



# LUMUNOS

FAITH & LIGHT FOR THE JOURNEY

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Doug Wysocky-Johnson

## Gathering On Day 1

If you celebrate Christmas, you may soon pull a nativity scene out of your attic. Even if the manger scene is not an important part of your holiday celebration, no doubt you will pass one driving along the road somewhere. And unless it happens to be a really low-budget version, you will see a crowd gathered: Jesus, Mary, and Joseph of course, but also others. There will be blue-collar shepherds, well dressed one percenters from the east, locals and out of towners. Who knows how it really happened? But according to the story we tell, there was quite a crowd in that stable.

Even on the first day of his life, Jesus was a gatherer of people. In later years, he pulled together a leadership team to travel with him. In a very patriarchal society, he invited women to join him. He attracted people of influence and those on the margins. I guess it shouldn't surprise us that even at his birth, he gathered a diverse crowd.

## What's In A Name?

*"Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."*

If you grew up in a church or attend one now, no doubt you have heard that verse. My guess is that Jesus the Gatherer cringes at the way this popular verse is (mis)used—the idea being that what

# What's in a Name?

makes a gathering 'Christian' is whether Jesus' name is mentioned. Functionally, this is taken to mean that we better work Jesus' name into the conversation or opening prayer. That then will ensure that the Spirit's presence will be among us.

But I believe this passage means something different. The biblical concept of a name didn't mean just saying it. In fact, at least when it came to God's name, there were times it was considered so holy, so sacred that it was not to be spoken at all. In ancient times, a name meant the actual deep identity and presence of the other. So to gather in Jesus' name means to gather in the essence or the way of Jesus. It means to gather in the spirit of Jesus. It short, it means to interact with others the way Jesus interacted with others. That is what makes a gathering spiritual, not simply saying a name.

## When Lumunos Gathers

This is as good an explanation as I can offer for why Lumunos gatherings work. It doesn't matter if we are on a church retreat (where we say the name of Jesus) or the conference room of a secular hospital (where we don't). When we lead a group conversation in a way that (imperfectly) mirrors how Jesus gathered with people, then good and spiritual things happen regardless of where we are or what

names we use. People speak truthfully about their fears. They experience the liberation of saying something hard or even shameful and realize that they aren't judged. Vulnerability is the norm, not the exception. The laughter comes from a deep place inside. There is a kind of freedom, hope, and something beyond ourselves in the room. I see it over and over; it is one of the things that makes my job so meaningful.

At Lumunos, we don't really care what the room looks like—church basement, corporate conference room, individual home, or Zoom video conferencing are all fine with us. We would facilitate a conversation in a stable if invited. Depending on who we are with, we are comfortable praying or not; using a biblical story or not; singing or not.

What we do pay a lot of attention to is how we gather. On that there is no compromise and great consistency. There are a lot of good models out there, and Jesus' example is as good a place as we know to start.

And however you choose to gather for the holidays, the Board and staff of Lumunos wish you the very best in this sacred season.

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## Changing Traditions

*Edited by  
Becca Perry-Hill*

**T**his year, through our newsletters, retreats, and LumZoom calls, Lumunos has focused on the topic of Change and Transition. In this issue of the newsletter, we're looking specifically at how our holiday traditions change throughout our lives. How do we gather with friends, families, and communities and how has that changed? What do we value most during the holidays and how has that changed? What was meaningful then and what is meaningful now?

Although I did not grow up in a particularly religious household, Christmas has always been very meaningful to me. What I valued most was the opportunity to be with my family in a way that felt different from ordinary life. Both of my parents worked long hours and my brother was busy being nine years older than me, so it was very special to be able to spend an entire day at home with them. Our Christmas magic started on Christmas Eve night with the annual viewing of *A Christmas Story* ("You'll shoot your eye out!"). On Christmas Day, the homemade meals and deserts were delicious; the decorations,

music, and smells were magical; the thoughtful presents made me feel loved and seen; and the afternoon walks as a family brought connection. As an adult, it's hard to reproduce those same magical feelings I experienced as a kid, but I still find meaning and connection in the gathering. We still make wonderful meals, we still take time out for each other, we still listen to the same music, and we still try to give presents thoughtfully. As my three-year old daughter becomes more aware of the holidays, we will be figuring out ways to make her traditions feel magical as well.

In our Voices newsletter series, we are aiming to bring you real stories from a variety of people. It is through our stories that we connect and relate. While our differences are interesting and meaningful, our shared experiences build connection. Regardless of your experience, we hope that you enjoy these stories about changing holiday traditions.

