

FAITH MATTERS

Grief and loss: Shattering the myth of 'why'

By Rev. Nancy Raabe

We've all heard the five words at some point in our lives: "Everything happens for a reason."

An unexpected setback. A debilitating accident. A



Rev. Nancy Raabe

diagnosis you never thought you'd hear. An illness that wreaks havoc on your life. A sudden death. Dreams that die, hopes that are crushed, relationships that end. Then, those five words, words seemingly simple, uttered without thinking, yet words that can inflict a lifetime of emotional, psychological and spiritual harm: "Everything happens for a reason."

No. Things do not happen for a reason. Things just happen, and suddenly the whole world is changed as you are swamped by an ocean of grief.

We are not talking the cause, but the purpose. Usually causes can be identified. But there is no reason for, or purpose in, all those things that go wrong, big and little, and throw a wrench into the way you had expected your life to unfold.

I remember how this thought swept over me a few years ago as I watched in horror, via live camera, as Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in downtown Milwaukee was consumed by a monstrous fire that reduced the stunning wood-graced sanctuary and its grand historic organ to a heap of blackened rubble. This church, exquisitely built and lovingly cared for over the course of

139 years, was destroyed in half an hour.

The roof was under repair and a hot tool may have caused the fire. But why? Why this church, of all those in the world that were undergoing roof work? There is no reason to be found. I know an organ is technically not a living thing, but a photo posted later of the blasted-out case with a few sheared-off pipes hanging bizarrely in mid-air made me weep at this specter of death all over again.

Watch what you say in the wake of any crisis or disaster. When someone utters this insensitivity to those who have suffered catastrophic loss, "Everything happens for a reason," one of two things is taking place.

First and most likely, the speaker does not want to get involved in the messiness of the person's grief.

It's so much easier to dismiss it with this vague wave of the hand. However, we are not dealing with mere insensitivity. To dismiss a person's grief in this way amounts to an act of violence against their humanity. It denies them their right to be human.

Or second, the speaker who utters those five words actually believes that God inflicts pain on people for their own good. The idea is that they will grow through their suffering. This is a misreading of the verse from Romans 5, "Suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character..." But God does not want God's children to suffer. How could a loving God desire that? And as we heard at the contemplative service on September 28, "Love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." God does not engineer bad

things in our lives to cause us pain. There is no earthly or heavenly reason for bad things happen.

What we do know, though, is that God in Christ is there with us in the midst of our pain — Jesus, who knows human suffering so well, shouldering our loss as his own and carrying us in his arms to the cross, that place of death that is also the entryway into new life. This is the meaning of those great words from Paul in Romans 6:3-5, which are part of our liturgy of the Thanksgiving for Baptism:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in new-

ness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

But first we must go with Jesus to the cross. We must reside there, we must inhabit that place, we must drink in the landscape, we must feel the pain in the depths of our being. This grounds us in the reality of loss, allowing our very human experience of grief to unfold in its own way and on its own timeline. Only then when we have passed through that dark valley can God begin to heal our brokenness with the new life we are promised in Christ, life that is the very foundation of Christian hope. This is the source of our thanksgiving. This why we sing: "Thanks be to God!"

A blessed Thanksgiving to you all, in Christ's name.

Worship News and Notes

By MediaNews Group

Send items for Worship News to religion@thereporteronline.com. Address questions to Nancy March, editor, at nmarch@thereporteronline.com. Deadline is noon Thursday to appear in the Saturday Worship News and Notes.

Presentation of Our Lord Ukrainian Catholic Church has one more Sidewalk Ukrainian Food Sale date: Saturday, Nov. 12, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at 1564 Allentown Road, Lansdale. Stock up on delicious pierogi and kielbasa. Questions: 215-362-9599. Christmas food orders will be accepted November 1-20. Please call 215-362-9599 and leave a message specifying your order. You will receive a call back to confirm.

St. John's United Church of Christ will hold its annual Blessing of the Animals under the large trees near the labyrinth at 12:15 on Sunday, November 13. This event has been rescheduled due to inclement weather on November 6. All furry, feathery and scaly friends (along with their humans) are welcome. If your pet is too shy to attend, you may bring a photograph to share. The church is at 500 W. Main St., Lansdale. Call 215-855-5489 or visit www.st-johns-ucc.org

The Chancel Choir at St. John's United Church of Christ will sing "The Kingdom" by Andre Thomas at the 10:15 a.m. service on November 13. In addition, the United Ringers will play "Sing to the Lord of Harvest" by Sandra Eithun, and the Children's Choir will sing "Gaudemus Hodie" by Natalie Sleeth. Later the service is available on St. John's Facebook page, website and YouTube channel: youtube.com/stjohnsucciansdalepa. The

church is at 500 W. Main St., Lansdale. Call 215-855-5489 or visit www.st-johns-ucc.org

The Philadelphia Chapter of the American Guild of Organists presents Noon Organ Recitals at St. John's United Church of Christ every Tuesday in November. All are welcome to these free recitals. The church is at 500 W. Main St., Lansdale. Call 215-855-5489 or visit www.st-johns-ucc.org. Schedule is as follows: Nov. 15, Doppelflote: Vincent M. Ryan and Melissa Freilich (Advent Lutheran, Harleysville); Nov. 22, Michael Krentz (Christ Lutheran, Allentown); Nov. 29, Mina Choi (Doylestown Presbyterian, Doylestown).

