

# Creekside

*a publication by and for the people of Harmony Creek Church*

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## Searching for Faith

 Harmony Creek Church

Volume 2, Issue 3

# A message from the editor

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*“Where does one find faith ... or does faith find us? Or do people lose faith?”*

*Lots of questions about how and where we may find it are always in our midst. We hear a great sermon, or maybe we just enjoy the outdoors and find our faith there. Or, perhaps, there are moments in our lives when faith escapes us. We lose faith in others or our world by virtue of what’s happening around us.*

*It can be a real challenge to find and keep faith sometimes.*

*That’s what we tried to explore in this issue of Creekside. I hope you’ll enjoy what our writers, Dick Todd and Carol Alexander, have shown us about their own experiences. And I hope you are able to share one of your own sometime down the road. We love hearing from new people and how they experience their faith - or not.*

*Enjoy!*



# Creekside

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*Creekside is a publication of Harmony Creek Church, 5280 Bigger Road, Kettering, OH. Creekside is published quarterly. Stories and suggested art may be submitted for consideration any time during the year.*

*For writing guidelines, see our page on the HCC website.*

*Stories submitted are the works of their credited writers. Any questions about story content should be directed to the contributing writers.*



# Faith Dialogue

by Dick Todd

**M**y brain can certainly be a scary place. Lots of conversations go on in there. I thought you might be amused by one that happened recently, so I taped and transcribed it for you....

‘Creekside’s summer issue is about faith. Guess that leaves me out.’

“Why? Because faith is one of my difficult topics?”

“Yep. Not sure I’d have anything to say about faith that would be in any way helpful to the good folks at Harmony Creek Church.”

“But John said it could be about your lack of faith; or your struggle to maintain your faith. Don’t I have something to say about that?”

“Do you really want to go there, Dick? A former minister who struggles with faith issues. With what you’ve already shared with these people, this may seal the deal about them thinking you’re a total whack job.”

“Well it’s not like I have no faith, at all. It’s just that there’s such a huge chasm between knowing and believing. When you know, it’s easy. When you don’t it just stays fuzzy.

I know what this is all about. It’s about when I see someone who seems to have tons of faith, isn’t it? They make me feel guilty. They seem so sure and confident – almost like they really do know and not just believe. They look strong and self-assured in their faith and because I still see the chasm between faith and knowing, I lay a guilt trip on myself.”

“And a lot of good that does, right?”

“Yeah. I know. Feeling guilty about that accomplishes nothing.”

“So let’s figure this out. It’s not like I DON’T believe. I mean I’ve never considered myself anything like an atheist.”

“True.”

“A lot of it is my concept of God, theology and spirituality keep changing. I used to buy the whole party line atonement theology and now I’ve left that aside. I’m enjoying progressive theology. That’s a good thing, right?”

“Absolutely.”

“And I keep getting new insights that help fine tune my concept of God being pure love.”

“Yep.”

“So why is it I still feel like faith is a struggle for me.”

“Maybe it’s because of the rational side of me. I want answers. Not ideas. I want proof beyond a shadow of a doubt about God when that proof doesn’t seem to be available.”

“So what does your gut tell you?”

“Good question. My gut says the most likely thing is that the Love we know is tied up in all of creation and everything’s really okay. Nothing to worry about.”

“Well there you have it. Why not just stick with that?”

“I guess that’s really what I try to do. But then that old culprit, Doubt, sneaks in and what sense of faith I have gets rattled. And when that happens, it makes me feel ‘less than.’ Especially less than those folks who go around oozing their faith out of every pore.

“But I’m not losing sleep over this, right? I don’t go around anxious or anything.”

“Right. So just keep going with the flow. I’ll keep holding on to the hope that both my brain and my gut are correct and God is really in charge somehow and love and life continue always.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

“Whew. Right. But one thing’s for sure. I am NOT going to write anything for Creekside this time.”

# You Are Accepted ... And More

by Carol Alexander

**T**hink 1971. My husband Bob and I had been members of a new start church in Kettering. We had attended since 1954. Evangelical & Reformed in 1954, the congregation embraced the new beginning of the United Church of Christ (UCC) in 1957. By 1971 we were fully engaged in the UCC. We were participating in our local church, SONKA Association and the Ohio Conference. We were both busy and happy with teaching Sunday school and Vacation Church School, leading the youth group, singing in the church choir, planning and executing community development work, and helping with activities for the entire community of more than 1000 homeowners. We loved it—and our two kids, John and Sue, enjoyed it, too.