—Becca Perry-Hill

*Continued on page 4*



### Elaine, 65, from Warren, NJ:

The holiday celebrations of my youth were spent surrounded by a large family, bountiful tables of celebratory food, warm and welcoming aromas, and decorations without limitations. The anticipation of the special day knew no boundaries.

From the first clumsily glued pipe cleaner decor of a young child to the lavish professionally created arrangements, the home of my childhood glittered during the holidays. It was magical! I was not aware of the many hours it took by my parents to create such magic. Until I was older, I did not realize long days, sleepless nights, the mechanical requirements, and the constant shuffling and reshuffling of hidden holiday treasures were a piece of this magical puzzle.

Aromatherapy is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as: the use of aroma to enhance a feeling of well-being. Little did I know that word and its definition as a child waking on Christmas morning enjoying the aroma of fresh pine from the tree. I can close my eyes now, inhale deeply, and be transported back in time to that moment. The anticipation was spectacular! As the day continued the freshly cooked dinner and baked desserts added to the scents in the house.

As I moved on to my adult home, I took pleasure in creating my own family magic. There were decorations happily crafted by little hands, lovingly displayed, still cherished! The professional creations were now my own. Inspired by the beauty of my youth I had pursued a profession in the horticultural design industry. Not only did I create magic for my family but for others as well! I now experienced my own lack of sleep and shuffling and reshuffling of hidden treasures. Holiday fatigue disappears quickly with one look into a loved one's eyes as the magic is experienced.

As I, my loved ones, my cherished friends have marked the passage of time the magic has changed a bit. Perhaps the decorations have become fewer and the style has changed, fewer people gather, the twinkle in an eye is now a softer calmer recognition of love and friendship, time spent together, conversations. The magic is different but no less. In my heart magic exists where I feel loved, safe, anticipate endless possibilities, express love.

My greatest wish, a dream which your heart makes, is that I have passed these warm magical feelings on to those whose lives in which I have shared, those I have loved and been loved by, those whose paths I have crossed. Traditions are fluid, magic is fluid. I look for magic in each day, if only for a fleeting moment, for as holidays come and go, traditions are cherished and evolve, magic in my heart lasts forever.

***“My greatest wish, a dream which your heart makes, is that I have passed these warm magical feelings on to those whose lives in which I have shared, those I have loved and been loved by, those whose paths I have crossed.”***

—Elaine

### Sam, 34, from Rochester, NY:

Every year, a few days before Christmas, my wife and I pack the car and drive west, back to South Bend, Indiana, where I grew up and my father and stepmother still live. Sometimes we meet up with my brother and sister and their partners and drive together—we all live on the east coast, and Christmas is the one time of year when we all go home.

When I was young, Christmas meant Mass on Christmas Eve. It meant running down the stairs before dawn on Christmas morning. It meant my mother's braised beef, a dish I knew only as “beef cooked all day.” A lot has changed since then. We tend to skip Mass now; my siblings and I aren't religious, and some of our partners didn't grow up Christian. We sleep in, a rare luxury. And Mom passed away almost two decades ago. New traditions have gradually replaced the old: now we make margaritas, not hot chocolate, on Christmas Eve, all of us—parents, siblings, step-siblings, partners—gathered in the kitchen.

Christmas means something different now that we have to travel to go home. It has the feel of a reunion, the joy of being with those you love most, the thrill of watching your family change and grow year by year. Over the last few years, the small rituals of family Christmas have come to mean more to my wife and me than I thought they could. My wife went through a series of miscarriages, and our trips to South Bend in those years were islands of comfort amid grief and loneliness. I don't know if you can get through life's most difficult moments without family.

And there is nothing like sharing life's best moments with family. Last Christmas, we drove out to South Bend with our first child, all of two months old, and watched as her stocking was hung on the mantel. A first Christmas, a new tradition: our family is changing, but home is still home. It's something spiritual, a sense of belonging and togetherness that our understated rituals bring to life and hold in memory.

### Tatiana, 41, from San Diego, CA:

By the time I got to college, my parents were over the holiday rigamarole. It was a pragmatic decision eventually reached by years of doing less than the year before. First, putting up the lights on the house stopped. Then, the wreath on the fireplace. Then the tree. My brother and

I learned to stop asking what we were doing for Thanksgiving or Christmas because it was apparent — nothing. We found it pathetic at first, but that later changed.

