

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER



Volume 2 Issue 19

December 19, 2021

Joy (The Joy of Home¹)



Oxford High School students gathered for a candlelight vigil... Credit: Nick Hagen for The New York Times

Tuesday, November 30, was supposed to be an ordinary day for the 1,600 students attending Oxford High School. The vast majority of them got up the same time they ordinarily got up — got dressed following the same routine they ordinarily followed — and went to school along the route they ordinarily used to get to school.

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Please continue to wear your masks when in the building. If you don't have one, let us know we will provide one for you.

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Inside this issue:

Love (The Blessings of Home¹)



A popular sitcom aired for eleven years called simply "Cheers." The show's name is a play on words since cheers is a common expression heard in bars that is said

as a person takes their first sip. The show is best known for the ending line in the theme song that sums up the bar's popularity. Cheers is a place "where everybody knows

your name." Cheers didn't catch on at first, landing near the bottom of the rating list. But the show soon gained popularity staying in the top 10 for the rest of its run and number one during its 9th season. I lived in Massachusetts during the show's peak popularity. And I frequently took visitors to see the Bull & Finch Pub in the Beacon Hill neighborhood of Boston to see the model for the show's set. The

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show's opening scene featured the entrance to this popular restaurant and bar, lifting its visibility to tourist attraction status.

Being understood is a heart's desire that yearns to be recognized by the people around us. So the cast of Cheers gathered in a neighborhood bar where each was known by the others. "You get me" hovered in the air like the smell of comfort food coming from the kitchen.

In an article in *Psychology Today*, Dr. Leon F. Seltzer asks the question, "is feeling understood more important than feeling loved?" Dr. Seltzer asserts that feeling understood is a building block for other positive emotions, including feeling loved. "When you feel misunderstood," writes Seltzer, "the connection between you and the other person is instantly broken."

Seltzer places loneliness at the opposite end of being understood and argues that love crosses what is otherwise a divide between understanding and loneliness. Being understood is paramount to being seen and affirms our identity.²

This idea of being seen, understood, and loved by the people around us is critical to our identity and sense of value. And while we generally think of individuals, these ideas apply to groups, neighborhoods, villages, cities, and even nations. In this case, comparative rankings often come into play.

For example, Flint's population dropping below 100,000 is a big deal. And in a 2014 Mlive article, Flint City Council President Scott Kincaid explained that this milestone would negatively impact Flint. Kincaid noted that "fewer funds will come into the community through state and federal sources."

Asbury recently received a large grant from federal funds allocated to Flint, but the award was half of what we needed to do the project. Perhaps this is one example of the fallout.

Redirecting our attention to the more positive, Dayne Walling, mayor of Flint at the time of this article, reminded us that "the 100,000 population benchmark doesn't reflect a community's worth." More important, "The quality of life in any community is not determined by its population size."

Nevertheless, our perception of worth lessened when Flint was lumped into the category of smaller cities and municipalities. Moreover, our need for financial assistance is even greater due to population decline, yet our share is substantially less than before.

I took this trip back into the Flint news archives as I reflected on a promise that God made through the prophet Micah. The promise goes something like this — *Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are one of the smallest towns in Judah, but out of you, I will bring a*

ruler for Israel (Micah 5:2). This prophetic declaration is bold given Bethlehem's relative insignificance in population.

Furthermore, the prophecy links the ancestry of this future leader to a previous dynasty long remembered as the heyday for the nation. It's like God might be saying, "You haven't seen anything yet!"

As Christians, we give significance to Micah's prophecy. According to scripture, this prophecy was fulfilled, and we celebrate this fulfillment at Christmas, often reenacting scenes.

But this is only the beginning of the upside-down, underdog coming out on top paradox that is the center of our faith. The whole story, as told by the writer of Luke, is a story of contradictions.

Elizabeth, too old to bear children, gets pregnant as the story unfolds. Her husband is a rather uncelebrated local pastor. He learns about his wife's pregnancy through an epiphany while working at the church. Their child is destined to usher in the public ministry of the One, who was promised by numerous prophecies.

