



“Christ’s Patient Endurance” by Tyler Hartford, Director of Church Leadership

As I write this, my iPhone news feed is filled with slaps and bombs. A quick scroll will give us headlines that all clamor for the same level of engagement, telling us that we should be concerned about so many events. Whether it’s an actor and a comedian fighting publicly, a country invading another, the results of a basketball game, a COVID relief program filled with fraud, what the Queen of England ate for breakfast, varying layers of themes are given the same attention.

Given the events of the past few years, more individuals are sharing how they are experiencing compassion fatigue, a condition that includes emotional, mental, spiritual and physical exhaustion with a reduced capacity to empathize or show compassion for others. It’s a dangerous place to be, where our brains begin to function out of fight or flight, and we lack the ability to respond creatively and lovingly. It takes a concentrated effort to not be drawn into the drama, and to sift through what might be important.



I live near a population of Ukrainians, and every Easter they hold an Easter festival that showcases intricate wax painted and etched eggs called pysanka. I’m thinking about the fragility of these beautiful art pieces as I also consider the fragility of our own humanity. If we are honest with ourselves, most of us are probably closer to slapping and dropping bombs than showing love to friends and family who hurt us or seeking the salvation of our enemies. We’re likely one verbal assault, one accident, one wrong move away from retaliating or retreating rather than demonstrating love and shalom.

As we approach Easter, the holiest day of the Christian calendar, we look to an extremely violent event as the center of our faith. A crystalizing moment which provides a standard against which to weigh the demands on our own lives. This wave of assault issued

by the religious elite, the Roman occupiers, the local officials, and even dear friends, crashed against the Son of God. If anyone had the right, the reason and the power to retaliate, it would have been Jesus.

And his response? The One who had looked out over the city with compassion, saying, “Oh Jerusalem, if only you knew what made for peace (Lk. 19:41-42)” later cries out to His Heavenly Father, “Father forgive them they know not what they do (Lk. 23:34).” While He acknowledges “My God My God, why have you forsaken me...(Ps 22:1)?”, His quote leads us further to verse 24, “For He has not despised or scorned the suffering of the

afflicted one, he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.”

In this Easter season, what if we all acknowledge the “nations rage and conspire, and the people plot in vain (Ps. 2:1)?” And we also live with Christ’s example of patient endurance, as our “pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross (Heb. 12:2).”

Ohio “ReGenal” Worship Event

June 11-12, 2022

Kidron Mennonite Church, Kidron, OH

Mark your calendars for a special Evana regional worship event!

Saturday PM and Sunday AM sessions will be led by members of Ohio Evana churches & feature special guests Carolyn & Chad Yoder.

Event hotel pricing til May 27 at <https://www.choicehotels.com/reservations/groups/WT55S4>

Surrender -

A New Album by Rebecca Martin

Surrender is an album birthed out of painful life experiences combined with a steadfast commitment to hold fast to God's promises even when they may feel empty. Rebecca Martin, a member of Smithville Mennonite, an Evana congregation, has released an album of ten original songs about how honest vulnerability and courage to confront unhealthy coping patterns can lead to hope and healing.



Many of Rebecca's songs contain catchy melodies and all of them contain lyrics that proclaim God's truth and grace. Some of her songs will especially appeal to foster and adoptive parents, but anyone who has

wrestled with past and present woundedness will find encouragement and blessing in listening. "I believe the songs that we plant in our minds and hearts will grow and bear fruit, if we fill ourselves with good, true and uplifting music, we will have a plentiful harvest," said Rebecca.

Songs are available to listen on most music streaming platforms and can be downloaded for a price of your choosing from www.rebeccamartinmusic.com. Physical CDs can be ordered through the website. Taking time to read the stories behind the songs on the website will add even greater significance to listening to *Surrender*.

Please consider giving Rebecca's songs a listen and allow them to grow and bear fruit in your spiritual life.

by Matt Hamsher, photo by Todd Martin

Financial Fidelity in Churches

While the social or sexual misbehavior of church leaders is often what gets talked about in wider culture, the most common ways things go sideways in church involves financial misconduct. As I look back over my own faith journey, I can tell countless stories of church audits taking place because of individuals improperly claiming contributions, pastors taking control of parsonages, leaders skimming off donations, and much more. As we work with churches, we are usually asked for help with transitions, vision work for outreach, and other ways of resourcing pastors and congregations. Conversations focused on financial clarity and accountability are a little more rare, yet we desire for all our congregations to practice due diligence with their finances. As the 2021 tax season wraps up, I'd like to offer a few observations for leaders to consider.

One, make sure your treasurer and stewardship team are aware of existing resources. One popular site is Christianity Today's Church Law & Tax Center, which provides input in areas such as exemptions, payroll, benefits and more. If you are interested in a more in-depth outside audit of financial health and processes, you may want to consider using an organization like CapinCrouse. At the very least, it's helpful to have access to a CPA experienced with non-profit and clergy tax matters.

Two, be sure to keep good records on tithing and special gifts, whether you use a blind or open tracking system. With multiple sources of giving available via online, text, or even trust disbursements, make sure individual records can track all sources. Despite federal deduction amount being raised, it's still good practice to track every gift. Many of our congregations use

membership software that also tracks giving, with more popular cloud-based options including Breeze and Planning Center Online (the Church Center module).

Three, one of the most common areas for non-profit missteps is in what's called "acts of self-dealing" by non-profits. While the IRS has special limits on what might trigger an audit on religious organizations, one trigger is via excess benefit transaction with a disqualified person (see point 2). As a not for profit, the church is not to provide transactions that favor members, especially in regards to goods, services, compensations or facilities. What are a few examples of an excess benefit transaction taking place? If a trustee owns a business that provides goods and services desired by the congregation, they must be excused from discussion around contracted services and should engage via a wider bidding process. Above-budget giving should be labeled for a wider need shared by the organization/community, not specific to an individual or family (i.e. John Smith Mission Trip or Jane Doe's Health Fund). A pastor or staff member should not receive any benefits from the general benefits fund, but rather staff support should be through normal compensation channels.

In short, a religious non-profit exists to benefit the community and the full membership of the group and should not favor any individual or family with its dealings. For more information, visit irs.gov and search for "Self-Dealing" and/or "Charities and Nonprofits."

This information in this article is not to be considered professional legal or tax advice, but rather observations that might help individuals and congregation identify resources. *by Tyler Hartford*

If someone you know is experiencing a pastoral ministry call, let us know & visit evananetwork.org/job-openings/ in 2022.