No matter how tragic your holidays seem, problems are only as big as your perspective. What started out as a tragic turn of events for my brother and me wound up getting recontextualized as an opportunity. Suddenly, we felt liberated. I no longer have to deal with my aunts' constant and unending criticism? Great. We no longer have to drive two hours away? Clutch. No more kids table? Sign us up!

***“Last Christmas, we drove out to South Bend with our first child, all of two months old, and watched as her stocking was hung on the mantel. A first Christmas, a new tradition: our family is changing, but home is still home.”***

—Sam



Since that time, I have created and recreated a variety of different holiday traditions. This is largely because my parents and grandparents have died. Sometimes the new traditions stick, sometimes they don't. The beauty of them is that I no longer feel, "It has to be this way in order for it to be good!" The goodness of my life is not contingent on things remaining the same. It is contingent on my attitude and the persistence of my hope. There is one constant in life — change. Honor the past for how it served you, but don't let it ruin your present. Here are a few of the traditions I have developed in the past 10–15 years:

My dad died two weeks before Christmas in 2008. That Christmas eve, I sat in a recovery meeting crying for two hours. A Jewish friend asked if I wanted to get Chinese food with him. I said yes. For the next four years, my Christian mom and I adopted the Jewish tradition of Chinese food on Christmas. It was nice to have somewhere to go.

I had friends who, feeling sorry for me, invited me over to their house every year. I was regularly adopted as the holiday refugee by a wealthy college friend's family in La Jolla. I was in awe of their fancy house, the fact that my friend had four siblings and the raucous environment it created. They were in awe of my piano playing skills as they had a baby grand that just sat around collecting dust. It was so fun to rent a big family and experience all of the commotion.

Merry Thriftmas. I hate the consumerism of Christmas. I hate the malls. I hate the need to give gifts. I hate the fact that every religious holiday gets side-railed by marketers. I wanted to develop a friends-related holiday party that was sustainable and fun and thus was born, Merry Thriftmas. This gift exchange party involves 20–30 friends and the requirement to buy a thrift store gift worth \$10–15. The party involves a potluck, so everyone pulls their own weight. When the gift exchange occurs, it happens along the White Elephant "steal, steal, dead" principle. Some people got amazing vintage T-shirts or a telescope, others got a horrible statue of a wonky 49er mining gold. The gift exchange creates big laughs and is so much fun for everyone.

It would be very easy for someone like me to be an "I hate the holidays" kind of person. My dad died December 13th, 2008 the day after his birthday and two days after my parents' wedding anniversary. My mom died four years later. My dad's family decided to stop talking to us after he died. The rest of my family lives in Brazil. We all have those "things" — those narratives that tell us that our holidays are no longer good enough. Guess what though, they are.

### **Hannah, 32 from Ashfield, MA:**

I grew up going to church and synagogue for the holidays since my mother was raised Protestant and my father Jewish. My grandfather was a minister so we attended church when he gave sermons, which if I were to be present for today, I'm sure I would adore, but when I was a child, I couldn't wait to run outside and

leave those stiff pews behind. My father's mother was the first and only female President of the Palm Beach synagogue in Florida, thus spiritual devotion runs deep in my bones.

At the age of nine, I decided to have a Bat-Mitzvah after attending my cousin's ceremony in which she was adorned with gifts and a party surrounded by all of her beloveds. I remember craving community and a place to sing together so I insisted my family join the synagogue. We attended weekly services on Sabbath and I went to Hebrew School a few days a week.

When my maternal Grandfather learned I chose to walk the path of Judaism, rather than Protestantism, he did not hesitate to give me his blessing. As long as I chose a path of God, he was happy for me. He even gave a speech during the ceremony, which I can't imagine happening earlier in time given how controversial my parents intermarriage was in the 70s.

After my Bat-Mitzvah, I slowly stopped attending services.

Not for a lack of faith, but probably because my school and social life were incredibly demanding as I prepared for high school.

What I have faith in now is the Great Mystery in each moment. The natural world is my sanctuary. I go to the forests to pray. I greet the sun each day and honor the four directions and all the elements which give me life. I sit in silence and listen to the birds. I empty the chatter of my mind into the Earth and breathe in serenity from the Sky so I may walk in peace.

I am grateful for my two religious upbringings, but even more grateful that my parents never pushed either of them onto me. I always had the freedom to follow whichever path I felt most connected to at the time.

I am a deeply spiritual person without a designated religion. As long as I place my heart into the hands of the ever-flowing love that surrounds all, then I am home. Or, as my Grandparents would say, into the hands of God. The word, "God" has many meanings to me: Love, Faith, Pachamama, Mystery, Spirit, Oneness, Divine. God is any representation that I feel connected to which invites me to rest in the Mystery of not knowing.