Meanwhile, a teenager living in the hill country in a small village even less significant than Bethlehem has an epiphany of her own. When she discovers that she

Asbury Worship Series
Time to go home
(A search for normal)



Licensed Image...Adobe

The pandemic has proven pervasive and invasive. Michigan is again at or near the top of new COVID cases. A lack of co-operation, absurd conspiracy theories and outright lies conspire to thwart the efforts of our health professionals to protect us. And we're faced with the potential for another dangerous Christmas season. It's frustrating and downright depressing to think about it.

Our new series, *Time to go home*, is in some ways a search for "normal" or at least a search for the intersection between tradition and our current reality. The idea of going home for the holidays is a favorite Hallmark movie theme. There is something about familiarity that comforts us. ¹

Book Club News

We concluded our discussions of *Better together* by Danielle Bean. We're taking a break from choosing another book during the holidays. Instead, we're talking about what it means to go home for Christmas. Of course, our conversations are within the context of some of the prophecies found in scripture about the birth of Christ and what Jesus said about His return.

Recent increases in new infections of COVID among the unvaccinated are pushing us

Leadership in Worship & Service

Tony, Mirium	Welcome Team
Anthony, Jim	Ushers
Jonathon, Terrance	Production Team
Miriam	Children
Cyndi	Worship Leader
Christine & Norma	Cafe

Asbury Staff

Rev. Dr. Tommy McDoniel	Pastor & Exec Dir
Connie Portillo	Office Manager
Sylvia Pittman	Empowerment Arts
Jim Craig	Board & Leadership Chair
Kevin Croom	Exec Chef & Dir Opers

back into isolation. While our regular attenders are vaccinated, we realize that a large number of persons are not vaccinated. Therefore, we reinstated our policy to require masks in our building for all persons when not eating or drinking.

We strongly urge all persons to get vaccinated as soon as practical unless advised by your doctor. Avoid news sources and rumors that promote baseless claims and pay closer attention to the experts we depend on to keep us safe.

We each make our own arrangements for lunch at this point. However, we look forward to returning to pot-luck lunches when infection rates fall. We anticipate this happening as the number of vaccinations reaches herd immunity levels, and the CDC relaxes precautionary measures.

If you prefer to avoid groups or live too far away I encourage you to join us online for our Wednesday gatherings. Alternatively, you can call in by phone, be heard, and hear what others say by calling (929) 436-2866 -- enter the meeting ID, 282 039 5568#.

We are a diverse group, and we are delighted when new persons join us. I hope that you will join in on our discussion.

You can contact our office with questions, by phone or simply type your question on our website's homepage — FlintAsbury.org.

Pastor Tommy



Matt DePalma	Farms Manager
Chris Freeman	South Campus Bldg Mgr
Israel Unger	Finance Director
Kim Sims	Connections Suprv
Terrance Williams	Arts Center Mgr
Katelin Maylum	Sr Mgr Local Food



Time to go home (A search for normal) ... Asbury Worship Series

If our memories of home are tainted with trauma, our search looks elsewhere when we feel as though our joy is under siege.

Families, communities, cities, and religious groups have varying ideas for rituals of celebration. And our calendars routinely overlap. Since Asbury Church comes out of Christian orientation, our calendar calls for a time of reflection, celebration, and communal rituals beginning on the last Sunday of November. The insider term is "Advent," but we're okay with simply calling this time the holiday season.

Advent captures a sense of anticipation about the future. Traditionally, we choose a theme each week that illuminates that which we're anticipating. Words like hope, peace, joy, and love show up on banners and posters to remind us of what we're expecting to find as we celebrate Christmas and beyond.

This year, our plan is to capture the spirit of this particular Christmas in a dramatic role-play that combines our present-day reality with the wonderment of anticipation. Even though the birth of Christ took place over two thousand years ago, we want to share the emotion felt by first-hand witnesses. But we weren't there, and any attempt we make looking backward is only partial.

We believe that the birth of the Christ child was anticipated for generations and interpret ancient prophecies as predictions of His arrival. Therefore, Advent is also about the promises He made and our anticipation of their fulfillment.

The main character in our role-playing is Mary, and the connection with the biblical character is intentional. Christmas is a big deal for Mary. And each year, she looks forward to time off from work, getting together with family, exchanging gifts, and lots of Christmas gatherings. Last year was a massive disappointment for Mary. This Christmas was supposed to be different.