Enter: A new idea! Our friend Bill called us at home one Sunday evening: “Bob and Carol, Jane and I just returned from a marvelous weekend sponsored by Ecumenical Institute in Chicago. It was a fantastic experience. We studied the works of three theologians: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Henri Nouwen, and Paul Tillich. The course is being taught again this weekend at St. John’s UCC in Dayton. We feel certain you will really enjoy it.”

Bob and I decided to go.

The Course, called “Religious Studies I” covered the works of three theologians: Bonhoeffer (weigh up [the cost], decide, and act), Nouwen (everyone has a spiritual base—live it), and Tillich (You are Accepted). Tillich said it ALL for me:

“You are accepted! You are accepted! You are accepted!”

Our Response: To say this course, and the continuing study we had with the Ecumenical Institute (later name changed to Institute of Culture Affairs), was life changing is a clear understatement.

By the time I studied Paul Tillich’s sermon I had been active for 19 years in a holiness church that stressed being “saved” so one didn’t languish in hell, been an active member in a UCC

congregation for 17 years where faith and grace are the operative words, and still—STILL—I knew that I was not a good enough person (despite all the work and study I had done) for God to love me enough to let me go to “heaven” when my present life was complete. Realizing in my heart—not just my mind—that I was accepted by God—as I was, without having to DO anything – or CHANGE anything—created within me an astounding feeling of peace; and an internal will to introduce others to this marvelous acceptance

These are the words from Tillich’s sermon that changed my life forever (in speaking of grace):

“Do we know what it means to be struck by grace? It does not mean that we suddenly believe that God exists or that Jesus is the Savior, or that the Bible contains the truth. To believe that something *is*, is almost contrary to the meaning of grace. Furthermore, grace does not mean simply that we are making progress in our moral self-control, in our fight against special faults, and in our relationships to men and to society. Moral progress may be a fruit of grace; but it is not grace itself, and it can even prevent us from receiving grace.

For there is too often a graceless acceptance of Christian doctrines and a graceless battle against the structures of evil in our personalities. Such a graceless relation to God may lead us by necessity either to arrogance or to despair. It would be better to refuse God and the Christ and the Bible than to accept them without grace. For if we accept without grace, we do so in the state of separation, and can only succeed in deepening the separation.

We cannot transform our lives, unless we allow them to be transformed by that stroke of grace. It happens; or it does not happen. And certainly it does not happen if we try to force it upon ourselves, just as it shall not happen so long as we think, in our self-complacency, that we have no need of it. Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when

we walk through the dark valley of a meaningless and empty life. It strikes us when we feel that our separation is deeper than usual, because we have violated another life, a life which we feel that our separation is deeper than usual, because we have; violated another life, a life which we loved, or from which we are estranged. It strikes us when our disgust for our own being, our indifference, our weakness, our hostility, and our lack of direction and composure have become intolerable to us.

It strikes us when, year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, when the old compulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage. Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying:

“You are accepted.” You are accepted - accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know. Do not ask for the name now; perhaps you will find it later. Do not try to do anything now; perhaps later you will do much. Do not seek for anything; do not perform anything; do not intend anything. Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!” If that happens to us, we experience grace!

After such an experience we may not be better than before, and we may not believe more than before. But everything is transformed. In that moment, grace conquers sin, and reconciliation bridges the gulf of estrangement. And nothing is demanded of this experience, no religious or moral intellection, nothing but acceptance.”

..... Paul Tillich ends his sermon with these words: “Sin” and “grace” are strange words; but they are not strange things. We find them whenever we look into ourselves with searching eyes and longing hearts. They determine our life. They abound within us and in all of life. May grace more abound within us!”

After that acceptance weekend, my life completely changed. In addition to all the church related work I was doing in the UCC, Bob and I were active in the Institute of Cultural Affairs for the next 14 years. We visited ICA headquarters

in Chicago for training and special events. We attended training, led workshops, at the Covington, KY office. In 1976 we participated in many weekend events in Ohio cities related to the United States 200th anniversary year.

Since 1986, when the ICA offices in Kentucky relocated, I have continued what is commonly called experienced based adult education in the areas of world religions, spirituality, and early childhood education. I love to play/sing/write music. I love to write—mostly essays and some poetry. I enjoy art—and create some myself. I love the interaction with friends and acquaintances. Life is great!

Of course, life has its ups and downs. Even so, I know—I feel it in my bones, in my inner-self—that I am accepted by God. Just as every other sentient being is! Just as you are!

You are accepted. Grace abounds! Enjoy!

