

“All Saints Day” by Cynthia Dahlin



Jubilee

November 6, 2022

Good Morning. It is All Saints' Day, and I am here on behalf of the Living Water Mission Group to honor those people from within our congregation and fellowship who have died this year, and to let you all mention other saints in your lives for us to remember, and thus keep alive in our hearts and minds.

I am not going to try to work in our lectionary reading. It

is one of those I could contort around to fit my own deep value of marriage as a way to really try to know another person deeply and thus love another as myself—but today I will skip to the last lines that God is the God not of the dead, but of the living, for to God all of us are alive.

At Seekers, we see All Saints' Day as a day to remember those who have passed away, and we will put memory tiles for each of these people in the back stairway hall so that their names are seen and even touched as we go up and down those stairs. These tiles aren't ready yet—we'll let you know when you can come see them.

Many places, especially in the British Isles, began holding feast days for the martyred saints from the 4th century CE. In 609, Pope Boniface IV dedicated the Pantheon in Rome to all the saints, and proclaimed it "All Saints' Day." Pope Gregory IV extended the definition of the word "saints" to include the communion of all men and women who have placed their hope in Christ through baptism. This commemoration was carried into many Protestant churches, including Anglican, Lutheran and Methodist denominations, but interestingly, not mentioned in the UCC hymnal or Book of Worship. So Seekers' adopting this celebration is an example of our taking church practices in an ecumenical way—taking on celebrations that mean something to us. For many of you, this service is one you experienced from youth. I grew up in Congregational churches, and we did not view ourselves as possible saints. When there were hymns about saints, we did sing "For All the Saints", but we were talking about long dead heroes, and that hymn was followed by an old favorite, "By the Light of Burning Martyrs," which continues "Christ thy bleeding feet we track." These songs were used before and after sermons about the violent repression of civil rights activists, or the death of Martin

Luther King. It came as a shock to me, when I came to the Church of the Savior, that by doing my best to seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God, I could be considered a Saint.

But thank God, Seekers gives each of this this blessing, as I now get to commemorate four saints this year from our community. I will speak of them in the order of their date of death, and then I will invite you all to call out the names of other saints in your lives who have passed on this year.

Ed Lipp was known to our community through his wife, Muriel, who was one of the founding members of Seekers. Ed would attend worship when Muriel preached, or on Christmas or Easter. He came to events with my mission group, Living Water, including an N Street Village dinner, and Christmas parties. We knew him not as a joiner, but as a support to Muriel as she was first a member of Church of the Savior, while raising four children, and then as a Seeker. He was a gentle, and thoughtful man, who grew up in an orphanage and went to World War II at age 17. He attended Temple University, University of Pennsylvania and Harvard, as well as the Air War College in Alabama. He served as a military intelligence analyst for 30 years, and then as a technical editor at ANSER, a non-profit intelligence analysis organization. But we at Seekers knew him as someone who knew our names, cared about our kids, listened to what was going on in the community, and sometimes commented online or in person. Ed died August 27, and Marjory and Peter led the memorial service.

Pat Grace Conover, a steward and at the center of the community as long as his health allowed, stepped back a year or two ago, and we knew that meant his health was suffering. Pat would carefully look at actions and positions Seekers wanted to take, and write an analysis we could all understand so that we considered impacts on other groups as well as our immediate body of members. He thought about the things we do

without reflection—and reflected on them—and brought us a version of “Jesus Loves Me” that matched our theology, and gave us a space in our worship service when the kids could make noise while leaving for Sunday School downstairs without being “shushed.” He did so much work in the world related to bringing us to shalom: building houses, teaching college students, advocacy for the United Church of Christ, exploring his gender identity, and writing a book to help others accept non-binary gender choices as part of God’s plan. He worked in anti-racism, peace-making, and in very particular ways to build our community here by noticing and inviting in people standing at the margins. Hospitality, story-telling and the love of his garden and his gazebo should not be left out!

