



August 20, 2021

A Note from Lindsay Robinson

Dear Friends,

The word “safe” has come up no less than a few dozen times in various conversations, groups, and emails I’ve been a part of in the last few weeks.

I’ve found people wondering what “safe” really means, how or if we can make activities including meeting in person “safe” due to the rising COVID numbers, how we can “safely” disagree and still love one another, and many other applications of the word, meaning, and feeling of safety.

There were many years when I wondered whether church was safe for me. I didn’t find myself feeling unsafe because of a single event, but I realized after a season of curiosity and unlearning that there had been a slow erosion of safety for my body, mind, and spirit.

There were times when my body wasn’t fully safe within the church because of the decisions that other people were making that impacted me and an environment in which my consent and bodily autonomy were not acknowledged.

There were times when claiming the fullness of who I am and who I loved wasn’t safe, because I was either told that I wasn’t welcome there, that I would never be accepted, or that it wasn’t the place for me, or I was just flatly asked to leave.

It was during these times that church became a place where my mental and emotional health wasn’t safe.

And then there were times when my spirit wasn’t fully safe. I wondered whether it was safe to ask questions: questions about the complexities and context around scripture, questions about the social, economic, and political happenings during the time in which scripture was written.

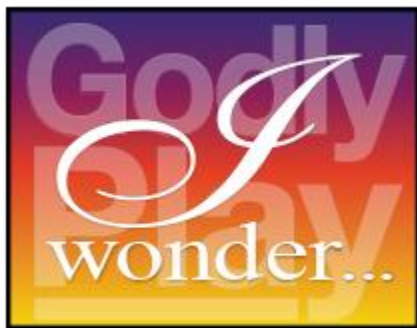
I wondered whether it was safe to question a church leader’s interpretation of scripture when it differed from the voice within my own spirit.

Much of the spoken and unspoken messaging I perceived as coming from church leadership created a belief in me that my connection with God, my inherent spirituality, my voice, was less than, not as important as those of my male counterparts, and devalued.

And so the idea of a church being a safe place went from something that I knew, to something that I questioned, to something that I wondered whether I would ever experience again.

The belief in the value of my own voice was not something that only impacted me within the church. It is still something that I am working to unlearn.

Even in writing this letter, I am finding myself questioning whether my thoughts on the subject are right, valid, and important enough. The echoes of the past are making themselves known in me now, and so **I intentionally reaffirm the value of my own connection with God and my ability to listen to the voice within and follow where the Spirit is nudging me.**



The encouraging news is that we have been doing this work at HUMC, and we have a place where it is safe to wonder.

Our children, beginning at age four, are wondering together. Through Godly Play, they are learning to listen to the voice of the Spirit within.

They are learning how to think critically about scripture and that it is safe to ask questions and express their points of view even when it is different from their peers and adults. They are building a foundation of self confidence steeped in the value of their own voice.

Through the work our children are doing in FaithKids and FaithFinders, they are wondering about the world around them and how God is present in their daily lives. They are learning that it is safe to wonder who they are and how to respect and honor the beautiful diversity in their community.

In worship we've been in a season of unlearning and exploring what it is to deconstruct behaviors and thoughts that may not serve us in the best way and might be holding us back from fully living into the spirit of Jesus Christ and who God created us to be.

We've been asking challenging questions such as those we are discussing in our current worship series, The Good Gift of our Bodies. (<https://hilliardumc.org/current-message-series/>) For instance, how we can unlearn the harmful practices of objectification and the influences of patriarchy?

And we are learning that it is safe to sit with truths that might push us into those uncomfortable places so that we can continue to grow into the welcoming, affirming, diverse community where all people can safely be their whole selves.



The great news is that we do have a wonderfully revised, thoughtfully updated Safe Sanctuaries policy that isn't just words on a page. It is part of an overall culture within our church in which we are continuing to learn how we can make sure our physical and digital spaces are ones in which people's bodies, minds, and spirits are safe from physical, mental, and emotional abuse — creating safe environments for all. (<https://hilliardumc.org/safe-sanctuaries-training/>)



Tomorrow, September 21, 7-8pm, we will have our first Safe Sanctuaries class of 2021, on Zoom, in which anyone who would like to volunteer within the church can attend, especially those who want to volunteer in programs with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. (Email me if you'd like to participate, and I'll send you the Zoom link [lrobinson@hilliardumc.org].) We'll offer several Safe Sanctuaries classes over the next few months.

Safe Sanctuaries is not just another policy; it's not just about minimizing risk and liability management. Rather, it is one way in which we seek to create a church that IS a safe sanctuary — where all persons' minds, bodies, and spirits feel safe and valued fully as the beloved children of God they are.

We have begun the work, and we still have much to do. But the beauty of this work — and I know it's not always easy — is that **while we are unlearning the behaviors, assumptions, thoughts, and patterns that have kept each of us from living fully into our identity as beloved children of God, we are also helping to create an environment in which new friends and future generations are safe and can hopefully connect more easily into their own belovedness.**

Together, we can ensure HUMC is a church in which your voice won't be squashed just because you ask a challenging question.

A church that will support and love you while you question your sexuality or gender identity...

A church in which your voice is not devalued because of the color of your skin...

A church in which you are free to explore and question your own faith...

A church in which you are safe and loved no matter where you are in your journey...

A church in which you are loved no matter what.

With Wonder & Love,

Lindsay



Lindsay Robinson
Director of Children's Ministry
lrobinson@hilliardumc.org

