

RE-IMAGINE THAT: **Partners in Community**

by Stan Friedman, Adam Gustine, John P. Perkins, and Jill Riley, p. 20

More and more Covenant congregations are asking, “What does it mean to be the church in my neighborhood?” Covenanter in this quartet of stories are bringing entrepreneurial vision to their communities.

1. What businesses in your community have entrepreneurial models similar to those depicted in these articles?
2. Instead of coming into the community to “fix” problems, Zion Covenant Church is working with its neighbors as they rebuild for themselves. Which method of problem-solving do you typically employ—fixing it yourself or training others to solve for themselves? What examples can you think of to explain your answer?
3. Social enterprise in an urban setting makes sense, but Adam Gustine argues that the same principles apply in rural and suburban contexts as well. What kinds of community enterprise businesses would flourish in your own environment?
4. John P. Perkins says, “I believe the best welfare program in the world is a job.” How can the church participate in the creation of jobs? What specifically can your congregation do in your community?
5. 5000 Pies, the West Long Beach restaurant started by Fountain of Life Covenant Church, is intentional about discipling their employees in faith. What tensions might a business venture encounter if it is more about people than its product?

A Stored-Up Sorrow

by Royce Eckhardt, p. 36

An unexpected encounter at McDonald's brings new healing to an old grief.

1. The article opens with the author preparing to eat his lunch at McDonald's. What is your favorite fast-food restaurant? What do you order there?
2. Royce Eckhardt repeats the adage that time heals. What experiences or losses make you testify to this being true? Are there situations in your life where that has not been true for you?
3. Considering his brother's perspective for the first time caused fresh grief for Eckhardt and he left the restaurant in tears. How do you respond when sorrow takes you by surprise?
4. Often in times of loss we look to Job. What aspect of Job's story brings comfort to those experiencing acute grief?
5. Eckhardt's father turned to the Scriptures and to caring Christian friends for wisdom and comfort while Eckhardt himself looks to hymns for consolation. Where do you typically turn in times of grief?

The Word Without Words

by Danielle Ng, p. 42

A mother discovers the depths of God's creation through the language of her son.

1. Psalm 19 outlines how God speaks through his creation. What place in nature do you escape to in order to connect with God?
2. Like poetry, Danielle Ng says Scripture can “slide into you sideways.” Can you identify a time when you’ve felt this way about either poetry or Scripture?
3. Ng wrestles with whether her autistic son needs “healing” or if that communicates a message that she wants her son to be different from who he is. What would you say to her?
4. Because her son is nonverbal, Ng says she often communicates with him by touching and cuddling. Does anyone in your life respond more to physical communication than verbal? In what situations do you feel physical touch says more than words could?
5. In times when we have no words, Ng encourages us to allow God’s good creation to support and speak for us. What have you learned about prayer through her story?

Four Seasons

by Andy Meyer, Nilwona Nowlin, Lisa Sundell Olsen, and Sandy Johnson, p. 48

Each life stage brings its own challenges. Amid uncertainties we can find seeds for growth and a deepening understanding of God's provision.

1. Which of the seasons of life represented in these articles comes closest to describing your current stage in life right now?
2. Becoming a father has helped Andy Meyer realize how much he must depend on God and on the people of God. Who are some of the people that were part of your childhood and formative years? How are you a “communion of saints” for others in this beginning of life stage?
3. Nilwona Nowlin took a leap of faith in the midlife stage of her career. When have you followed God’s prompting into scary and unknown areas?
4. Lisa Sundell Olsen’s son agreed with the advice she received to “Speak less, pray more.” What do you remember about leaving your home as a young adult?
5. When Sandy Johnson retired, she named six values to help retain her purpose, identity, and worth. Which of these would be a priority in your own retirement? Are there any values you would add to the list?

Before You Exit, Ensure You're in the Right Seat

by Jelani Greenidge, p. 34

Through new experiences as an associate pastor, Jelani Greenidge gains firsthand insights on the role of women in ministry.

1. Jelani Greenidge discovers that he has much to learn when he takes on a new role as associate pastor. When have you changed positions, either at work or in a volunteer setting, and scrambled to catch up on the new expectations?
2. Through listening and watching pastor Mary Putera, Greenidge has found a “treasure trove of insights.” Who do you find yourself watching and learning from most often? What is something you have learned from them recently?
3. Greenidge describes the theory of intersectionality as layers of advantages and disadvantages operating simultaneously. This plays out in his ministry when people may not accept him as a pastor because he is black but may be more prone to accept him because he is male. What theories of intersectionality can you name in your own life?
4. In his new role serving with a senior pastor who is a woman, Greenidge says he has seen sexism for what it is in fresh ways. In what areas of your life do you see or experience sexism?
5. What “seats of leadership” are filled by women in your church? Are you aware of any challenges that they face?

Starting at Home

by Diana Trautwein, p. 35

Columnist Diana Trautwein reminds us that we are each loved as a child of God, no matter who we are.

1. Diana Trautwein visits and tenderly cares for her mother during a recent visit to a skilled care nursing facility. Have you ever needed to be a caregiver for one of your parents?
2. People from Trautwein's church have a ministry feeding the homeless in a nearby park. In what way is your congregation reaching marginalized people in your community?
3. Where have you seen the face of God or acknowledged his presence in others this past week?
4. Trautwein finds herself ministering to a parent with dementia and to people living on the street. What do you find rewarding about ministering to God's children? What do you find challenging?
5. Trautwein is serving others "by smiling at aging faces and heating the lasagna." What is something you could do this week to extend God's love to someone in need?

Learning by Acknowledging the Differences

by Kathy Khang, p. 58

Columnist Kathy Khang explores the changing landscape of evangelicalism in the wake of an unusual election.

1. Can you identify with the three post-election groups of people Kathy Khang describes? Which response is most like you?
2. Khang says, “I don’t believe that trusting in God relieves us of responsibility to engage in and with the world.” Do you agree or disagree?
3. Where do you most often express your views about religion and/or politics? In smaller groups, one-on-one, rallies and marches, social media?
4. How do differing racial, ethnic, and gender identities influence your views on religion and politics?
5. How have you seen views of evangelicalism changing since the elections?

Resurrection Life in a Culture of Meme and Meh

by José Humphreys, p. 63

Evangelicals are called to step away from apathy and disappointment to live in wonder and surprise.

1. How do you think the church should address extreme differences in opinions such as we have seen in the current political climate?
2. Are you doing anything differently in your church or community now than you did before the November elections? Who do you know that is living with an “arms wide open” posture?
3. What conversations have you been part of concerning racism, politics, or marginalized people? Do you see conversation as an avenue to healing or does it stir up more contention?
4. After reading the quote from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel what do you think he meant when he said, “We must learn to be surprised”?
5. Where have you seen God at work in today’s culture? Has he surprised you lately?