I write this on the day after Yom Kippur, a day of atonement and looking back on the past year to reflect on what we would like to do differently. I had invitations from friends and family to attend services at synagogue and even in churches that hosted Kol Nidre, a singing circle to begin the holiday. Instead of attending services, I chose to honor the holiday by writing letters of forgiveness to friends I felt I'd been hurt by. On the cooler nights, I lit a fire at home and burned letters, agreements and contracts I'd made consciously or unconsciously that were no longer serving my heart. As I

watch the wind blow through the bright orange leaves of autumn outside my window, I say prayers to call in what I wish to see in the next year. May these prayers of courage, love, strength, healing and justice be carried by the wind to all those who are listening.

Aho. Amen. Shalom.

***"I am a deeply spiritual person without a designated religion. As long as I place my heart into the hands of the ever-flowing love that surrounds all, then I am home. Or, as my Grandparents would say, into the hands of God."***

—Hannah

***"Sometimes the new traditions stick, sometimes they don't."***

—Tatiana



# Reflections During Advent: Advent Psalms

By Angier Brock

## ADVENT WEEK I

*A Psalm for the Journey*

1 December 2019

**Psalm 122:1.** I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.”

“I was glad,” the psalmist exclaimed, and several thousand years later the words remain fresh and dynamic. I love this opening verse of Psalm 122 for its exuberance. Most biblical scholars believe the psalm was written for a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. How eager the speaker seems to make that journey, how delighted to hear that the time to begin it has drawn near.

The first week of Advent invites us on a different kind of journey, an inward one that will take us through the weeks leading to the celebration of the birth of Jesus. In an ideal world, perhaps we would set out gladly, like the psalmist of long ago. Do we? Well—maybe.

And, also maybe not. Even for those who, like me, love Advent, conjuring up gladness can at times be difficult. In any given year, the season may seem different, changed in some way, lonelier or harder than previous years. We may be feeling the effects of a personal dislocation—illness, loss of a job, death of a loved one, aftermath of a divorce, complications of a move. Or we may be suffering from a more general malaise—outrage fatigue, environmental anxiety, worry about the economy, worry about what the future holds for us or the world’s children and the dispossessed. Frankly, it is in that generalized disquiet that I often find myself these days.

And so today the Advent journey begins, whether or not I am feeling glad. But then maybe the point of observing Advent isn’t to idealize the journey. Maybe the point is simply to set out with clarity and self-awareness about where I am, what I am happy and grateful for, what I worry about, what I feel sad or angry about, and what I long for.

If we read further into Psalm 122, we see that the writer doesn’t dwell in the feeling of gladness but uses it as a springboard, first into quiet reflection and then into prayer. That is a useful model. Taking a cue from the psalmist this week, first I simply allow myself to feel whatever it is I feel—often a mix of feelings. I notice any discontent as well as any gladness; I notice any sense of pain, weariness, grief, or despair as well as any sense of hope or joy. I notice what I long for. And then I pray, not only for my own journey but also for fellow pilgrims, those I already know as well as those I will meet along the way.

I hope you will take a few minutes sometime this week to read Psalm 122 in its entirety. If you keep an Advent journal, you may wish to jot down some of the feelings you experience during the week. Don’t try to change them; just acknowledge what they are. Once you are aware of them, take some time to pray.

## ADVENT II

*A Psalm for Our “Kings.”*

8 December 2019

**Psalm 72:1–2.** Give the King your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the King’s Son; that he may rule your people righteously and the poor with justice; that the mountains may bring prosperity to the people, and the little hills bring righteousness.

Often categorized as a “royal psalm” because it mentions an earthly king and his heir, Psalm 72 is a prayer for those royal ones, a prayer that they will be instruments of God’s righteousness and justice so that even the land—the mountains and the little hills—can flourish and contribute to the prosperity of the people. Though we do not live in a monarchy, and though our history and civics classes teach us to value the separation between church and state, this psalm offers much to consider.



First, it offers an image of a government that is “godly”—that is, so grounded in justice, mercy, compassion, and fairness that everyone prospers. While I don’t expect to see any government perfectly measure up to that standard anytime soon, the ideal is nevertheless worth naming and striving for. Moreover, the psalmist’s hope for the king offers itself as a good model of a prayer for our current leaders—whether they be spiritual leaders or public officials; corporate officers or scientists; environmental advocates or teachers at all levels; or medical workers, law enforcement personnel, and any others charged with promoting and protecting the common good. This psalm reminds me that there is a relationship between faith and civics, and that even if I have little ability to influence the powers of this world, I can at the very least lift them into the light of God through my prayers.

