

Letters of ENCOURAGEMENT

God Loves You  No Matter What

February 5, 2025

A Note from Pastor April

Dear Friends,

What a start to the year we have had so far. Arctic cold temperatures, devastating urban wildfires, a national championship, a fragile ceasefire deal in the Middle East, a tragic airline crash, and an enormous shift in political power in our country. (All in one month!)

I haven't even mentioned the many things going on in each of our personal lives. If you are feeling a little out of sorts these days, like your nervous system has been having a hard time settling down and finding a sense of calm ... please know that you are not alone.



We are living through a time of MASSIVE TRANSITION.

Times of rapid change, uncertainty, and upheaval are felt in our bodies and in our communities, regardless of our political leanings. Feelings... Well, you probably have a few of those, whether they are right on the surface or buried down deep.

All of us are holding a LOT these days.

I was recently sent a short video by a member of our community that I found very helpful. It was recorded by Chris Newman, a first-generation Black farmer, advocate, and social influencer in Virginia through his Instagram account @sylvanaquafarms.

He advised his audience to care for themselves during this time of transition in three primary ways:

1. Limit your news & social media

In a time when our energy is needed for so many different things in the world, it's important that we not spend too much of that energy arguing with people on social media or doomscrolling on the news.



What's happening in the world *does* matter, and we need to stay in the know, but that doesn't need to be driven by the 24/7 news cycle.

His advice: find a largely neutral news platform that can give you the basic headlines, and spend no more than 10-20 minutes a day giving your energy to the news.

2. Make space for joy

Spend time *in person* with the people you value and love the most.

COVID really pulled us away from one another, and we still haven't fully rebuilt the kind of robust communities we all need to feel that sense of belonging and joy.



Take time for the things that bring you joy, spend at least a little time outside every day (even in the winter) to soak up some fresh air and Vitamin D and connect to nature, and be sure you still have space to laugh each day.

Here I am sharing in some moments of joy at a vineyard with my sister and mother!

3. Organize, organize, organize

Chris Newman's final words of wisdom are to focus our organizational and communal efforts on caring for and empowering our *local* communities.

As I listened to him, I thought to myself, he's talking about the work of the church — our call to love our neighbor and care for the needs within our community in every way we know how.



This includes building relationships with others who share our values and vision of a world where all are treated with dignity, respect, and justice.

It certainly means we work together across our diversity to hold our political systems and our local leaders accountable to the care necessary to make these visions a reality.

I think I would add one more word of encouragement for you.

While it is tempting in times of transition to hunker down and just try to survive, **I encourage you to think about this moment as a critical time to grow in community.**

My guess is that one of the three things Chris highlights is something you could spend time learning and growing around.

Perhaps you've been considering moving off social media entirely.

Maybe you want to engage with people in authentic conversations to build deeper relationships and grow in your understanding of what your faithful response is.

It's also entirely possible that you've been running yourself ragged with too many things, and what you need to do is make a little more space for fun and rest.

Times of transition are hard, but we experience the challenge of them differently when we are learning and growing *with* a community, recognizing that we aren't walking through life alone.

Today, I'm going to be taking my own advice and hopping on a plane to the Pacific Northwest, where I will spend some time *in person* with my sister, my best friend, and two grad school classmates I've only met online. This weekend is our second semester intensive, so this time away will be a good balance of learning and being in community. I need *both*!



This past Sunday, our first round of Whole Story Groups got started.

(<https://hilliardumc.org/grow/adults/learning-opportunities/#whole-story>)

These are great places on Sunday mornings to stop in and meet some others who want to have meaningful conversation for an hour and sort through how to reflect theologically about this moment we are in. The structure of the gatherings mirrors some of the topics from our Sunday morning worship series, and everyone is invited.

Attend when you can, join anytime. You can sign up here or just show up!
(<https://forms.gle/JDzqVynTL3RQXsCT9>)

- **Sunday mornings, 10-11am**, Sanctuary building room 306/308 (upstairs, education wing), with Gabi Polisenio (young adult) and Marilyn Hoeflinger (retired professor)
- **Sunday mornings, 11:30am-12:30pm**, Sanctuary building room 206 (parlor, main level), with the newly-forming MAP* group (*middle aged people, but really anyone!), organized by Lori Lee, Amelia McCarty, and Scott Merillat.

And more are coming soon.



Finally, we are excited to announce the dates and details for our fourth Deeper Waters cohort, which will be launching in September 2025.

(<https://hilliardumc.org/grow/adults/learning-opportunities/#deeperwaters>)

This is an incredibly rich nine-month experience of deep personal growth and spiritual learning, done in authentic community with others who are ready to dive in alongside you.

We're hosting our first of four info sessions on this experience on Zoom on Sunday, February 16 at 4:30pm. Come learn more!

With you on the journey,

April



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P.S. The immigration resources I mentioned Sunday in worship are on our website here. (<https://hilliardumc.org/pages/immigration-resources/>)



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