviolent people being beaten. We weren't armed with guns or sticks. Some of us had knapsacks with an apple, an orange, some books, the Bible. We were bearing witness to something that we thought was right. We all were committed to the philosophy and discipline of nonviolence. Most of us had just left church.

JD: Part of the challenge of nonviolence is to respond nonviolently to personal assault, but to keep insisting on the truth of justice and peace. Jesus epitomized this and Gandhi taught us this. How did you respond personally to these police who were beating you and to all the people who threatened you during those years in the struggle? What was it like for you to deal with this violence nonviolently?

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JL: Well, I believe in the philosophy and discipline of nonviolence. I accepted it not simply as a technique or as a tactic, but as a way of life, a way of living. We have to arrive at the point, as believers in the Christian faith, that in every human being there is a spark of divinity. Every human personality is something sacred, something special. We don't have a right, as another person or as a nation, to destroy that spark of divinity, that spark of humanity, that is made and created in the image of God.

I saw Sherriff Clark in Selma, or Bull Connor in Birmingham, or George Wallace, the governor of Alabama, as victims of the system. We were not out to destroy these men. We were out to destroy a vicious and evil system. So, our attack had to be directed against customs, traditions, and unjust laws—but not against these individuals.

JD: Unfortunately, most people and most Christians don't see Jesus as nonviolent, or God as a God of nonviolence. Yet our faith is calling us to uphold the sanctity of life through nonviolence. How do you understand Jesus and God in light of nonviolence?

JL: I happen to believe that God is love, that love is God. Hate is too much of a burden to bear. If you start hating, in the end, how are you going to decide who you are going to hate today and love tomorrow? The Christian doctrine of love and nonviolence is a way of life, not merely a tactic. Love in action, Christian love, is a better way, a more excellent way, and it's more redemptive. I don't know how to explain it, but I somehow came to that point, as I grew in my faith, that this is the way, this is the way out, and the way out is the way in.

JD: You had the privilege of working with so many people in the Civil Rights Movement, but especially with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Can you tell me what you learned personally about nonviolence from Dr. King?

JL: I learned a great deal from Dr. King. This man, in his own way, taught me that love in action is the strongest force, that nothing is more powerful than love in action. He taught me to have hope, not to give up, not to give in, and not to give out. In the philosophy of nonviolence, in the way of Christian love, you have to have an element of hope, an element of faith. He taught us that. He would say, from time to time, that if you don't have hope, you're already dead, you're really not here.

It's very much in keeping with our Christian faith that if you really believe in love, you have to live it. If you believe it, you have to live it. When I was working with Dr. King, after a while, I began to believe that maybe, just maybe, we could create the Beloved Community. That's the thing: It is possible to create, in this world, in this life, a Beloved Society, a Beloved Community, a Beloved World.

JD: Dr. King was cut down right in the prime of life. What would you say is his greatest legacy, his greatest contribution?

JL: I think his greatest legacy and contribution is that he taught us how to love, how to live, and, really, how to die. You live your life by giving, by serving, by sharing, and, in the process, you don't worry. You are consistent, you are true to your faith, to your belief. I often think about Dr. King, that if it hadn't been for this man, I don't know where our world would be today.

JD: Could you say a word about how you see nonviolent civil disobedience specifically as a tool in the struggle for social change?

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JL: Nonviolent civil disobedience is a very powerful weapon. It's probably one of the most powerful weapons that we have in the arsenal of nonviolent action because you're literally putting your body on the line. You're saying you're willing to disobey a custom, a tradition, or what you consider to be an unjust law. You're willing to pay the price. You're willing to suffer. You're willing to go to jail if necessary and serve your time.

I think there's something very redemptive about it. There's something very cleansing about it, to go through all that. In keeping with the philosophy of nonviolent civil disobedience, you come to that point where you have to educate the larger society, and you keep trying, over and over again. Then, sometimes, it's only a core group that's prepared to go the distance with that. I think it's being true to the heart of the faith, and to the philosophy and discipline of nonviolence.

JD: In your opinion, how can Christians use nonviolence to help to end war, end poverty, eradicate hunger, and abolish nuclear weapons? How can we use nonviolence to attack all these big global issues of injustice?

JL: There are so many things we can do as Christians. We can lead the way, even as a nation. Those of us who believe in the philosophy and discipline of nonviolence, who believe in Christian love, who believe that it's redemptive and powerful—we can say to the leaders of our own country that there is a better way. We can take the lead.