Secondly, there is the matter of inner “kings”. Who or what rules me? What impulses work in me for good or for ill? Who guides my ambitions? What drives my decisions about how I use my time, energy, and attention? Who informs how I spend money? What guides my consumption of food, water, and material goods? Do I have inner kings worthy of my support? Do some need toppling? Are there inner kings for whom I am called to pray?

Then there is Jesus, “king of kings, yet born of Mary,” as we sing in one of my favorite hymns. We move closer each day to that king, the babe born in Bethlehem. What is my relationship to and with him? What power does he have in my life? He comes among us that we might prosper— not, I think, in the sense of worldly riches but in a more basic sense of having an inner ease, being secure in his righteousness no matter what other circumstances surround us. How do I respond?

When you can, take a few minutes this week to read through Psalm 72, verses 1–7 and 18–19. If you keep an Advent journal, you might want to jot down some of the “kings” in your life, whether they are inner or outer ones—and then pray that they too rule justly so that prosperity and righteousness might come to all God’s people.

## ADVENT III

### *Songs of Praise*

15 December 2019

**Psalm 146:5.** Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God.

**Luke 1:46b–47a.** “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.”

The third Sunday in Advent uses portions of Psalm 146— or, as an alternative, Mary’s song, the “Magnificat.” Some traditions call this day “Gaudete Sunday,” from the Latin word for “rejoice.” Other traditions refer to it as “Rose Sunday” and light the pink candle on the Advent wreath instead of a purple one. Based on the psalm and the Magnificat, we might also think of it as “Gratitude Sunday.” Both Psalm 146 and the Magnificat are vibrant readings that exult in significant reversals in peoples’ fortunes as a result of God’s action in their lives. Psalm 146 praises God’s promises—that the hungry will be fed, the blind will see, and the stranger will receive care. Similarly, Mary exults that “the Mighty One” has lifted up the “lowly” and “filled the hungry with good things.” She takes

particular delight in God’s action in her own life, noting that “from now on all generations will call me blessed.”

Often the weeks leading up to Christmas urge us to make wish lists of things we want. But what about what we already have? Our very lives, for example. How many small acts had to occur, how many “coincidences” had to happen, just to bring us into being? If my maternal grandfather had decided not to take a job in Kentucky, and if the U. S. Army had decided to station my father anywhere other than Ft. Knox, and if any number of subsequent serendipitous events had gone differently, my parents would not have met, and I would not be here. That seems amazing to me. Something fortuitous, something far beyond my understanding was at work long before I arrived. Praise God!

And hot running water. How many kings and queens of old, despite having huge castles, many servants, and near infinite riches, lived without a luxury I take for granted, the luxury of being able to take a hot shower on a cold winter morning? Praise God for running water, for electricians and plumbers, and for inventors of shower heads. Praise God also for food, friends, my dog Joey, birds, evergreen-scented candles, and Christmas carols. I admit that, now that I am in my seventies, some mornings I wake up feeling old and stiff and thinking, *Oh my God, this is the best I am ever going to feel.* But the fact that I do wake up, and that I can get up and get dressed and get arthritic joints moving and begin to feel just a little better—well, praise God! In so very many ways, I am blessed. This third week in Advent is a good week to remember God as the source of those blessings.

Take a few minutes to read either Psalm 146 or Luke 1:45b–55. If you’re keeping an Advent journal, make a list of things God has already done in your life. Perhaps you too will begin with the fact of your own birth as your own unique self. In what other ways, small and large, has God acted on your behalf through the years—all the way down to this present moment? What are your blessings? Once you’ve made your list, write your own song of praise.

## ADVENT IV

### *A Psalm of Lament*

22 December 2019

**Psalm 80:3 (repeated in verses 7 & 19):** Restore us, O Lord God of Hosts; show the light of your countenance and we shall be saved.

One of the things I love about the Psalms is their expression of a range of human emotions. Whether you’re mad, sad, glad, or afraid, there’s something in them for you. Sometimes people joke about our Virginia weather, saying that if you don’t like it, wait ten minutes and it will change. The same could be said of the Psalms. If you are not attuned to the feelings in any given psalm, keep reading. It won’t be too long before you find a match.

