

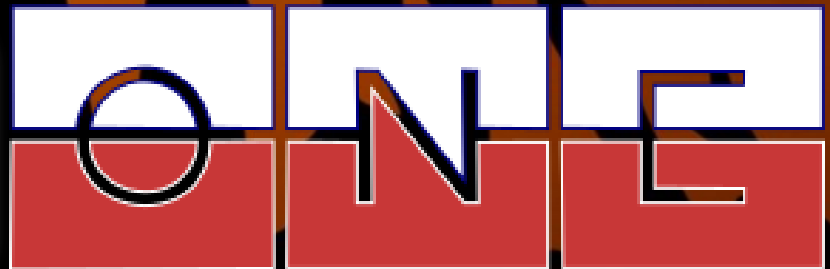


**“NOW FAITH IS CONFIDENCE IN
WHAT WE HOPE FOR AND
ASSURANCE ABOUT WHAT WE
DO NOT SEE.”**

- HEBREWS 11:1 (NIV)

INSIDE:

**+ Graduations
affecting faith life**



A Publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance

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Ellis County Ministerial Alliance

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Advisory Board

Kurt Beyers
Ben Houchen
Anna Towns

Editor

Terri Braun
terribraun91@gmail.com

Editor's Note:

This month we asked our writers, "During this time of graduations, what is something you have "graduated" to in life that has had an impact on your faith life?"

I Have Joined the Ranks of 'Cancer Thrivers'

Written by:

Linn Ann Huntington

It was a sunny September day in 2022 when I answered the phone and heard my doctor's voice. (You always know when it is the doctor calling you, instead of the nurse, that it is going to be bad news.) "The biopsy came back positive, Linn Ann," she told me. "You have breast cancer. That's the bad news. The good news is we caught it early."

Thus began my journey. Five months later, after two surgeries, 16 rounds of radiation, and starting on chemotherapy (which I will continue for the next two years), I joined the ranks of cancer survivors. Or, as one of my fellow patients put it, "We are not just cancer survivors; we are thrivers."

So, I have graduated to a new phase in my life. Initially, I was determined that cancer would not make a big difference in my life. But it has. Here are a few of the ways I have changed.

No. 1, when I retired in 2016, I had to learn to say "no" to certain things. When you retire, people assume that you have a lot of free time that you need to fill up. And they have lots and lots of volunteer opportunities to help you do that.

I prayed and asked God which volunteer "assignments" He wanted me to take on—and which ones He didn't. Then, I had to graciously turn down those volunteer "opportunities" that I didn't feel He wanted me to accept.

After my cancer diagnosis, I have had to learn to say

"yes"—to trips that may be tiring, to evenings out with friends, to things that would be easy to turn down because my energy level isn't what it once was. I take more naps in the afternoon.

But I have learned that with a little more advanced planning, I can say "yes" to opportunities that I know I will enjoy. For example, I am a big fan of Richard Thomas, the actor. He was playing the role of Atticus Finch in a national professional tour of "To Kill a Mockingbird," one of my favorite books.

Long before my cancer diagnosis, I had Googled the tour dates and locations. The nearest location to us was Omaha, Nebraska. But that weekend, as it turned out, was just a week following my last round of radiation. I realized about midway through my radiation treatment that there

I Have Joined the Ranks of 'Cancer Thrivers' (Continued)

was no way I could drive that distance by myself. I was too weak.

So I contacted some friends, and they agreed to drive me to Omaha. I was also worried about being able to walk the distance from the parking garage to the theatre in downtown Omaha. But one we arrived at our hotel, my friend talked to the manager and discovered the hotel had a shuttle to and from the theatre. It dropped us off near the front door.

I hadn't known this when I booked our rooms. But, of course, God knew. He took care of every detail of our trip. I had a lovely time at the production and a lovely visit with my friends.