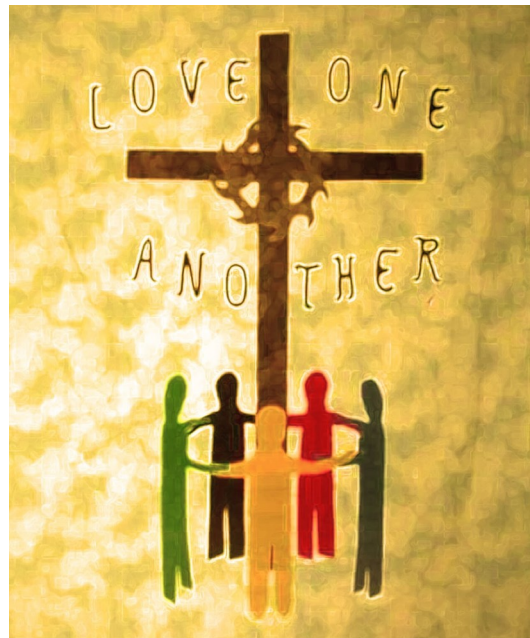
The death penalty is not something that a great nation should be proud of. Putting people to death is barbaric. It represents another period in history. We can do better. We can lead the way. We can lay down the tools of war and all the tools of violence. War is an obsolete tool of our foreign policy.

Christians, religious leaders, and all people have to say to our elected officials: "Let's use our resources to end hunger and poverty, to find cures for the diseases that afflict humankind, to improve the standard of living and the quality of life for all people on this little planet." I think we have to take the lead in saying all that. I hope, in the future, people will have a deeper appreciation of the philosophy of Christian love and nonviolence.

JD: As you know all too well, racism is alive and well in our country. What would you suggest to Christians, particularly to white Christians in our country, about turning to nonviolence and using nonviolence to fight the sin of racism?

JL: I think that all of us as Christians must use everything at our disposal to speak out against racism and bigotry. The scars and stains of racism are still deeply embedded in our society. When we acquiesce, when we're silent, we're helping racism to continue to prosper and to grow. We should say, as Christians, that we're one family, that we're sisters and brothers, that we're one community, that we're one house.

JD: What is your hope for future generations, given your life in the movement of Christian nonviolence?



NONVIOLENCE IS CHRISTIAN LOVE IN ACTION: A CONVERSATION WITH JOHN LEWIS

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JL: I'm very hopeful, very optimistic, that in the days and years to come, more and more people—not only in America, but around the globe—will come to accept Christian nonviolence as a way of life, as a way of living; that somehow, some way, humankind will evolve to a higher level, where people will accept that violence and hate are too great a burden to bear; that more and more people will lay down the burden of hate and violence; and that we will move to a new period in history where we will be quick to negotiate, to discuss, and to solve our problems around a table rather than in the streets, by shooting and bombing.

JD: I hear many people who are despairing say, "Well, this is very idealistic and wonderful, but there's no evidence of any change happening." What signs of hope have you seen?

JL: John, I must tell you—I have seen a lot of changes in my lifetime. I have witnessed what I like to call "a nonviolent revolution" in our country. The signs that I saw growing up, saying "White" and "Colored," are gone, and they will not return. There was a tremendous amount of fear in the South, and that fear is now gone. At one time, hundreds of thousands of people of color could not register and vote, could not participate in the democratic process. But today, they can register, and they are voting.

In the South, less than thirty years ago, there were only about fifty black elected officials. Today [in 1995] there are almost seven thousand. We've made a lot of progress. We're not there yet, but I think we're on our way to the Beloved Community. There are going to be setbacks and disappointments here and there, along the way, but I think that, as a nation and as a people, we're going to move toward the Beloved Community.

Christian nonviolence came from Jesus and was spread by Gandhi, but it has now been picked up by so many other different peoples and religions around the world. I think it will continue to live on as a message and spread far and wide, so I'm hopeful.





Because you have written to us concerning immigration, I wanted to share some of Senator Murphy's reactions to his recent trip to the Southwest border as part of a [bipartisan delegation](#). Following his trip, Senator Murphy discussed his takeaways and the importance of finding a bipartisan solution to reform our immigration laws.

