

Conference Minister's Corner

Amy's Summer Roundup

By Rev. Amy S. Zimbelman

Some interesting/funny/informative things I've come across recently that I thought y'all might also appreciate . . .

Best flow chart

Is it Work? A [flowchart](#) for pastors

As pastors, it's not always easy to know when we are "on the clock." What counts as work and what doesn't? "If I'm counseling someone about their marital difficulties in my office, that is work. But what if that person starts in on the same sensitive and private conversation in the middle of the grocery store while my peanut butter cup ice cream slowly melts in my cart? Is that work?"

[This flowchart by Rev. Joanna Harader](#) should help answer these questions.

Best event of the summer

ASSEMBLY 2022 at First Mennonite Church, July 29-31. Did you know we'll have speakers from across the country, authentic Hmong food cooked especially for you, a Chicano music jam session, never-before-publicly-shared hopes and dreams for the conference, lots of great activities for the kids (yes, parents: you get a break!), and music and worship led by none other than accomplished musician Pastor Randy Spaulding? So will it be the best event ever? I wouldn't doubt it, but you'll have to attend to find out. Register right [here](#).

Recent articles by credentialed ministers in our conference

Pastor Erica Lea-Simka writes in [this article](#): "To be human is to experience a wide variety of abilities and disabilities among our species. To celebrate the human Christ is to experience a Jesus with a wide variety of abilities and disabilities" and she encourages us to celebrate Jesus' body—"wrinkles, wounds, scars, limps, prosthetics, chemical imbalances, assistive devices and all."

Wilmer Villacorta [writes in Fuller Magazine](#) about power dynamics and social justice. In addition to naming the disproportionate injustices that BIPOC folks face in the U.S., he also shares that "We have a system of justice that treats you much better if you're rich and guilty than if you're poor and innocent. Wealth, not culpability, shapes outcomes." As an antidote to oppressive "I and It" relationships, Wilmer invites us to reclaim a "humble use of power" in "I and Thou" relationships with our Creator and one another—relationships that treat others as God's image-bearers and work for equal justice.

Mike Martin writes in [this article](#) the heartbreaking reality that "Gun violence is now the leading cause of death for children in the U.S., surpassing car accidents in 2020" and that "transforming guns into garden tools over the past nine years has completely transformed me."

A random quote

"And we pray, not for new earth or heaven, but to be quiet in heart, and in eye, clear. What we need is here." —Wendell Berry

Most anticipated family-friendly arts performance

[Su Teatro Chicano Music Festival](#). Wait, what? That's also part of Mountain States Assembly 2022? [Sign me up!](#)

Most thought-provoking religious book that is not for the faint of heart (Caution: Stories of abuse and F-bombs abound here.)



God is a Black Woman by Christena Cleveland, PhD. HarperOne, 2022.

The title of this book is provocative. The content of this book is provocative. If you're willing to be prodded to better understand the devastation that (idolatrously) envisioning God as white and male wreaks on bodies that are not white and male (and bodies that *are*), then this is your provocative summer read.

Christena Cleveland journeys through France to meet some of the famous black Madonna statues there (fun fact: there are over 400 in existence!). As she visits shrines she dubs with names like *Our Lady of the Side Eye* and *She Who Cherishes Our Hot Mess*, Christena fearlessly revisits her own past, memoir-style. She uncovers how an oppressive spirituality contributed to her own disordered eating, the beatings from her father, her career of cleaning up white peoples' messes, and more, and searches for a God who definitively declares that Black women are sacred and, therefore, "all living beings are sacred." She seeks to counteract that oppression by discovering "a God who cherishes our humanity and welcomes our fears, vulnerabilities, and imperfections" (17).

I had a lot of cognitive dissonance while reading this book because I was trying to fit Christena's theological and ethical paradigms into orthodox Christianity. They do not fit. That is her point. At the end of the book (spoiler alert!) she explains that she is traveling outside of Christianity to explore goddesses like Isis of ancient Egypt, Kali of Hinduism, etc. (247). She concludes that Christianity is too far gone, too wrapped up in the worship of whitemalegod, so she feels she has no choice but to seek out another spiritual system entirely (as a replacement? as a syncretistic combo? It's unclear).

I find this deeply tragic. I so want the liberation she envisions to be what those of us within the fold are known for—for us to reclaim Mary and her son Jesus as revolutionaries who believe that all living beings are sacred as they lift up the lowly and bring down the powerful from their thrones, dismantling even the powerful idol of whitemalegod (Luke 1:52). So while I am not going to follow her wholeheartedly, I understand that the abuse she's experienced at the hands of Christians has driven her away . . . so I don't blame her but wish her the best on her spiritual journey.

Continuing ed opportunity

[Mary Magdalene: Apostle To Our Own Times](#) short online course, taught by Cynthia Bourgeault. At Anita Amstutz's recommendation, I'm taking this interesting course now offered through the Center for Action and Contemplation. (It'll be offered again in the late summer/early fall.) So far, we've covered topics like: Why is Mary Magdalene known as the "Apostle to the Apostles"? Why has she been wrongly slut shamed through the years? (Hint: it might have something to do with Pope Gregory I in 594.) Is she the Beloved Disciple (not John)? and the like. If those questions interest you, you'll find the class is \$120 well spent.

Articles on the Supreme Court's recent decision

I'm someone who wrote a letter to the US President when I was 8 years old asking him to outlaw abortion. Now I'm someone who understands that it would be unethical for someone NOT to access an abortion in certain cases (i.e., an untreated ectopic pregnancy, which will now be harder to access in some states, as doctors could face life imprisonment if they make a mistake).

Here are a few articles discussing some of those nuanced aspects of abortion. No matter what your experiences or leanings are, hopefully these will be helpful to you:

[Sojourner's Adam Taylor naming these nuances and tensions](#) and his hope that abortion is both legal and rare.

One [global study with interactive map](#) shows that making it illegal does NOT actually reduce the abortion rate.

What *does* reduce the abortion rate? Parents having the financial means to support their children. This [Washington Post article](#) says that almost 1/3 of women said their decision to choose an abortion was at least in part because of the financial stress having a child would cause.

I also co-authored a [brief article](#) back in the day (when my name was Amy Spaulding) on a study finding that “social policies that increase economic support to women in the U.S. directly correlate with a decrease in the number of abortions.”

This ruling is expected to increase prison rates for Black women in particular in the U.S. No matter your personal beliefs, it’s vital to understand and lament that this change will not affect BIPOC and White people equally, as explained in [this article](#).

Free music

The Walking Roots Band is back again making their [music available for FREE](#) to you and your congregation (plus art and “Little Liturgies”). Fill out the request form on their website: <https://www.thesoilandtheseedproject.org/>

Wait . . . I forget. Did I mention what the best event of the summer was gonna be? I did? Well here it is again just in case you haven’t registered yet:

MOUNTAIN STATES MENNONITE CONFERENCE ASSEMBLY 2022 at First Mennonite Church, July 29-31. Register [here](#) and we’ll see you there!