No. 2, since my cancer diagnosis, I am better at not procrastinating. I am more intentional about getting things done now. When I worked, I had my "to do" list every day. Now, I am setting

goals at home—to clean out my third bedroom, which over the years, became my storage area. The bed was piled high with things I needed to find a place for "someday." While the bed is not completely free of items yet, the pile is much smaller.

I was always bad about delaying minor surgeries for health issues that weren't emergencies. For years, my ophthalmologist told me I had cataracts in both eyes. But I had heard stories from friends about their cataract surgeries—the inconvenience, the time it took to heal. So I kept putting off my own surgery.

Last fall, I had the cataracts removed from both eyes a month apart. Not only is my vision clearer, I am also seeing colors more distinctly. I am also planning another minor medical procedure this July. With whatever time I have left, I am going to enjoy life with a

healthier me!

I have no illusions about cancer. I watched my younger sister and my mother both die of cancer—horribly painful deaths I certainly don't want to experience. But I also know that God is in control. I have friends who had a breast cancer diagnosis, who took the same medication I am on. They were cancer-free for years, before they were diagnosed with cancer in a different part of their body. In a few short weeks they were dead.

No, I have no illusions about cancer. But I refuse to view myself as a "victim." Instead, I intend to be a "cancer thriver" for as long as God gives me.



Linn Ann Huntington of Hays is a professional writer and retired professor. She attends North Oak Community Church.

Let's Learn to Look "Up"

Written by:

Rev. Ben Houchen

Hello there, dear readers! Today, we're going to talk about a special time of year that makes me want to stand on my desk and shout, "Carpe diem!" It's graduation

season, folks! Now, some of you might be thinking, "Oh captain, my captain, what's the big deal about graduation?" Well, it's a big deal, and not just because the kids get to toss those caps in the air. No! It's about celebrating a

journey - a journey of growth, discovery, and transformation.

And while we are currently in the time of academic graduation, we must remember that graduation is about more than just school.

It's about friendships

Let's Learn to Look "Up" (Continued)

forged, lessons learned, and memories made along the way. It's about embracing the uncertainty of the future with courage and optimism. It's about believing in yourself and your ability to make a difference in the world.

It's easy to feel that when we're kids and we're graduating from school to school, or from school to work. But it can get harder to feel that kind of optimism later, can't it? When we graduated from high school or college, we probably all thought the future could be scary! "What if I mess up? What if I fail?"

But it's likely that plenty of people around us were encouraging us, telling us things like "failure is just another word for opportunity. It's a chance to learn, to grow, and to become the person you were meant to be. So don't be afraid to take risks, to follow your dreams, and to

seize every opportunity that comes your way." And as a young person, just getting started into adult life, that feels exciting.

But when you are older, finding optimism in a new stage of life like graduating from parent to an empty nest, empty nest to a grandparent, employment to retirement can start to feel more burdensome than freeing. Optimism can become hard to find. You've probably had failures, that were just failures. Nothing great came out of them.

Maybe you learned something. But you could have probably learned it without that failure. So, your next big graduation may feel more impending than approaching.

What I think tends to change over time that leads us to this mindset is our imagination. When we're young we imagine a grand distant future, but as we age, we can let our imagination

become corrupted by our own fear. We let the world tell us what to believe, rather than turning to the Divine Creator for the hope that exists in the Christ; allowing our imagination to be dominated by the love and truth therein. As Christians, we absolutely must overcome this.

So, in this season of graduations, as the kids throw their caps to the sky, we must continue to look up as well. Letting our hope for the future be determined by a God who knows the good set before us. The One who calls us to cast out all fear and look, with hope, into the expanse of unending love.



*Rev. Ben Houchen
is the Priest at St.
Michael's and St.
Andrew's
Episcopal Church
in Hays.*

Cliff of Faith

***Written by:
Becky Clark***

I was asked to write about something in my life that I have "graduated" and that has had an impact on my faith. I immediately knew what I would be writing about. I have graduated with several college

degrees in my lifetime and have always classified myself as a lifelong learner. I am eager to learn new things and improve my skill set in life. I have been a teacher, behavioral specialist, autism consultant, school principal, school district administrator and ultimately a mental health

therapist. However, none of those worldly graduations are what I chose to write about today.