On why he joined this trip: "So we went to the border as a bipartisan delegation, hopeful that what we learned could help paint a path forward for immigration reform. Now, Congress has been unable to pass immigration reform since the 1980s. And we got asked during our trip, why on earth this time would be different. One of the answers that we provided is that the group that went to the border is a group that has been able to break through on issues that had similar decades of inaction... Part of the group that went to the border included Senator Sinema from Arizona, Senator Cornyn of Texas, Senator Tillis of North Carolina. Those are the three senators that I wrote the bipartisan gun bill [with], and that's not a coincidence. The group that went to the border has found a way to compromise on difficult issues like guns and get bills passed in the House and the Senate. I believe that we can do the same thing on the issue of immigration."

Murphy highlighted reforms he's focused on pursuing in the Senate: "So that's the set of reforms that we're talking about – continuing our system of asylum, but having that process occur before people come to the border and having that process be quicker, and then opening up the pathway for other kinds of legal immigration, whether it be the guest worker program, agricultural workers, or the family reunification program. We just should allow more people to come to this country legally."

On a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers, Murphy added: "That has to be on the table...I certainly want a pathway for Dreamers. Frankly, I want a pathway to citizenship for all law-abiding, undocumented workers in this country given certain requirements that they meet."

"My hope is that this group that went to the border will be able to sit down and try to hammer out a compromise. I understand the House is right now in control of pretty right wing Republicans, they might or might not be interested in that compromise, but the bond that many of us already have through tough negotiations on issues like guns, and the bond that we formed through this common experience of the last few days, I think will allow us to at least start discussions on a bipartisan bill, and I'm glad to be part of it," **Murphy concluded.**

During his trip, Murphy visited El Paso, Texas and Yuma, Arizona where he met with Border Patrol, community leaders, and non-profits to learn about the security, humanitarian, and economic challenges facing border communities as well as asylum seekers.

Below is a full transcript of his opening remarks:

"I just got back late last night from a two day trip to the southwest border – one day in El Paso and the surrounding area, yesterday in Yuma and the surrounding area. I was there as part of a pretty unprecedented bipartisan Senate delegation. Unfortunately, very often you have groups of Republicans or groups of Democrats going to the border, given the fact that this issue is often simply viewed as a political cudgel. We decided to do something different – four Democrats, four Republicans – in an effort to try to find common ground to solve a crisis that is vexing Americans.

“I want to talk to you a little bit about what we saw. I want to talk to you a little bit about the path forward. Connecticut is not a border state, but there is no doubt that a lack of order at the border affects us in Connecticut. You saw 2.5 million migrants cross that border, be apprehended at the border last year. That's a record setting number. Many of those migrants end up in Connecticut. Now, that's good for Connecticut. But when you have that large a number of migrants coming in an unplanned way, it also stresses out social services at the border but also throughout the country.

“What we heard is that the two top destinations for migrants who are arriving in El Paso or Yuma are Chicago and New York. There's no doubt that many of those who are bound for New York are coming to Connecticut. That's good for Connecticut, but we need to be able to better manage the inflow of migrants in a way that allows us to plan in Connecticut.

“So we went to the border as a bipartisan delegation, hopeful that what we learned could help paint a path forward for immigration reform. Now, Congress has been unable to pass immigration reform since the 1980s. And we got asked during our trip, why on earth this time would be different. One of the answers that we provided is that the group that went to the border is a group that has been able to break through on issues that had similar decades of inaction.

“Part of the group that went to the border included Senator Sinema from Arizona, Senator Cornyn of Texas, Senator Tillis of North Carolina. Those are the three senators that I wrote the bipartisan gun bill [with], and that's not a coincidence. The group that went to the border has found a way to compromise on difficult issues like guns and get bills passed in the House and the Senate. I believe that we can do the same thing on the issue of immigration.

“Now, what have we learned? The first thing we learned is that those that are working at the border, whether that be Border Patrol or not-for-profit groups, are doing heroic work. What we learned is virtually everybody that's crossing the border is doing so to simply seek a better life in the United States. Yes, there are drug traffickers. Yes, there are a handful of dangerous people. But almost everyone that is coming to the United States is coming here because they want to work. They're coming here because they're fleeing violence or persecution.