This week’s psalm flips the exultant, grateful mood of last week’s psalm on its head. Whereas Psalm 145 reveled in God’s giving of food to the hungry and lifting up of those who are bowed down, Psalm 80 laments the fact that it is the people of God themselves who have been brought low, fed with the bread of tears, scorned

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# Lumunos: Where Conversations are Sacred

*Through the years, Faith at Work/Lumunos has remained vibrant in an ever-changing world because of the community of people who have been part of our work. We have been blessed by these “Lumunaries”. Lumunaries are people who embody the values of Lumunos – people who are using their gifts and living their call; people who value authentic relationships and continue to grow spiritually. Lumunaries are also people who have supported Lumunos and advanced our mission in one way or the other. In this issue, we’re featuring Dan Davis and Suzanne Schmidt who graciously helped to plan and host a Lumunos Crossing the River Retreat and house party for the friends of Lumunos on November 17th (for future events check out [www.lumunos.org/events](http://www.lumunos.org/events)).*

**D**an Davis and Suzanne Schmidt live in a suburb of Washington, D.C. They are both active in their home congregation, United Church of Christ of Seneca Valley in Germantown, MD. It’s where they met and the church from which Suzanne was ordained. Over the years, Dan has been involved in social justice efforts and served on the church council. Suzanne has chaired the council, preached, and provided pastoral care while the pastor was away. They are currently spearheading an effort to add a playground to the church property. Dan also serves on the Lumunos board and Suzanne is a former Lumunos board and staff member.

Before “retirement” from the Food and Drug Administration, Dan advocated for women’s reproductive health and rights through his career in Obstetrics and Gynecology. He is still consulting on these health issues along with enjoying sports (watching and playing), cultural events, listening to books, crossword puzzles, and collecting Scotch in his free time. Suzanne’s passions are teaching, preaching, hospitality, and reaching out to others. She enjoys facilitating sessions related to The Soul of Aging, and recently led two online sessions on the topic of Aging Well for Lumunos. She also likes to swim, entertain, attend cultural events with Dan, and use her love of fashion creatively. In fact, one year she and a friend did cosmetic makeovers for the women at the homeless shelter, which everyone loved. Together, they love spending a portion of each summer at the Chautauqua Institution in New York where they have an opportunity to hear excellent preachers (like Otis Moss III) and excellent speakers (like Ken Burns). They also enjoy connecting with and visiting their three adult children and three grandchildren who live in Madison, WI; Steamboat Springs, CO; and Cape Cod, MA.

*In October, we asked Dan and Suzanne to tell us about their experiences with Lumunos and what impact it has had on their lives. Here they are in their own words:*



Dan Davis and “Princess” Suzanne Schmidt in September at Suzanne’s 70th birthday party

**Suzanne:** I came to Faith at Work as the result of calling the office to replace a lost book, which I borrowed from my pastor. Marjory Zoet Bankson [Executive Director at the time] answered the phone and invited me to a NewGen event in 1994. Soon I became a FAW board member and later worked for FAW. I grew up going to and working at Camp Lutherlyn in Prospect, PA. When I came to my first FAW event, it felt like I had found camp for big kids.

**Dan:** I went to a FAW board meeting as a guest with Suzanne and soon joined the Guatemala pilgrimage for five years. I joined the Lumunos board in 2009 and have continued to serve on the board and the Stewardship Mission Committee for the past 11 years. Over the years, I have enjoyed the bocce event in Chicago. Suzanne and I are looking forward to hosting the upcoming mini-retreat for the Washington, D.C. metro area (to be held at our local church) and a house party for friends of Lumunos.

**Suzanne:** Dan and I joke that Lumunos gets two for the price of one with us because he always seeks my input on marketing and program ideas which the board is considering. While I served as a local church minister, I was not directly involved with Lumunos. Now that I have retired from local church ministry (but not from serving God’s people), I have become active in Lumunos again. This fall I wrote an article for Lumunos’s monthly email about Aging Well and facilitated two LumZoom calls on the same topic.



***Did Lumunos help shape your sense of “calling”? Did it influence the work or service you’ve done through the years?***

**Suzanne:** I see FAW as having a direct impact on my decision to pick up a latent call to attend seminary at age 58. What I learned about call and small groups through Lumunos has served me well and continues to do so. In fact, I recently applied for a grant to study how clergy women claim new calls upon retirement.

**Dan:** When I was in college, I went to Nigeria on an Operation Crossroads Africa summer mission trip. That left an impression on me and I had a desire to do it again. FAW’s pilgrimage to Guatemala allowed me to reclaim a call from many years ago to partner with people in underdeveloped countries. I especially was drawn to the concept of reverse mission in that I ministered to the Guatemalan people and they ministered to me.