While working as a therapist in the schools, I was also working on my clinical license as a therapist. So, I began to practice part-time

Cliff of Faith (Continued)

under a Christian Counselor. During this time, my soul caught fire and I realized God was pulling me out of education and everything I had known for the past 23 years. He was asking me to take a leap of faith and to trust Him in the step He was asking me to take. To me, at the time, it felt as if He was asking me to dive off a cliff into a pool of water below and I wasn't sure I would be able to swim when I hit the water.

I wrestled with God on this one. I told Him that He had called the wrong person for the assignment of leaving my stable job with great benefits, steady income and everything that ever made me feel "safe".

As a single mom of two kids, security was something I had always worked hard to achieve. Surely, God wasn't calling me to the edge of the cliff and asking me to jump into the unknown?

And still, I heard the call in so many ways. I began to pray that He clearly order my next steps as I began to truly trust His perfect plan for my life. I asked for discernment and for God to take me by the hand and lead me to still waters so I could wrap my head around this calling. We serve a faithful God and I remembered a Bible verse from youth group as a kid. Hebrews 11:1 (NIV) says, *"Now Faith is confidence in what we hope for and*

assurance about what we do not see." I stood firmly knowing that if God brought me to this that He would see me through it.

About a month later, my niece from Texas came to visit and gifted me a wall hanging that had Hebrews 11:1 on it! No joke, she and I had not had a conversation about what had been going on. I chuckled and thanked God for yet another confirmation that I was on the path He intended for my life. He was clearly calling me to use my gifts to bring hope to the hopeless, to bring comfort to the grieving and to be a beacon of light in our dark world.

About a month later, I retired from public education and opened my new private practice to do just that. In honor of God's provisions, clear guidance and faithfulness, I named the business "Still Waters Christian Counseling." Several of my colleagues asked me if I thought the identification of "Christian Counselor" would hurt my new business endeavor. I stood firm on my decision and now have two offices in the state and have been richly blessed by our Heavenly Father.

Doing work for His kingdom is by far the most important assignment in my life. Looking back on my life,

when asked to write on this topic I jumped at the opportunity! Our graduation into full faith and trust in the One who has never left our side, and never will, is something that needs to be shouted from the mountaintops! When we graduate into falling into the arms of our Lord and Savior, we are abundantly blessed. At that moment, we graduate from relying on our own success, achievements, and degrees. That indeed, my friends, is the single most important graduation date in our lives!

The most impactful graduation date for me has by far been the one in which I stepped out in faith as the Lord called my name. Remember, when we are asked to jump off that high dive, aka "cliff of faith", we know that one of two things will happen: there will be something to stand on or we will be taught how to fly! Graduating into a full trusting relationship with our Lord and Savior has by far been the most momentous graduation date of my life.



Becky Clark is the CEO of Still Waters Christian Counseling, LLC.

United in Prayer

I think we all can agree that our nation needs prayer now more than ever. It used to be that our Founding Fathers sought the wisdom of God during challenging times and even asked God for help in making difficult decisions. Abraham Lincoln said, "Nevertheless amid the greatest difficulties of my Administration, when I could not see any other resort, I would place my whole reliance on God, knowing that all would go well, and that he would decide for the right." George Washington said, "It is a duty of all nations to acknowledge the province of almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favors."

Our country was founded as "one nation under God."

This concept has somehow become convoluted over the years. As we are now a nation divided in so many ways; God, no God; Republican or Democratic; Us versus Them; I versus We. Our nation needs the power of prayer for its indifferences, prejudices, biases, hatred, and anger just to name a few. So how about we all stand together and pray for our nation despite our differences!?