“Second thing we learned is that the profile of the individuals and families that are crossing the border is fundamentally different today than it was five or 10 years ago. A decade ago, it was mainly Mexican immigrants, immigrants from poor countries in Central America. That's not what's happening today. In the Yuma sector, there are more Russians crossing the border than there are Mexicans. The variety of countries represented at the border is just stunning. Cuba, Venezuela, Colombia, but also China, India, Russia, people are coming to the United States from all over the world right now. And again, the majority of those, 99% of them, are just coming here for a better life. But it's becoming hard to manage this number of people from this diverse set of places, and so we have got to set up a better, more orderly system.

“I think President Biden in the new plan that he put forward last week is painting a picture for what that new system should look like. People should be able to apply for asylum in the United States. I'm a big believer in America's asylum program or refugee program, but it's got to be through a planned orderly process. That's why it makes sense first to have more people apply for asylum before they arrive at the United States border.

“Second, we need to process those claims much more quickly. Right now, when you show up to the United States and claim asylum, you can stay in the United States for three, four, sometimes five years before your claim is processed. Many of those migrants don’t actually qualify for asylum status, but they stay in the United States for five years before they are ordered removed. Now, that’s not really fair to those that are waiting for visas to enter this country and have to wait for five to 10 years to go through that process. So we need to process these asylum claims much more quickly in days, not years.

“So that’s the set of reforms that we’re talking about – continuing our system of asylum, but having that process occur before people come to the border and having that process be quicker, and then opening up the pathway for other kinds of legal immigration, whether it be the guest worker program, agricultural workers, or the family reunification program. We just should allow more people to come to this country legally.

“My hope is that this group that went to the border will be able to sit down and try to hammer out a compromise. I understand the House is right now in control of pretty right wing Republicans, they might or might not be interested in that compromise, but the bond that many of us already have through tough negotiations on issues like guns, and the bond that we formed through this common experience of the last few days, I think will allow us to at least start discussions on a bipartisan bill, and I’m glad to be part of it.”



JESUS OFFERS ABUNDANT LIFE TO ALL. THE U.S. ASYLUM PROCESS DOESN'T

BY PAOLA FUENTES GLEGHORN

JAN 12, 2023

During his recent visit to the U.S.-Mexico border, President Joe Biden announced changes to border enforcement and the asylum process — the legal process that allows people fleeing danger to seek safety in the U.S. One of the most concerning changes was **an expansion** of Title 42, a public health policy invoked by former President Donald Trump that weaponized the pandemic to turn away many Black and brown migrants looking for asylum.



It isn't supposed to be this way: When people arrive at the border asking for help from violence or persecution, both international and U.S. law grant them a right to seek protection by requesting asylum. However, under Title 42, many people — including children and families — are sent directly back into the dangerous environments they were fleeing before they can even *request* asylum.

This announcement from the Biden administration should prompt us all to take a hard look at the laws that make up U.S. immigration policy. Ask yourself: Who do these laws protect and who do we see as worthy of receiving protection? Who benefits from the laws we create? Who do those laws apply to? Jesus tells us in John 10 that he came that we may “have life, and have it abundantly,” yet when I look at the U.S. immigration system, I see racist and xenophobic laws that claim the only people found “worthy” of protection and opportunity are those who have enough resources or are from the right places. This completely contradicts what God has told us about every person having equal value as part of the body of Christ. “Just as a body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ,” writes Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:12, insisting a few verses later that “if one member suffers, all suffer with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it” (v. 25-26).

During his border visit, Biden also announced that while they are expanding Title 42, they are also beginning a new program to allow up to 30,000 people from Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Haiti to temporarily enter the U.S. to seek asylum if they apply from inside their home countries and meet all of the requirements. While this might sound like good news, for many people seeking asylum, those requirements are difficult if not impossible to meet. The Cair Coalition, an immigrant advocacy organization, **estimated in an Instagram post** that a person or family would need to:

- Know someone in the U.S. who has enough money to support them for up to two years, including housing, transportation, food, and medical needs.
- Access a smartphone or internet to contact that person and to apply for the program
- Have enough time and safety to complete all the paperwork and make all the appointments while fleeing for their life
- Access to all their life's paperwork and a computer with internet to upload all of that necessary paperwork
- Money and time to buy a plane ticket to the U.S. in case you are given an interview to receive the temporary visa

JESUS OFFERS ABUNDANT LIFE TO ALL. THE U.S. ASYLUM PROCESS DOESN'T

(continued from page 18)

It is hard to believe that a person fleeing for their lives would be able to meet these requirements; people fleeing for their lives rarely get to pick and choose how they travel to safety. That is why, under international and U.S. law, a person seeking asylum just has to reach the U.S. border and ask for help seeking protection from violence and persecution. Instead, this new program serves as a wealth and connections test, essentially only allowing people with access to wealthy connections in the U.S. to seek protection.