St. Peter's Lutheran Church, 211 S. Main St., North Wales celebrates Sunday, Nov. 13, with a Communion service in the sanctuary at 8:30 and 10:30 a.m. (Note the time change to 10:30) The service will be live streamed at the 10:30 service for those unable to attend in person and can be accessed from our website www.stpetersnorthwales.org. SPARK (children's Sunday school) is at 10 a.m. Confirmation class is 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. St. Peter's Belles (handbells) will provide music at the 8:30 service.

Gwynedd Square Presbyterian Church PC (USA), 837 Sumneytown Pike, Lansdale: Join live in the sanctuary or for live online services via Zoom with an internet-enabled device or by telephone. Sunday Worship is at 10 a.m. and Early Worship is at 8:30 a.m. For web links or dial in numbers, visit www.gwyneddsquare.org. Weekly Bible Study meets at 10 a.m. in the pastor's study and on Zoom and will meet every Wednesday at this time. The Adult Forum meets every Monday at 7 p.m. on Zoom. The Forum will change to an Advent Series, "Finding Our

Place at the Manger," from the Thoughtful Christian and will meet Nov. 21, 28 and Dec. 12 and 19. The readings for these weeks can be obtained by contacting the same places for web links or dial in numbers for activities. Please send an email to office@gwyneddsquare.org or call the church office at 215-699-9159. The Divas Faith Based Reading Group will meet on Monday, Nov. 21, at 7 p.m. at Pizza Time Saloon. The book we are reading and discussing is "Ten Words to Live By" by Jen Wilkin. Please join for an interesting discussion. Betsy's Book Club will meet on Wednesday, Nov. 16, at 5:30 p.m. at Pizza Time Saloon. The books we will be discussing are "A Brilliant Night of Stars and Ice" by Rebecca Connolly and "The Lincoln Highway" by Amor Towles.

Faith Lutheran Church, 615 Cowpath Road, Montgomeryville, continues to worship in the sanctuary as well as on Zoom at 10:30 a.m. Sunday School is held Sundays from 9:45 to 10:25 a.m. for ages 3-11. Nursery will be provided for the 3- to 5-year-olds during the 10:30 a.m. service. All services will also be uploaded to Facebook. Find that at www.faithmontgomeryville.org and click on "Connect on Facebook." For the Zoom link or more information, please email faithmont@verizon.net

The Church of the Holy Spirit of Harleysville (Episcopal), 2871 Barndt Road at the corner of Sumneytown Pike, Upper Salford, holds Holy Communion services in-person at 8 and 10:15 a.m. on Sundays. The church also live-streams the 10:15 a.m. services on Sundays on the church website and Facebook page, Church of the Holy Spirit, Harleysville. Church school for preschool through adult classes begins at 9 a.m. Services are led by the Rev. Kathy Andonian, Rector. For

more information, call 215-234-8020 or visit the church webpage, www.churchoftheholyspirit.us.

Montco Bible Fellowship, 160 E. Main St., Lansdale: Join virtual services accessed via website or in-person each Sunday. Adult Sunday School begins at 9:30 a.m. and Worship services at 10 a.m., along with Children's Church at 10 a.m. On Wednesdays at 7:20 p.m., we hold virtual Bible Study. Call 215-855-0899 for the Bible Study Zoom link. Visit our new website at www.montcobf.org.

Indian Creek Mennonite Church, 647 Harleysville Pike, Telford, will conduct services as follows: Sunday school, 9 a.m.; worship service, 10:15 a.m.; October 30, Inspirational Song Service, 7:30 p.m. Revival meetings Nov. 7-13, 7:30 p.m. Speaker: Matthew Bennetch, Bethel. Thanksgiving Day service will be at 9:30 a.m. Questions? Call Kevin Moyer (215) 721-9127.

Grace Lutheran Church, 40 N. Main St., Hatfield with Pastor Nancy M. Raabe continues its fall worship schedule of Sunday services at 8 and 10:30 a.m. with Sunday School at 9:15 a.m. Heidelberg United Church of Christ, Hatfield, and Grace will once again join together for a traditional Thanksgiving Eve service at Grace, 40 N. Main St., on Wednesday, Nov. 23 at 7 p.m. Please plan to stay for refreshments and fellowship afterward in the atrium. Sunday worship at 10:30 is streamed

live under "Online Worship" at gracelutheranhatfield.org. For more information, call 215-855-4676.

Gwynedd Square Presbyterian Church Christmas Performance Opportunity for Volunteer Musicians: The church is hosting a Christmas concert on Sunday afternoon, Dec. 18, featuring the GSPC Chancel Choir and the GSPC Community Concert Band. The church is extending an invitation to community members to join the choir or band for this special and festive event. If you play an instrument or love to sing, you are welcome to participate in either musical ensemble. Choir rehearsals are on Sundays at noon and Concert Band rehearsals are on Sunday evenings at 7 p.m., in the church's sanctuary. If interested, please call the church office at 215-699-9159 or send an email to office@gwyneddsquare.org for additional details. Information about our programs, events and ministries can be found at GwyneddSquare.org.