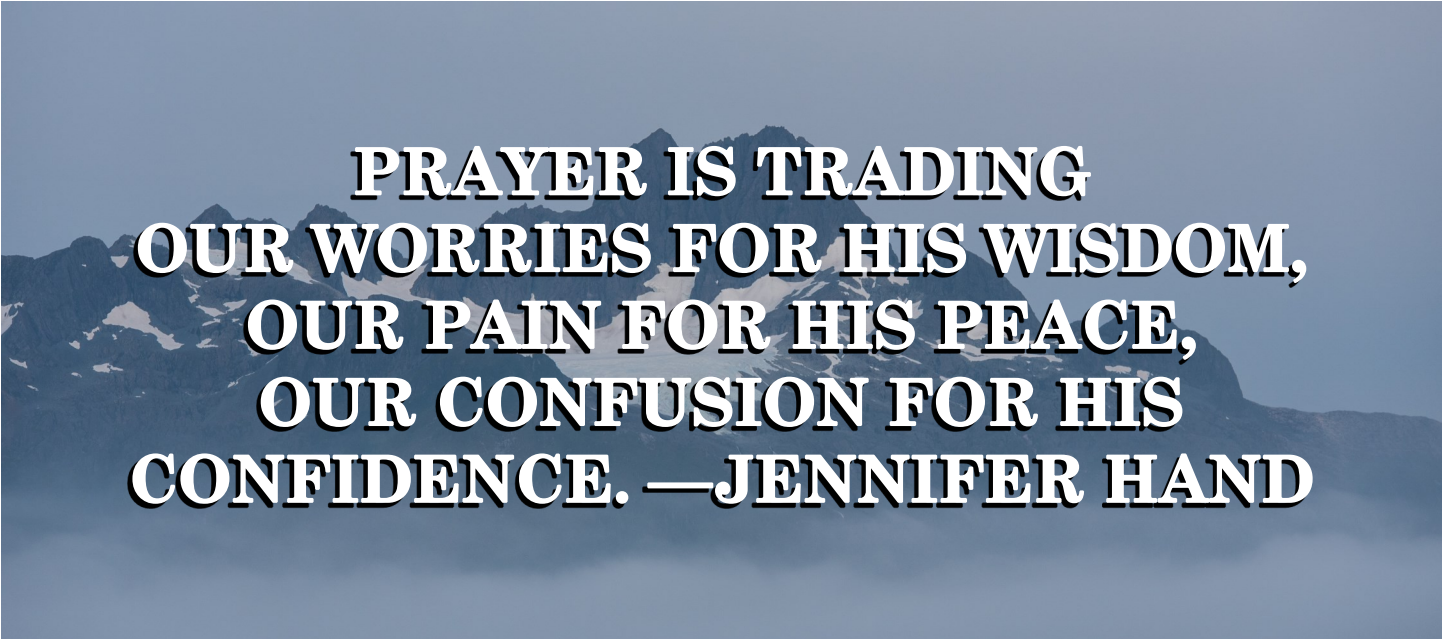
We will do just that on the National Day of Prayer, May 2, which was declared by law in 1952. All denominations will come together as one. We will pray alongside millions of other believers nationwide blessing those in need and those who lead.