Mary's Christmas journey isn't her's alone. Along the way, she meets others who, like her, struggle with our present circumstances. Mary also meets a few fascinating characters who try to help her see the joy in every Christmas.

Home is whatever place you feel hope, peace, joy, and love. It is a place where hope never fades entirely out. Home is space, feelings, longing, desires, and wholeness. And so, going home is a journey worth making.

The latest colder weather is bringing more people together indoors. Closer contact with each other, supercharged by new variants of COVID, is driving a resurgence of new infections among the unvaccinated. It's time to come out of whatever fears or biases keep you from being a part of the solution. Get vaccinated! If you've already done your part, thank you, but don't forget to get your booster.

I pray that you will join us each Sunday morning at 10:30 am. We share our weekly episodes live on our ***YouTube channel***. We go live at 10:30 am. You can find these links along with more information about us, or join our live broadcast on our ***website*** at ***FlintAsbury.org***.

Pastor Tommy

¹ Katelin Maylum, Tommy McDoniel, and Terrance Williams. "Home for Christmas. Flint, Michigan. © Asbury Church, 2021.

Joy (The Joy of Home¹). *cont. from pg 1*

I suspect that most of us prefer ordinary over the alternative for daily routines. I know I do. While sporadic episodes of unexpected events can be delightful, there are some things where the ordinary is more practical and comforting.

Going to school is one of those things where parents, in particular, prefer ordinary for our children.

But for Ethan Crumbley, that particular Tuesday was anything but ordinary.

A morning meeting with his parents and school administrators interrupted Ethan's and his parent's daily schedule. After which, the parents returned to their schedule and insisted that Ethan return to his. While the vast majority of students rarely, if ever, find themselves in such a meeting, this was not the case for Ethan. The meeting took place after a teacher observed a disturbing drawing featuring a gun and a victim, accented by a laughing emoji and the words, "Blood everywhere."

Now I realize that in our justice system, it is proper to use words like alleged and suspect rather than words that suggest we already know the outcome to be decided. This understanding is essential given our assumption that all are innocent until proven guilty. And given the complexity of our legal system, which looks at splitting hairs into thousands of strands of minutia until a person is found guilty or innocent with great specificity.

Of course, the rest of us reduce such complexity into the reality of the horror and grief that we experience as a result. Even if we don't know a single student — or parent — or teacher — even if we don't even know where in Michigan Oxford is found on a map — we're affected in very profound and uncomfortable ways.

And for the families and friends of Hana St. Juliana, age 14; Madisyn Baldwin, age 17; Tate Myre, age 16; and Justin Shilling, age 17 — their grief is only beginning, and healing may be elusive for a long time.²

We simply don't get over such violent affronts. We are both affected and marred when violence is done — even when we don't know anything happened.

And yet — we feel helpless to do anything about it.

In what is described as a rare decision, the suspect's parents, James, and Jennifer Crumbley, are charged with involuntary manslaughter. The legal term is "involuntary" even though they voluntarily purchased a tool designed and manufactured to take life away, supposedly as a Christmas gift for Ethan.

Seldom heard from and protected by numerous layers of legal veils are the persons behind the profits made by selling the 9mm Sig Sauer SP 2022 pistol to the suspect's parents. The weapon was manufactured by SIG Sauer. The

company is currently headquartered in New Hampshire. This company was initially founded as SIG Arms, an importer of German manufactured weapons.

The company eventually began manufacturing its own models of guns and, by 2016, was selling an estimated 43 Thousand weapons a year. Ron Cohen, President of SIG Sauer, Inc., will not be prosecuted for his role in this murder or any other destructive use of the weapons designed, sold, and manufactured for profit. Nor will the owner of Acme Shooting Goods, who sold the weapon.

Nor will any of the designers, manufacturers, store owners, employees, officers, or Board Members of other companies that produce and sell weapons designed for killing. They won't be prosecuted because we don't roll that way when it comes to protecting our rights to purchase weapons for home use. By the way, did I mention that a semi-automatic handgun is designed and constructed as a killing machine?

