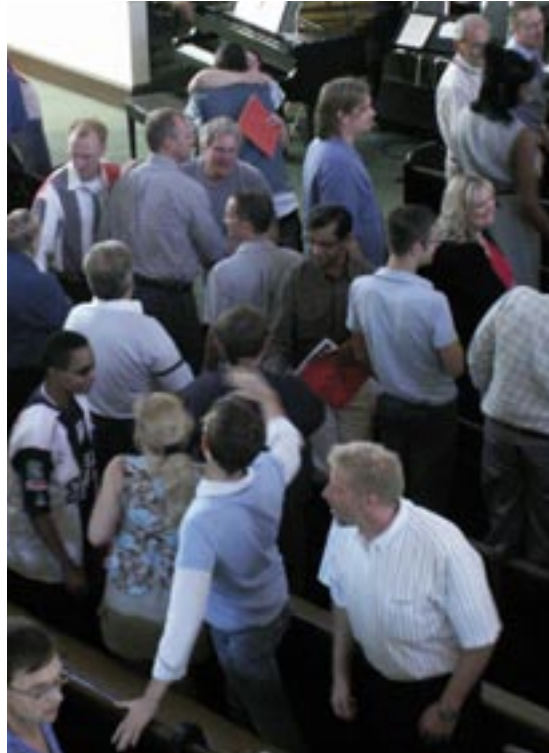


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*I will bless you, and make your name great,
so that you will be a blessing.*

Genesis 12:2



Faith Stories
by the people of

ALL GOD'S CHILDREN

A METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH



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All God's Children MCC
is called by Christ to be:

A radically inclusive community of faith

Healed by God's unrelenting grace

Sent in love to share our gifts with the world

Dear friend,

In your hands are a few of the many wonderful stories and experiences that are the essence of All God's Children MCC. We hope these stories will inspire you, cause you to think and hopefully encourage you in your own faith journey. The stories in this volume give you a taste of who the people of All God's Children are and how the presence of God's Spirit has changed our lives.

Please feel free to use this booklet as a daily devotional, an insightful look into the lives of some of our people or as a way to ponder your own experiences with the divine. We hope this booklet blesses you as much as we feel blessed in sharing our stories.

I want to thank those who contributed to this booklet. Each of them shared a little bit of their private insights and journey. Each is also living out our theme of understanding that the blessings of their lives are a way to bless our world.

We invite you to become part of the on-going story that is All God's Children MCC. We would love to hear what God is doing in your life and how that is helping you to grow in faith.

Blessings!

Rev. Paul Eknes-Tucker, **Pastor**

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“In This Very Room.....”

Dana Badgerow

My absolute all-time favorite inspirational music is the song by Ron Harris entitled “*In This Very Room.*” Often sung at weddings, and set to an uplifting tune, it was actually written in a lonely hotel room where the composer, who was traveling on business, was looking for comfort as he missed his family.

The words are simple:

*In this very room there's quite enough love for one like me
And in this very room there's quite enough joy for one like me,
And there's quite enough hope and quite enough power to
chase away any gloom
For Jesus, Lord Jesus...is in this very room.*

The second and third verses repeat this simple mantra acknowledging that there's quite enough love, joy, hope and power for all of us, and for all the world...in this very room. What a comfort to hold close the thought that in whatever room, or predicament, or challenge, or lonely moment, or deep depression, or aloneness, Lord Jesus is in the room with us – ensuring that we are surrounded and infused by all of the Lord's love and care. Enfolded in the comforting arms of Lord Jesus, I know that I am never alone – and I am at all times and at all places – in this very room – empowered to express love, joy, hope and even power!

My Faith Story

Donald L. Jones

Every so often I sit down in a quiet place and take an inventory of my life; where I am and where I want to be. One thing was missing in my life – my religious needs were not being met. This being the case, it was a fairly easy decision to make a change, since I had already visited AGC on a number of occasions. This was where I should be.

Right after the decision, a friend invited me to a service. I accepted the invitation without hesitation and attended the service with him. Since then I joined the church and almost immediately attended every service. It has been an absolute pleasure to hear the Rev. Eknes-Tucker present his fresh and up-to-date sermons. Rev. Provis also provided the same quality in her own style making our services exceptional.

In summation, I have found what I was missing in my life – a wonderful place to worship and learn more about God's Word. I strongly believe it allows me to be a better, more caring individual.



