

# Letters of ENCOURAGEMENT

God Loves You  No Matter What

December 6, 2023

A Note from Pastor April

**Dear Friends,**

Renewal leave allowed me a great deal of space to do something I love... travel.

I have always loved the chance to experience new cultures... discovering all the wonderful foods, wandering through magnificent and ancient architecture, practicing a new language, and exploring communal rituals that I never knew existed. I love all of it!

On our first night in Spain, my friend and I both ordered a tortilla for dinner. What came out was not at all what we expected! A Spanish tortilla is a more like an omelet in the shape of a crustless quiche. Made with a base of eggs and potato, there is an endless variety of veggies and meats and cheeses that you might add. It was our first of many delicious encounters with the fabulous food in the region!

**Despite all the cultural differences, traveling also reminds me of the things we share in common as human beings.**

Early in the trip, we spent an evening walking through the Old City in Burgos. It was Saturday night, and the pubs and restaurants were packed with people catching up and enjoying a good time.





As we were on our way back to our Airbnb, we heard a chorus of cheerful shouts coming from a block away. Curious, we wandered closer until we came upon 75 or so Spaniards gathered outside a pub, all singing together at the top of their lungs. After about a minute, I asked the woman beside me in Spanish,

Me: “What are you singing?”

Her: “A hymn”

Me: “Like a church hymn?”

Her: (laughing) “No, definitely not a church hymn. It’s the Burgos Hymn.”



As it turns out, the *Himno a Burgos* has been a part of the city’s culture for nearly a hundred years.

When I looked up the lyrics, I read the poetic words about the people’s love for their land and city, and their commitment to honor this place with their lives and their love. Those who grow up in the city have been singing this song in school and community since they were little.

At the pub, all the people raised their glasses in unison at the very end of the song for the final triumphant words...

*Salve! Salve! Salve!*  
*Hail! Hail! Hail!*

The hugging, high-fiving, and jovial laughter that followed reminded me of something that all cultures seem to share.

### **Music brings us together.**

Whether it's the fight song at the OSU football game, a sing-along in the car, or an impromptu dance party after cooking dinner in the kitchen, music has a way of breaking down barriers, reminding us of our shared connections, and connecting us with the fuller range of human emotions.

Researchers have found consistent evidence that making music, listening to music, and/or singing with others can significantly reduce stress, anxiety, and anger. Not only that, but after a few minutes of listening to music, our neurons start to fire with the beat of the song. When we are listening with others, this means that our brain activity starts to synchronize. This is even more powerful when people are singing together, since their breathing begins to line up as well. That feeling of "being on the same wavelength" is exactly what is happening!

**I'm delighted that this Sunday, we have three unique ways to experience the power of music to tell the story of Christmas.**

(<https://hilliardumc.org/events/praise-special-music-sunday/>)

At our **9am Traditional service in the Sanctuary**, our choir will sing five glorious Christmas anthems, one of which will be accompanied by violin. Our newly formed Handbell Choir will bless us with three pieces, and we'll sing at least two congregational hymns as well.



At our **10:30am Family service, also in the Sanctuary**, we'll focus mostly on congregational singing of familiar hymns, with a guest saxophonist who will join our music team!

At our **11:15am Nontraditional service in Warehouse 839**, we are delighted to have an entirely full band playing contemporary versions of familiar Christmas songs.

Join us in person or online for one, two, or ALL services!

(<https://hilliardumc.org/worship/>) Whether you come to listen, sing, or share your musical talents, the day promises to be an uplifting morning and a beautiful reminder of the good news of love that connects us and brings us together. (And we'll encourage you to consider wearing a mask this Sunday if you come in person — remember last year when covid ran wild among the congregation after the special music service?)

**Don't be surprised if you leave feeling a little less stressed, anxious, and frustrated.**

In the Spirit of Connection,

Pastor April



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