A weapon's intended "use" whether at home, school, the work place, or elsewhere is for the sole purpose of killing. And that's what Ethan had in mind whether or not his parent's ever considered that their son might actually use the weapon for its intended purpose.

is pregnant, even though she has never had sex with her fiancé, her future looks bleak by any standard we might apply.

However, revealed to Mary in her epiphany is that she will bear the promised One. After telling Joseph, Mary leaves town to stay with her relative Elizabeth for a while.

According to Luke, when Elizabeth first saw Mary coming to visit her, she was filled with the Holy Spirit. The baby inside of her also seemed to respond to the unfolding excitement. These women were the first to know that God's plan for salvation was coming to fruition.

The knowledge they shared was both inspiring and dangerous. A holy scandal was coming to live inside their wombs. Soon their secret would be known by the world. In the meantime, they stepped up to the obligations put onto their shoulders.

Mary responds in song, the words of which have been sung for generations. A song that begins with Mary realizing she is known. Not just by her friends at school or around the neighborhood. Mary is known by God.

The lyrics are a recitation of God's economy. A world where declining cities are ranked near the top. A neighborhood where each of us is known, understood and loved.

God has remembered me,
his lowly servant! From now
on all people will call me
happy.

Luke 1:48

A city like Flint. A neighborhood like ours.

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A reminder that we publish this newsletter that we call the *Circuit Rider* each week. You can request this publication by email. Send a request to connect@FlintAsbury.org or let us know when you send a message through our [website](#). We post an archive of past editions on our website under the tab, Connect - choose [Newsletters](#).

Pastor Tommy

¹ Katelin Maylum, Tommy McDaniel, and Terrance Williams. "Home for Christmas." Flint, Michigan. © Asbury Church, 2021.

² Leon F. Seltzer, Ph.D.. Reviewed by Ekua Hagan. "Feeling Understood — Even More Important Than Feeling Loved?." © 2017 Leon F. Seltzer, Ph.D. Psychology Today. June 28, 2017.



Life groups questions & notes:

For he has remembered me, his lowly servant! From now on all people will call me happy.

Luke 1:48 (GNT)

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS


1. Read the book of Luke 1:39-55, Micah 4:3-5, and Micah 5:2-5a. What is a common theme found in all of these verses? Have you heard Mary's song before? Where? Can you identify with what Mary is singing? In what ways?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *Love*. Where can you go that people know who you are? Do you feel known in general? What is being known mean to you? Can you connect being known with feeling loved? In what ways do you identify with Flint? Your neighborhood? Does your connection to where you live affect how you view your self-worth?
3. How can the members of your group help you this week and on-going to help you to be more receptive to hearing and understanding the Word of God? Pray for each other to have the Holy Spirit bless you with more courage.

“Feed Flint”



“Feed Flint”

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A meal goes a long way for a senior living alone, a family struggling to make ends meet, or a child fearful of empty shelves at home. But for the residents of Flint who carry the effects of lead-tainted water, nutrition is critical. Feed Flint provides locally grown, chemical-free, fresh produce to residents living in and around Flint. And we're hoping that you can help us provide 10,000 meals this summer.

Feed Flint includes takeout meals, produce boxes with recipes, and home deliveries as part of our work to guide and support families in moving to sustainable abundance. The reality is that Michigan's food insecurity levels got worse during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this summer's recovery is leaving behind those at the most risk of having to miss meals.

Flint families continue to struggle with the ongoing effects of the water crisis.

We're bringing together the resources of the Asbury Community Development Corporation. This includes Asbury Farms, the South Flint Soup Kitchen, the Asbury Community Help Center, multiple food pantries, and our Sizzling Culture Mobile Food Trailer. Our plan is to care for our neighbors when they need it most. We accept all people as they are, and our doors are always open to anyone.

Asbury Farms provides locally grown produce used to create fabulous and nutritious meals. Our seed-to-table approach is community-based. This not only helps families make it through emergencies and crises. We help move families towards sustainable abundance.

Our Sizzling Culture program provides jobs and new skills to our city's youth. This includes year-round employment. Our staff and most of our volunteers come from the neighborhoods we support. We call this sustainable abundance because families move from need-based on scarcity to enough based on community-generated abundance.