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It Is Well With My Soul

James Dahlen

Ever since I first started attending AGC, I felt an overwhelming sense of it being a good fit for me. Honestly, prior to that day, I hadn't thought much about my faith in many, many years. As I got more comfortable at AGC and got to know more people, the Spirit seemed to move me at many services, especially during the communion songs. I remember tearing up the first time I was able to sing out *"my sin, not the part but the whole, is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more"*.

I think of this hymn often and even repeat it quietly to myself in those times when life seems to deal me a bad hand or if I have just had a rough day. If you always remember the words of this hymn, everything always seems to be put into perspective *"Whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say, IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL!"*

Since then, of course, I have pursued leadership roles at AGC, expanded my involvement to the Praise Team. I get more fulfilling joy out of belonging to this church than any in my lifetime. I have moved along in my faith journey and made many close friends – all the result of belonging to something that is bigger than myself. AGC helped me realize that I was missing something I hadn't even imagined before walking in those doors and I am eternally grateful for the experience.

My Faith Story

Nicky Simon

“Go confidently in the direction of your dreams! Live the life you’ve imagined.” – Henry David Thoreau

All God’s Children is not just the place I come to pray and serve my God. It is the place where my cup becomes filled with confidence, love, honor, respect, pride, hope, passion, and faith. It provides me with enough of the Spirit so I am armed to face all of the challenges that come my way. In many ways, AGC is my place to re-arm myself to face the challenges in society.

I did not come to All God’s Children from an area of hurt. I was not pushed out by a previous church and was not abused by hate from family or friends. I was drawn to All God’s Children because I wanted a place to meet people who were GLBTQ and Christian. I wanted to meet people with values and who respected each other. The thing I have come to love most about AGC is the people – my chosen family. I support the ***Blessed and Blessing Others*** appeal because I want future generations to walk in our front doors and feel at home at All God’s Children. I want to help make it possible to live the life that I have imagined for All God’s Children.

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My Faith Story

Scott Ronald Smith

Six months ago I woke up. I was an addict for 30 of my 38 years alive. I am a survivor of an abusive childhood and an abusive relationship. Most of my life was spent wandering through life and using drugs to cover my pain... until one day in October 2006, I woke up.

I moved to Las Vegas, Nevada to escape my wreckage of a life in Minneapolis. To no avail; I made a mess of myself for the year I was there. At my rock bottom I decided enough was enough. I prayed to a Buddhist statue to get me through the next few days. I got on a bus for Minneapolis and never looked back. On that ride my resolve wavered and at that moment a woman reading the Bible decided to see where I was going and why. She helped me get through the trip without asking for anything. I was on my way to rehab. I went to Pride Institute and signed up for church one day. In church I prayed for the first time in my life. I asked God to take away my desire to use drugs during Communion and I broke down.

Back at rehab I went through what seemed like an emotional breakdown. Every emotion I've known – happiness, sadness, anger, fear – all in a matter of minutes. It felt like an exorcism. My blood pressure was horrible and I couldn't eat. They wanted to hospitalize me, but I refused to go. I knew inside what was

happening to me so I laid down for a nap against doctor's orders.

After a good five-hour nap, I woke up. The most amazing thing had happened. I felt better than I've ever felt in my life. My blood pressure was better than it ever had been in my life. And one more thing happened – I had no desire to use drugs in any form. That was six months ago and to this day I have no cravings or desire to use. I didn't need medication for this. God provided.

Today my body is still healing from 30 years of damage. I did not know at the time but if I hadn't stopped I would have been dead in December 2006. I am grateful to All God's Children MCC for helping me find faith and strength in God. Without either I would not have been alive to share this story. Thank You.

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My Faith Story

Steve Robertson

Luke 24:13-24

We have recently celebrated Easter. I love this day, not so much because the resurrection is central to our faith as Christians, but there is so much to learn about life when reading the Easter stories. Take for instance the story of Easter Evening. The scene recorded in Luke 24:13-24 fascinates me. In this story we have two sincere disciples walking along the dusty road to Emmaus telling how horrible it is that Jesus, whom they had placed all their hopes with, has died and is buried. God, in disguise, listens patiently, his wounded hands covered by his robe. He must have been touched at the faithfulness of this pair. Yet he also must have been tremendously frustrated. He had just died and risen from the dead to provide these same two disciples the promise of heaven...and these two were worried about the political situation of Israel. Sounds all too familiar, doesn't it?

