

Letters of ENCOURAGEMENT

God Loves You



No Matter What

November 1, 2023

A Note from Pastor Melonie Harnish

Dear Friends,

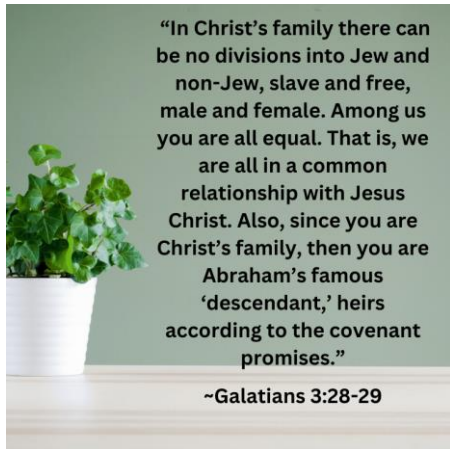
I have been attending for the last year but most of you do not know me — my name is Melonie Harnish, and I moved to Hilliard in June 2022. I am a retired United Methodist Elder (pastor) in full connection with the West Ohio Conference. I have been retired since July 1, 2021, after serving in West Ohio for 34 years.

I have been married to Sam for 47 years, and you will meet him this Sunday when he preaches. Sam is also a retired UM Elder. We have three adult children along with their spouses and eight beautiful grandchildren. They are the reason we ended up settling in Hilliard. When we get together there are 16 of us, and 15 of them live less than 10 minutes from us and the church. All family is important but I agree with this statement: If I had known that being a grandparent was going to be so fun, I would have been a grandparent first and skip parenting all together.



Pastor Jon asked me to share with you why Sam and I chose Hilliard UMC to be our church home in retirement. As stated above, family played into our selection. When we moved we hoped that some of our grandchildren might come to church with us. We were familiar with the church because three of our grandchildren are graduates of the weekday preschool. HUMC was close to us all, and it offered more than one service plus Sunday school. So HUMC fit that bill, but that is not what kept us coming back.

Before Sam retired in July of 2022, I had made a list of churches that I wanted to check out. HUMC was not on the list, which included Church for All People, Summit, and King Avenue. It was not on my list just because of my own ignorance. I had not kept up with how God had moved within the congregation.



In seminary one of my last classes was translating Galatians from the Greek into English. We were to pick a passage that spoke to us and to relate that scripture to the world today.

My signature scripture is Galatians 3:28-28. “In Christ’s family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ. Also, since you are Christ’s family, then you are Abraham’s famous ‘descendant,’ heirs according to the covenant promises.” (The Message)

That passage has guided my life for more than forty years. I knew that the churches on my list lived that out as well.

When we first moved. I had a leg infection caused by lymphedema. The infection was so advanced and the pain was so severe that I spent a week in the hospital and about three months recuperating. When I was well enough to go to church, and because I was running late, we decided to visit HUMC. That is how this part of my journey began.

That first visit, I was a skeptic. I was prepared to hear things about the congregation that really did not reflect the people in the church. I heard, “God loves you, no matter what,” but I really expected to find, “God loves you, if you are like me.” Sadly, I have found far too many churches follow the second way instead of the first. As that first service went on, I found out that Hilliard was part of the Reconciling Church network and was trying to live out the same calling that I had. What a surprise that was to me.



One thing that happens when you are a pastor is that overall you write more sermons than you get to listen to. In 2007, my calling came crashing down around me. The institutional church decided that I had become too symptomatic from my autoimmune disorders to lead a congregation, so I was appointed to medical leave.

When I went on disability, I got to listen to Sam preaching. If you asked me what makes a good sermon, I wouldn’t be able to give you a list, but I could tell you if it spoke to me. **I can tell you this, though — April and Jon are good preachers.** Their sermons are interesting, and I have learned some things that I did not know. Faith is not stagnant, so that is important to me. I can learn here. Their sermons usually speak to me.

Speaking of learning, HUMC has a strong education component. Learning for all ages and levels in their faith journeys. That is so important, a place for everyone and anyone no matter what. People are involved and encouraged to move forward.

HUMC has strong outreach. I was once told by a District Superintendent that he was impressed that I could go into a room and talk with anyone. Pastors have passions, and my passion is outreach. I love sharing God's love with anyone and everyone and will go wherever that leads me. HUMC does that as well. It takes the road less traveled and tries to live out the Gospel everyday. Being a Reconciling Congregation is important, being involved with the Free Store and food pantries, mission trips, and not being a social club, the preschool... the list goes on. These are all things that I look for in a church.



I came to HUMC a long time ago when Warehouse 839 was first starting up. I went to a meeting about how to get started and what worship could look like.

I love the fact that HUMC has three different worship services. I might feel like attending the 9am Traditional service, which we did on Easter. We like Godly Play, so when we have the younger grandchildren with us we go to the 10:30 Family service. But most of

the time we will probably go to Warehouse 839 at 11:15am (weekly now!) because we like the music and informality. We feel free to go where we feel led and know that we will feel welcome.

In conclusion, we are at HUMC because it meets our needs and is a welcoming community.

HUMC is a God-centered community that follows in Christ's footsteps and looks beyond what society says and shows love to everyone — no matter what.

What a world we could live in if only more churches would practice what they preached. If they would, then all the hatred and violence could be a memory.

In service with Christ,

Melonie



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