Our work is also about food and justice. Our vision is a revitalized community where every resident can use their talents and passions for the common good, where children grow into active citizens. And all residents can enjoy safety, good health, and a culture that fosters life-long learning and satisfying lives. This summer, help us address food insecurity and strengthen Flint's budding local food system by supporting the Feed Flint campaign. Thank you for taking the time to see what we're doing and considering how you can help.

Donate to our Feed Flint Campaign by visiting:
flintasbury.org/feed-flint-donate

SOUTH FLINT SOUP KITCHEN
PRESENTS...

DECEMBER GIVEAWAYS!

Have a jolly holly holiday season in our Angel Closet!

**ANGEL CLOSET: DECEMBER 1ST
CHRISTMAS CLOSET: DECEMBER 22ND
APPOINTMENT ONLY! CALL 810-239-3427
OR EMAIL
SOUTHFLINTSOUPKITCHEN@GMAIL.COM**

**FOOD GIVEAWAYS: DECEMBER 8TH &
15TH - NO APPOINTMENT NEEDED FOR
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ALL GIVEAWAYS 11AM-NOON

South Flint Soup Kitchen
3410 Fenton Road
Flint, MI 48507 (three blocks north of
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- TRY OUR WEEKLY VEGGIE BOX FOR \$10.00 -

SIGN UP FOR A FREE ASBURY FARMS ACCOUNT TODAY

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CREATE YOUR OWN VEGGIE BOX

Select what goes in your box from each week's harvest. Get \$5 off your next order when you fill your box with \$15 of produce.

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*** CONVENIENT PICKUP AT ASBURY OR AT THE SOUTH FLINT SOUP KITCHEN ***

Meanwhile, the Sunday before the shooting, churches around the world celebrated the start of Advent. The name Christians chose to designate the four weeks leading up to Christmas. Advent is a holy time of preparation, reflection, and celebration.

On the first Sunday of Advent, we celebrated the hope represented by Christmas. Last Sunday, we celebrated the peace promised by God that came as a Messiah. This week we celebrate the joy of God's presence and actions in the world. Next week we celebrate God's love and recommit ourselves to loving others as we love ourselves.

Meanwhile, there is cause for grief, regret, despair, and anger.

Most of us recognize that joy is as intentional as it is a result of external events that evoke joy. We sometimes think of joy as an attitude more so than a response. Joy can appear calloused in the face of tragedy. Yet joy is nuanced, coming in a multitude of intensities and moods.

The pervasive joy that rises above crisis, drama, and violence comes out of a sense of realizing that God is still in control. And for many, Advent is a time that reminds us of this reality. During Advent, we remember that God chose to live among us and promised to be with us always.

"A day is coming," said Isaiah, "When people will sing, 'Give thanks to the Lord!'" These words are among the numerous

predictions of God's intention for Jesus Christ to be born as both a sign and a solution. Isaiah challenges us all to "Tell all the nations" about God's plans (Isaiah 12:4).

Paul writes about joy in his letters. For example, in Paul's letter to the church in Philippi, Paul encourages the people to "always be joyful in your union with the Lord." He reminds us to ask God for what we need that is getting in the way of our joy.

A day is coming when people will sing, "Give thanks to the Lord!"

Isaiah 12:4

He goes on to point out that God's Spirit has a miraculous effect on us whenever we're able to shift enough of our focus from problems to gratitude. Paul notes that this feeling of peace is outside human understanding. I agree. It's hard to understand how we can find joy, even as Christmas approaches, given the problems surrounding us (Philippians 4:4-7).

Nevertheless, I promised myself that I will look for the joy of Christmas even as I grieve over the needless loss of life. I will celebrate each week, sing thanks to God. Even as my heart breaks over our divisions and inability to work together to end the use of

violence, I anticipate that God's peace will prevail, and I will find joy. And I invite you to do the same.

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Pastor Tommy

¹ Katelin Maylum, Tommy McDoniel, and Terrance Williams. "Home for Christmas." Flint, Michigan. © Asbury Church, 2021.

² Albeck-Ripka and Sophie Kasakove. "What We Know About the Michigan High School Shooting." © New York Time, December 3, 2021.

