

# Letters of ENCOURAGEMENT

God Loves You  No Matter What

July 5, 2023

A Note from Pastor April

**Dear Friends,**

Space.

As I listen to people talk about what they are going through, I hear this consistent longing.

More space.

They may not always use this word, but it's there under the surface.

*"I can't wait for some time away from work."*

*"I'm waking up exhausted each day."*

*"I haven't had time to myself in weeks."*

*"I just wish I had more time with the people I care about most."*

More space.

To rest.

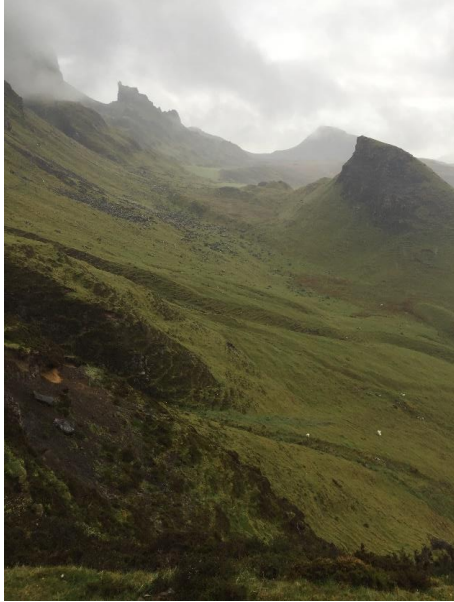
To exhale.

To set down the work.

To be alone.

To be with people we care about.





**More space to do the things that fill our hearts with life and joy.**

*(I've filled this letter with pictures of some spaces that have helped me exhale and rest. You might recognize a few!)*

This is what the United Methodist Church had in mind when they created a provision in our Book of Discipline for clergy to take a time of renewal leave every six years of ministry.

Space.

Space to step away from the responsibilities of ministry.

Space to rest.

Space to listen to God.

Space to listen to your own heart.

The idea was that by giving clergy the space to step away, they would return to their places of ministry refreshed, renewed, and ready to serve for the next season with vitality and vision.

For the last several years, I've been longing for more of this space in my life. I'm diligent about making good use of my Sabbath and day off. I'm good about taking time away for vacation and spiritual retreat.

At the same time, I never fully set down the responsibilities of my vocation. I don't feel burned out by my work (quite the opposite!), but I know that to keep moving forward over the course of the years, more space would be a benefit to me and to the church.

When I first approached Pastor Jon and our Staff Parish Committee in the spring of 2022, I was blown away by the support that I felt. We began having necessary conversations about the right timing and ways that we could make this season easiest on the congregation and leadership.



Rev. John Hoffman (<https://hilliardumc.org/people/rev-john-hoffman/>), a retired minister, offered to help out. Many others offered to help with the preaching while I was away. Bit by bit, the pieces fell into place and the space was created.

**This Sunday, July 9, will be my final Sunday in worship before my renewal leave.**

Pastor Jon Osmundson and I will join in a dialogue sermon where we'll talk about this leave and much more.

As I thought more and more about what I was longing for in this space, several things came to the forefront...

### **SPACE to THINK**

I've spent a good portion of time in the last few years learning about **spiritual development and how people move from one stage to the next**. This included a year of intense study with Dr. Terri O'Fallon, the creator of the STAGES model.

So much of what I learned in that course got my wheels turning about how these insights could impact the church in profound ways. One of the things I'll be doing during my time away is returning to this material and diving deeper, giving myself the space to think about its applications to our church and far beyond.



### **SPACE to BE WITH PEOPLE I LOVE**

Many of you know that our older son, Eugene, transitioned to be closer to Columbus this summer. I'm grateful for more time with my immediate family, both in a weeklong vacation to Michigan, and as we continue to seek to transition Eugene back to the Columbus area and eventually home.

In addition, some of the most important people in my life do not live here in Ohio. We see each other from time to time and certainly connect via phone and text, but I am delighted to have extended time away with my closest friend, my sister, and my childhood best friend who now lives in Switzerland.

### **SPACE to LISTEN TO GOD and the VOICE OF THE SPIRIT WITHIN**

Centering Prayer has been a key part of my spiritual practice for six years. I can tell you that daily meditation and prayer has rewired my brain and deepened my ability to be present to what God is doing in and around me. In the early days of my renewal leave, I'll be attending a ten-day silent meditation retreat that will give me all kinds of space to listen to God and self. (If you read my June 14 Letter of Encouragement (<https://hilliardumc.org/pages/releasing-the-outcome/>), this is the one I was waiting on. I eventually got in!)

At the start of September, I'll be joining a dear friend in North Central Spain, where she is hiking the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage trail. She will carry on to the end, while I'll be



there for the first week. I expect these days of walking to be wonderful times of conversation and reflection, and a different way to listen to the voice of God.



**I can assure you that through all of this, I will carry with me a deep space for gratitude.**

Gratitude for this amazing congregation, which has granted me this time away.

Gratitude for opportunities that I know will bring healing and renewal.

Gratitude for space and what it will bring for me and also for you.

It took me a long time in my life to learn that I need to ask for the space that I need in life.

**I know not all of us have the luxury of stepping away for a season, but my guess is that all of us might have a few things we need to set down so that there will be space.**

I'm reminded as well that when I say yes to the space in my life, it creates spaces for others.

My stepping away will create space at HUMC for things to happen in my absence. For the Spirit to work in people that otherwise might not have stepped forward. For the community to listen to their own voices and see where God is leading.

**Friends, I pray and long for the space for each of you for what you need most in these coming seasons.**

I cannot wait to see where God will be leading us all. And I'll look forward to being back with you the week of November 13, and back in worship on November 19.

Blessings, friends,

Pastor April



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