From the beginning, the U.S. immigration system has been a system of laws that protects and benefits white Europeans and wealthy people. These new policies make clear what our immigration system has emphasized over and over: Black and brown people from poorer countries are not worth protecting. The land of opportunity and freedom is not available as a hope for Black and brown migrants seeking safety, protection, and a future for their family.

Right now, the Biden administration is trying to present this announcement as an effort to make a safer way for people to come to the U.S. to seek protection. In reality, they are putting forth a harmful policy that will return many people back to the dangerous situations they are fleeing. While they are cracking a window open for a few asylum seekers with access to a lot of resources and privileges, they are shutting the door on most people seeking asylum.

This situation isn't unfixable; we could choose to implement different policies. The U.S. has the capacity and resources to offer protection to people seeking asylum in a just and equitable manner.

When the war in Ukraine began, the U.S. promised to welcome 100,000 Ukrainian refugees and according to the nonpartisan **Migration Policy Institute**, it kept that promise by "extending protection to as many as 180,000" Ukrainians — a good and much needed response that modeled how should respond to people fleeing violence and danger. It showed that the U.S. has the capacity to welcome many people and that, with political will and resources, an organized, timely, and humane system for processing asylum seekers is possible.

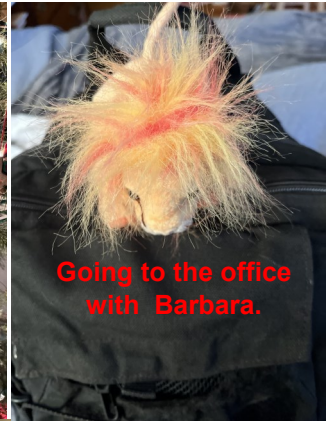
As Christians, our faith tells us that every person is made in the image of God and therefore has immeasurable and equal worth in the eyes of God. So, our immigration laws and policies should honor the God-given dignity of every person and treat every person as being worthy of protection.



A COLLAGE OF LOVE: FROM BARBARA RUHE AND HER "SICK LION"



Packed my favorite blanket and my hair dryer — so I will have a great mane and will feel comfortable and safe while I am away with Judy.



Going to the office with Barbara.

All these pictures and more were sent daily to Judy Butterworth-Kremer.



At Church.

This symbolizes the prayers and concern that rang out in our communities.



Supervising Elena today!



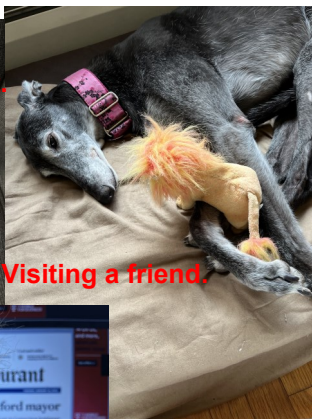
Got left in the office over night!! Did we party!



On my way to church.

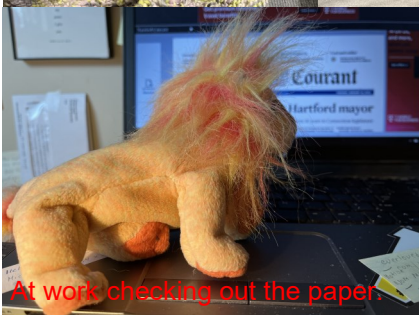


Mom teaching me to knit



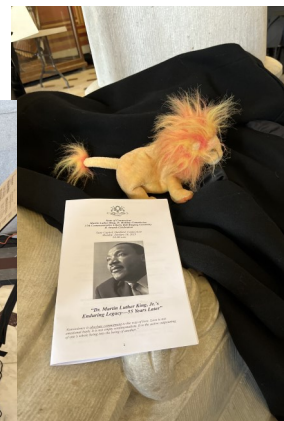
Visiting a friend.

At the State Capitol for MLK Celebration Wayne Dixon sends his love.