Just maybe these prayers will make a change in someone's heart which will

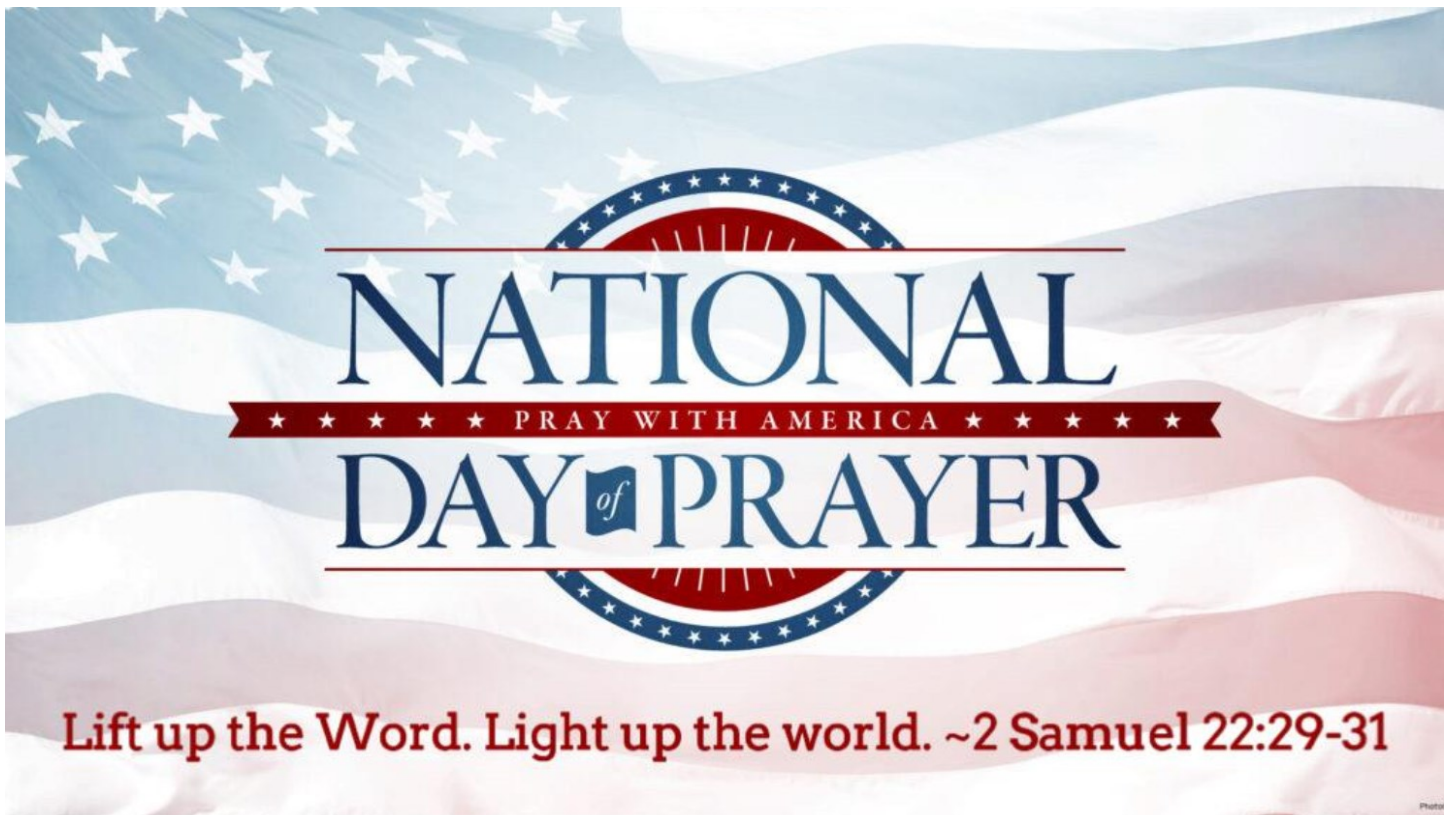
soften and welcome Jesus. Maybe love will enter hearts and more people will be kinder to each other. And maybe others will take inventory of their morals and values and see if they align with God.

Let's pray that some will have conversions and yet some will just have the seed planted...but oh how those seeds can grow! Let's pray that our country will have more justice than injustice, more love than hate, and more similarities than differences.

Let's unite and pray for our nation together! Come join us on May 2 at the VFW ballroom from 12-1pm. Prayer is so powerful! It is what tugs on the heartstrings of God.



**PRAYER IS TRADING
OUR WORRIES FOR HIS WISDOM,
OUR PAIN FOR HIS PEACE,
OUR CONFUSION FOR HIS
CONFIDENCE. —JENNIFER HAND**



Date: Thursday May 2, 2024

Time: 12:00-1:00pm

Place: VFW Ballroom

2106 Vine St.

*Let's come together as a
nation to pray for our nation!*