***Has Lumunos influenced your life in other ways?***

**Suzanne:** When I facilitate groups, I use the fundamentals of small group formation, which I learned years ago from Marjory Zoet Bankson, Nancy Boyle, and Doug Wysocky-Johnson. When I was teaching in graduate school, one of the students asked if I was connected with FAW. She said she thought so because of the way I facilitated learning.

**Dan:** Lumunos reminds me of the importance of sacred conversations and personal reflection, as well as the importance of deeply listening to one another.

**Suzanne:** I believe that FAW is directly responsible for my desire to deepen my faith and claim the title of the “Queen of Fun.” (See Princess photo of Dan and me at my 70th birthday celebration.)

**Dan:** We continue to support Lumunos because we believe in the mission. There are precious few places where conversations are sacred. Nobody does this better than Lumunos. We will continue to support Lumunos through legacy giving by remembering Lumunos in our wills.

***What are the most important lessons you’ve learned about living your life in a way that aligns with your sacred values?***

**Dan:** My mantra today is pretty much the same as it has been throughout my life: I have been given many advantages in life including an excellent education and a well-paying career. Because of my success in life, I seek out and enjoy finding ways to be generous to individuals, my church, Lumunos, and other organizations which reflect my values.

**Suzanne:** I too have been blessed to be a blessing. I believe that we are all God’s children. We are all connected, and as such we all have something to give and receive from one another. I believe strongly in celebrating life with others and shining the light of Christ in the dark places of life.

I take life and my faith seriously and myself lightly. I am reminded of the time I was serving as a chaplain intern at the local hospital. Two brothers told me, “You don’t look like a chaplain because chaplains are supposed to look somber and you don’t look somber.” I responded, “Well, I am the kind of chaplain who finds joy in living and celebrates resurrection.”

***Are there any bits of scripture, quotes, or other writings that help steer you through life?***

**Dan:** The hymn *You Have Come to the Seashore* inspires me. It reminds me that Jesus calls us to give up what we are doing to serve others in his name. This hymn also reminds me of our pilgrimages to Guatemala.

**Suzanne:** I love the Gospel stories about feeding—The Feeding of the Five Thousand and Jesus feeding the disciples after the resurrection when he tells Peter, “If you love me, feed my sheep.” That scripture gets me every time. It informed my community outreach work as a pastor when our church started a program to pack weekend food for local elementary students. Then we built a Little Free Library to house children’s books (to feed the mind). The idea of feeding sheep still informs my call today. Dan and I enjoy cooking for the women at the local homeless shelter and our friends. My parents did the same thing when they lived. Cesar Chavez said, “People who give you their food, give you their heart.”

In 2019, Lumunos expanded our offerings and helped more people to come together than ever before. We held 126 gatherings with over 900 people attending. That number includes weekend retreats, half day events, online LumZoom gatherings and workplace programs. ([Lumunoswellbeing.org](http://Lumunoswellbeing.org)) Our goal is to bring together even more people next year through new opportunities like the 6-session cohort program for any group.

In our busy yet disconnected world, gathering people is more challenging and more crucial than ever. Please consider a gift to Lumunos by responding to our appeal letter or going to the donate button at [Lumunos.org](http://Lumunos.org)





## Advent: Continued from page 7

by their neighbors, mocked by their enemies. Again and again, the psalmist repeats a plea: “Restore us, O Lord God of Hosts; show the light of your countenance and we shall be saved.”

Typically, the psalms of lament found in the Hebrew Bible fall into two categories, individual and communal. Probably most of us have individual grievances regarding things we wish God could, or would, restore—health, a job or relationship, the special glow of a Christmas past. We may feel all the more aggrieved if we have consumed too many carefully curated Facebook posts or overdosed on festive scenes in glossy magazines or taken certain advertisements too seriously. Of course, it is entirely appropriate to admit our private sadness and sense of loss to the God who created and understands us, and to ask for comfort and strength. Many psalms do just that. Our individual grievances, however, are not what Psalm 80 is about.

Psalm 80 is rather a communal lament that grieves the community’s loss—particularly the community’s loss of God’s favor and protection. “How long will you be angry with your peoples’ prayers?” it asks God. Three times it begs, “Restore us, O Lord God of Hosts; show the light of your countenance and we shall be saved.” Like Psalm 72, Psalm 80 invites us to consider biblical civics for, as the biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann writes, the function of a communal lament is to “permit us to remember that we are indeed public citizens and creatures [who] have an immediate, direct, and personal stake in public events.” Brueggemann argues that in order to understand and pray these psalms, we must “think through the public sense of loss and hurt and rage that we all have in common.”