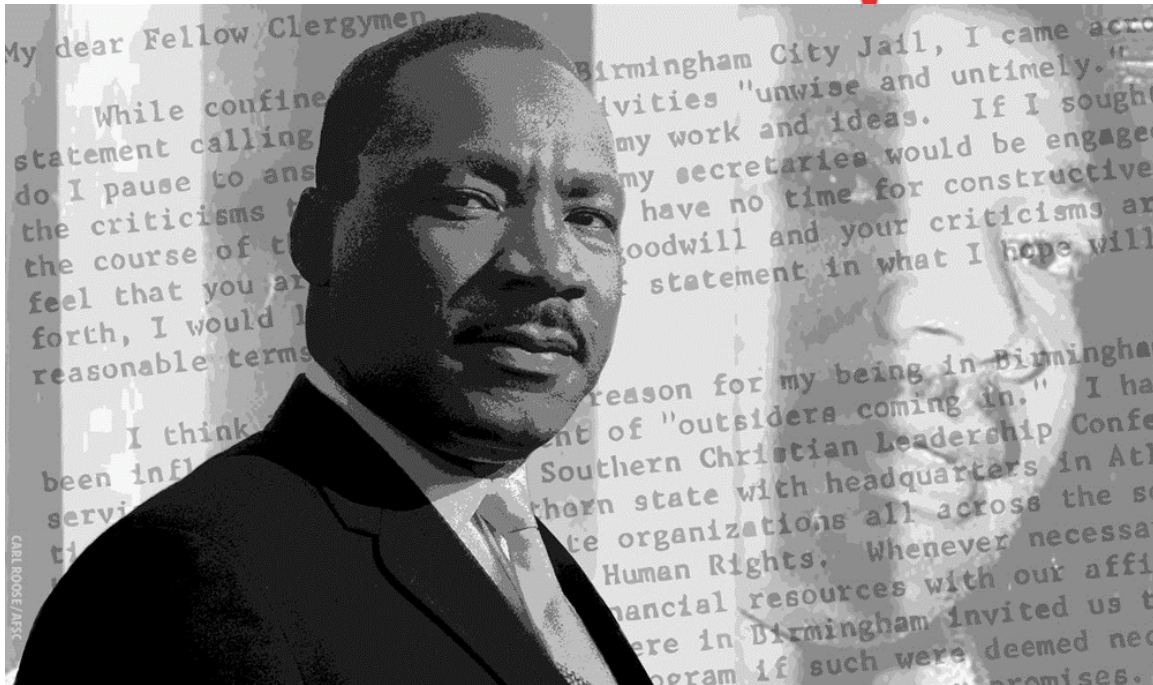
At work checking out the paper.

And, Thanks be to God she is coming home.



SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 2023

Weekend Reading



As we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day this weekend, we also mark the 60th anniversary of

Read Martin Luther King Jr.'s [**"Letter from Birmingham Jail."**](#)

"Letter from Birmingham Jail." Dr. King wrote the letter in April 1963 while jailed for leading a nonviolent demonstration against segregation. AFSC published the letter, distributing hundreds of thousands of copies in advance of the March on Washington.

[**As Denver seeks to aid migrants, immigrant rights activist speaks out against 'inhumane' U.S. policy:**](#) Since December, the city of Denver has assisted more than 4,111 migrants who arrived in the city. U.S. intervention in Central and Latin America has long fueled instability in the region, forcing people to flee, says AFSC's Jennifer Piper. And President Biden's policies, like Title 42, reject people seeking safety, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. "For people who've made it to us, I think of them as people who are very resilient and strong and creative, and also folks who need support and safety," she says. (Rocky Mountain PBS)

[**Tell Congress: Oppose Israel's demolition of Palestinian homes and schools:**](#) Just days into the new year, the Israeli military demolished several Palestinian homes, water tanks, and olive groves in the Masafer Yatta area of the West Bank. The destruction is part of Israel's planned evictions of over 1,000 Palestinians—half of them children—in the West Bank. And it advances Israel's policies of forcibly displacing Palestinians from their land and homes. Urge Congress to speak out today!

Join us for The Black Quaker Lives Matter Film Festival & Forum (Feb. 4-April 9): Next month kicks off this special series of events, co-sponsored by AFSC, to celebrate Quakers of color who have courageously worked for a more just, peaceful world. The festival will host screenings every other Saturday at 1 p.m. ET on Zoom followed by a Q+A with special guests. See the list of upcoming films and register today.