Jackie McMakin died October 2, 2022. Many older Seekers came to the Church of the Savior through the Life Direction Lab, later called “Working from the Heart” workshops that helped people discern call after discovering and acknowledging their spiritual life. Jackie and Sonya Dyer led one or two of these 9 month, bi-weekly workshops for about 15-16 people every year. Jackie had been an activist in the ecumenical movement, and organized the Partners Community to pair Protestant and Catholic lay leaders to help them learn the best from each other’s spiritual practices. She wrote a workbook for small groups called Doorways to Christian Growth that has many similarities to our mission group process. And, she was always looking to new places to serve. She and her husband, David, went to South Africa to help develop Othendweni, a partner effort to Bokamoso. In her Linked-In page she said: “My life work has been assisting individuals and organizations to clarify and carry out their call to make a difference through work and non-work activities.” Because she and David never wanted to settle into one organization, but were called to move to help the next group on the horizon, she never became a Steward, but as a close friend and colleague of Sonya Dyer’s, she attended Seekers frequently and was very close to many members. The workshop helped me begin to read much

spiritual and theological literature, introduced me to John Yungblut, to start my own spiritual direction with one of the masters of the art, and to look at my joys and passion to find call. She loved music, and led a chorus which sang Handel's Messiah each year. This was a skilled chorus—they had a practice one year at a reunion of Working from the Heart alumni, and you had to have your own score and know how to sight read to participate. So I stood across the room, and enjoyed the music. Jean Adams, whom I will discuss next, however, joined in the singing.

Jean Adams, a long-time Seeker, came to us from Rock Spring Church partly due to Jackie McMakin's interest and involvement. She was a public school art teacher, and came in great part due to the lure of the Artists' Mission Group. When Jean retired in 1990, she began teaching art classes at Christ House in Adams Morgan, and became even more involved in the Church of the Savior missions nearby, such as Sarah's Circle and Potter's House. Jean brought her art to Seekers at Wellspring family sleepovers—even letting children try to make the difficult Ukranian dyed eggs, at the summer art camps, and I think at a women's retreat? Even until the last year or two, she taught watercolor painting at her retirement home, Goodwin House. As her health was fading in the last few months, she told our Living Water Mission Group repeatedly that she felt most alive and most spiritually happy when she was teaching art, sharing a love of art with others. Two other items in her life were apparent to us Seekers: the effect that her visit to Taize had made on her with a love for the Taize chants however she could fit them into her life, and her love of Cape Cod and inviting people to her cottage. The ocean and beach life made it into many of her paintings.

We celebrate each of these saints—they will have a tile on our back staircase soon to keep their names in front of us. Today, we have an altar with pictures of each of them, and this reminds me of the Ofrendas, or home altars for the Day of

the Dead holiday in Mexico. I was in Puerto Vallarta last year for this celebration. First, I was amazed by the large papier mache statues of skeletons dancing, playing musical instruments, riding bicycles. Then, visiting churches, I saw the very intricate altars built by local families, with pictures and items beloved by the ancestors in the photos and paintings there. I walked over some of the orange flower petals—probably some were paper, and someone tapped me on the shoulder and told me not to disturb the path of petals so that it would be even and make a clear path to guide the ancestors' spirits home. When I was thinking about this sermon, I re-watched the Disney movie "Coco" to remind me of why it was so important for the spirits to get home. The side of the equation we often think about is so that we remember the people on whose shoulders we stand, and venerate their efforts to help build our community—it takes a village, and the village needs artists, activists, theologians and family support. But Coco, the boy who looks for his great-great-grandfather's spirit in "Coco" is going to get a blessing. We need our elders for their blessings on our work, to give us strength and perseverance to go on. I have felt blessed in my life by Ed Lipp, Pat Conover, Jackie McMakin and Jean Adams. And if we are all saints today, it is important that each of you, in the many mission groups, in membership but not yet in a mission group, or who are just trying to be a good person in the world, you are blessed. I bless all of you in the name of God, and pray that you will go forth and bless each other and those you work and play with as you leave today.

Amen.