To think through our common loss, hurt, and rage may seem an odd project for the Advent journey. Wouldn’t we rather focus on love, peace, good will? But to lament the threats to the things we most value as a community is the project to which Psalm 80 calls us. In these few remaining days before Christmas, spend a few minutes with Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19. What are the precious things in your community that are under threat? If you are keeping an Advent journal, make a list, and then write your own psalm of lament. Brueggemann again: “It is stunning to think that prayer of this kind might indeed be the point of entry into the larger world of faith, where the Lord of the nations governs.”<sup>1</sup> How might your lament be such a point of entry for you?

## CHRISTMAS EVE/DAY

*A Psalm of Joy*

24/25 December 2019

**Psalm 96:14.** Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea thunder and all that is in it; let the field be joyful and all that is therein.

Christmas! Today we celebrate a child born into a world that in many ways is not so different from ours, a world in which wars rage, droughts lead to famine, and corrupt rulers do all they can to cling to earthly power, even to the point of massacring children. But that is only part of the truth. The rest of it is that in the child born in Bethlehem—the child who will grow in wisdom and understanding and later be called the Christ—in that child, the Infinite Divine Creator God and the finite created human being meet.

Christians who read Psalm 96 today might be forgiven for believing that it celebrates that meeting, that birth at Bethlehem. But, according to Walter Brueggemann, even for the psalmist, who wrote centuries before the birth of Jesus, Psalm 96 is a psalm of joy. In Brueggemann’s words, it celebrates the new reality that “the future now belongs to God, not to the feeble idols who are in fact agents of chaos.”<sup>2</sup>

When you can, read Psalm 96. Listen to the invitation to sing a new song—an invitation issued to the whole earth, which of course includes you. Observe how the whole earth joins in—the sea and the field and all that are therein. Even the trees sing for joy. Wherever you are today, pause and look around you. Let yourself become a psalmist. Whom or what will you invite to sing a new song? Maybe your phone that connects you to friends or loved ones far away, or maybe the cards you’ve received or are still planning to send. If you’re in the kitchen, maybe the pots and pans. If you’re working, maybe the tools of your trade, whatever they are. If you’re in a hospital room or nursing home, maybe the wheelchairs or monitors, the nurses or other staff. If you’re traveling by air, maybe the TSA people or the flight crew or the landing gear. If you’re traveling on the highway, maybe the person keeping the gas station open, or maybe the tires of your car, humming over the asphalt as you move along.

If you’re keeping a journal, make a list of those people, those things. How might they declare God’s glory? What story might they tell of God’s salvation? Jot some of those things down, too. Then write your own new song.

Merry Christmas!

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**Angier Brock** is a former long-time Board member of Lumunos, songwriter for retreats, and women’s ministry leader. These days she is doing some freelance writing and editing, playing in a hand bell choir, being a Virginia Master Naturalist, and grandmothering.

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<sup>1</sup> From “The Message of the Psalms” by W. Brueggemann, 1984, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> From “The Message of the Psalms” by W. Brueggemann, 1984, p. 144.

## I Will Light Candles This Christmas

Candles of joy, despite all sadness,  
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch.  
Candles of courage for fears ever present,  
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,  
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,  
Candles of love to inspire all my living,  
Candles that will burn all the year long.

—Howard Thurman, *The Mood of Christmas*



## Upcoming Events



### **Monthly LumZoom Calls**

Check [www.lumunos.org](http://www.lumunos.org) for dates/times

### **Chicago Area Half-Day Retreat in Winnetka, IL**

January 18, 2020

### **LumZoom Series on the Mystics**

January 22 & 29; February 5 & 12, 2020

### **Vero Beach Men's Retreat in Vero Beach, FL**

February 6-5, 2020

### **Chicago Area Men's Retreat in Geneva Bay, WI**

March 13-15, 2020

### **Denver Area Women's Retreat in Estes Park, CO**

June 5-7, 2020

For questions about these or other future Lumunos events, please email [becca@lumunos.org](mailto:becca@lumunos.org).



## Please consider becoming a monthly donor.

When donations come in monthly, that helps us manage our day-to-day operations and cash flow. It's very easy to set-up - go to the "Donate Now" button on our website, or give us a call at 802.860.1936. Thank You!





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*In true community, we are windows constantly offering  
each other new views on the mystery of God's presence  
in our lives.*

— Henri Nouwen, *Making All Things News*