'We should not have to live in fear': For many immigrants like Fidelina Alfaro, it was a huge relief when President Biden extended Temporary Protected Status for people from El Salvador. TPS protects from deportation people who are from countries afflicted by war, natural disaster, and other dangers. In this op-ed, Fidelina, who works closely with AFSC, shares her story. She also urges Congress to provide permanent protections for all immigrants. (NJ.com)

Tell Congress: Cut Pentagon spending and keep social programs: It's been more than 60 years since President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned of the dangers of the "military industrial complex." Since then, the Pentagon budget has grown at an astronomical rate. As Congress considers spending cuts, join AFSC, Win Without War, Daily Kos, and other partners in lifting your voice. Urge Congress to cut the Pentagon budget, NOT social programs.

Above occupation, beyond survival: Last year, AFSC helped bring the voices of Gaza to the U.S. and international audiences with the anthology "Light in Gaza: Writings Born of Fire." Palestinian writer Nadia Elia says the book is "a unique opportunity to hear the pain, frustration, and anger of the writers, but also, above all, their refusal to be defeated." In this article, she highlights some of her favorite passages.

Be well and take care

MEET OUR CHURCH COUNCIL PRESIDENT

For those of you who may not know me, my name is Betsy DeRoma, and I currently live in Somers, CT. My maiden name is Webb, which makes me a part of the Webb/Eberhardt clan which so pervaded Grace from the laying of its cornerstone through two or three generations. I was baptized by Pastor Teichmann, confirmed by Pastor Rotvig, and married by Randy Webb with assistance from Pastor Santmire. I have taught Sunday School at Grace, and I have directed the junior choir through musical worship productions of "100% Chance of Rain" (Noah's story), "Beauty and the Feast" (the story of Esther), "Sam" (the Good Samaritan) and "Barbecue for Ben" (the Prodigal Son).



Most importantly, Grace has always been home to me, even when work commitments necessitated my working on Sundays. With those commitments now finished, I am thrilled to be back at home on a regular basis. I have a lot to catch up on and a lot to learn, and I hope all of Grace's members will help me to accomplish both of those objectives.

I ask all of you to feel free to bring concerns to me, because I want to be upfront and open with all of you. In order for Grace to survive, and most of all, to grow and thrive, we all need to be on the same page. This won't happen overnight, but as a Christ-centered congregation, we can work to make it happen.

AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY



Richard—Today marks the start of Black History Month and National Gun Violence Survivors Week.

By early February, more people are killed by guns in the United States than are killed in our peer countries in an entire calendar year.

This week, we honor every life that has been impacted by gun violence—from the 40,000 people killed and 100,000 people wounded each year to the countless others who have lost a loved one to this epidemic or who have experienced the trauma of shootings. You do not have to be struck by a bullet to be a survivor of gun violence.

HONOR SURVIVORS WITH ACTION

The gun violence epidemic impacts all of us, but it doesn't impact us equally. As Black History Month begins, we want to draw attention to the outsized impact this crisis has on our Black communities. **Black people in the United States are 10 times as likely to die by gun homicide as white people.**

We refuse to sit on the sidelines as gun violence steals more than 120 American lives every single day. **Please, join us in honoring all victims and survivors of gun violence with action. Contact your US Representative and urge them to act on gun violence prevention by supporting a federal safe storage law.**

Thank you,
Renée (she/her)

P.S. We are collecting stories of survivors of gun violence. If you are interested in sharing your story on our website, social media, or in our emails, please reply to this email. The Alliance <info@waqunresponsibility.org>

FEBRUARY 2023 BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES!

Happy Birthday!
February



Happy Anniversary!

Richard Kremer & Judith
Butterworth-Kremer 02/09

*May you all be blessed as
you celebrate your
special days!*

Did we miss your birthday or anniversary?
Contact the office at 860-527-7792 or
email office.gracelutheranhartford@gmail.com
to update our records.

True Love

For God so lo **V**ed the world,
That He g **A**ve
his on **L**y
Begott **E**n
So **N**
That whosoever
Believeth **I**n Him
Should **N**ot perish,
But have **E**verlasting life."
John 3:16

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Lloyd Smith, Lay Minister

Louisa Barton-Duguay, Religious Worker,
Artist in Residence

Walter Scott, Sexton

Betsy DeRoma, President

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