*"But we **had hoped** that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel."*

*But we **had hoped**...How often have you heard a phrase like that?*

*"We **were hoping** the doctor would give us different news."*

*"I **had hoped** to get a new job quickly."*

*"We **had hoped** the surgery would get the entire tumor."*

*"We **had hoped** our pastor would have stayed longer."*

Words painted with disappointment. What we wanted didn't

come. What came, we didn't want. The result – shattered hopes, shattered dreams.

Like the disciples, we too often walk the road to Emmaus dragging our sandals in the dust, wondering what we did to deserve the situation we're in. How often have we said: *"What kind of God would let me down like this?"* I know I have been guilty of this all too often.

You see, the problem with our two heavy-hearted friends was not a lack of faith, but a lack of vision. Their petitions were limited to what they could imagine and see right now. Our problem is not so much that God doesn't give us what we hope for as it is that we don't know the right thing for which to hope. (You may want to read that sentence again.) Hope is not what you expect; it is what you would never dream. It is a wild, improbable tale with a pinch-me-I'm-dreaming ending. Like our Scriptures remind us in the Book of Hebrews: It's Abraham adjusting his bifocals so he can see not his grandson, but his son. It's Moses standing in the Promised Land not with Aaron or Miriam at his side, but with Elijah and the transfigured Christ. And it is the two Emmaus-bound pilgrims reaching out to take a piece of bread only to see that the hands from which it is offered are pierced. Will God do any less with you or me?

Reading the Easter stories all over again help me remember who I am, and to whom I belong. God will never fail me...nor will God fail you. Keep hope alive!

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My Faith Story

Roger Riege

Acts 9:1-9, Psalm 146, John 9:25

After my partner of 37 ½ years died in January 2002, I began experiencing vision problems. As an artist, that terrified me because 1/3 of my vision in my right eye was gone – a black hole. Later, my left eye would become totally blind. I remembered Acts 9:1-9 (Saul's journey to becoming Paul and accepting Jesus as Lord). I was already feeling adrift in a vast, lonely sea without my Charlie; it now appeared that blindness was my destiny. While Charlie and I believed in God and Jesus, we were not church goers. His Catholic church and my Methodist church both had a policy of non-inclusiveness for gay men and gay couples.

When I started attending All God's Children MCC, I found some new friends, peace and healing. I joined that September and chose to be part of the Healing and Wholeness Team. I've always believed that in helping others heal, the giver is also blessed with healing.

Over the next two years, God helped me through five eye surgeries, working through two of the best retinal surgeons in this area. My team member's prayers, encouragement and love made it possible to endure three vitrectomies (surgeries where the patient must be face down for 24 hours a day for eight days). God's love healed me so that I now have 20/20 vision in my right

eye and 20/25 in my left. I love to see and read Psalm 146. Praise the Lord! God is Love!

My prayer is this poem I wrote for Charlie:

*The gift of love once seen in eyes,
Was shared with others' lives...
For only love redeems the soul...
Only love makes us whole, for it
Never lies... remember
Now and always,
It is love that never dies.*

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My Faith Story

Tim Schram

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

This has always been one of my favorite scriptures. From an early age, this passage has helped me understand and cope with the process of life. It has also shaped me and made me who I am today.

For me, growing up was the time for hate, and adversity always makes us stronger. I also know that God and my parents have always loved me. Now is the time for love and acceptance.

The Open Door

Daniel Pierre

When I was in my early 20s, during the 1970s, I was very closeted even though these were the years just after Stonewall... being out still involved considerable risk for most people. I did all the sneaking around, the covering of my tracks, making up convincing stories to explain my presence or my absence. I had a good relationship with God but I was very afraid of getting caught and exposed... so I accepted life as it was.

Then in February of 1974 I was home on a Sunday afternoon watching TV – it was either the *David Frost* or *Dick Cavett Show* and the guest was Troy Perry. I was amazed at this man – a clergyman – talking about being gay and being Christian. For the first time in a long time – maybe the first time ever – my fear left me (or at least my courage was competing with my fear for dominance), and I thought if this man isn't afraid to come on TV and talk openly like this, then maybe there's something I can do. It was shortly after that I first walked in the doors of MCC. The rest, as they say, is history!

Thank God!

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