Gwynedd Square Presbyterian Church is happy to announce that Advent Night is returning following the pandemic. It will be held on November 18 from 6 to 8 p.m. Please join us for a pizza dinner in the Fellowship Hall. Following that we will decorate the church for Christmas or participate in one of 4 activities to aid local organizations. Activities include (1) prepare and package meals for

Friends who provide meals for the frail and home bound in the 5-county area (2) prepare and package soup for Manna on Main Street (3) prepare and package snack bags to go with meals for Manna and (4) repackaging rice for Hope Prison Ministries. Children are welcome to participate in decorating and in the activities.

For over 50 years **Sanctuary United Methodist Church** in North Wales has held a biennial Christmas Bazaar. Proceeds from the bazaar have regularly raised over \$10,000 for local organizations. There will also be a silent auction in the Pet's Room and gingerbread houses will be on display during this special holiday shopping event. Brunch for a nominal fee will be served. Join us Saturday, Nov. 12 from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. For more information contact 215-699-9331.

Gwynedd Square Presbyterian Church has its Angel Tree with gifts for children and families in need. Deacons at church will be collecting unwrapped gifts for children and families served by Gemma Services, Hope Prison Ministries and Keystone Opportunity Center. Angels are available for selection on Sundays from 8-11 a.m. at the church. You may also participate by making a donation by sending a check payable to Gwynedd Square Presbyterian Church with Angel Tree on the memo line to Gwynedd Square Presbyterian Church, 837 Sumneytown Pike, Lansdale, PA 19446.

147th

FROM PAGE 1

Frederick, Upper Salford, Lower Salford and Franconia.

According to Montgomery County results, Scheuren won the majority of votes in all but Upper Pottsgrove, which Wisser won by 48 votes; Lower Frederick precinct 1, which Wisser one by 138 votes and four of six voting precincts in Lower Salford, a township which Scheuren nevertheless won by 19 votes.

In a statement posted Wednesday on her campaign Facebook page, Scheuren wrote "it is with immense gratitude and overwhelming appreciation that I extend my sincere thanks to the many people that helped make my victory in the 147th a reality. Whether we've known each other for years, or became brand new neighbors and friends throughout the campaign, your commitment to the cause and tireless efforts to help me get elected are what made this a team win. I am truly honored to have earned your vote and I look forward to the privilege of representing everyone in this amazing district."

On her campaign Face-

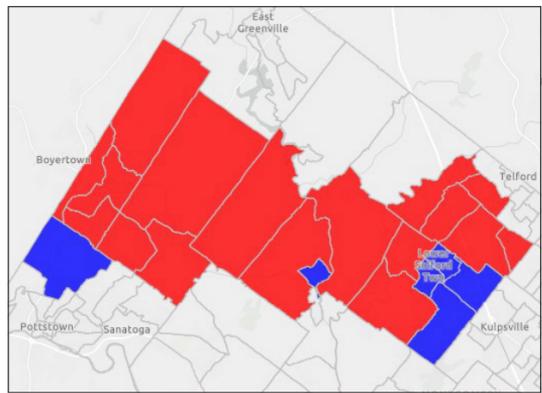


IMAGE BY MONTGOMERY COUNTY

A map of the 147th district showing precincts won by Donna Scheuren, shown in red, and those won by Alexandra Wisser, shown in blue.

book page, Wisser wrote, "Pennsylvania has a lot to be hopeful for today! I am so encouraged by the many Democrats who won their races in this unprecedented political time. The will of the people has been heard! Unofficial results show that the 147th district did not go our way, but I am so incredibly proud of our team and all that we have accomplished in this race. We have worked with tireless volunteers who we cannot thank enough for their dedication. Turnout was above average and our district continues to gain Democrat voters. We have great momentum in our communities and we will continue to work toward



Donna Scheuren

our ideals. And the ultimate thanks goes to you, the voters — thank you for coming out to vote, thank you for representing your values, and thank you for helping to preserve democracy."

RELIGION DIRECTORY

Your Local Guide to Religious Services

Sound Assistance Available	Sign Language Worship Aid	Special Greeters	Large Print Worship Aids Available
BAPTIST Bethlehem Baptist Penllyn Pike and Dager Road Spring House, PA 19477 Ph: (215) 643-4977 • Fax: (215) 643-4474 www.bbc4Christ.org Worship: 9:00 a.m. & 11:15 a.m. Sunday Bible Study (Church School) 9:00 a.m. Midweek Bible Study-Wed. 11:00 a.m. & 7:15 p.m. Pastor Charles W. Quann	LUTHERAN TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH 1000 West Main Street, Lansdale INDOOR WORSHIP Sat. 5:30 pm, Sun., 8:30/10:45 am LIVESTREAM: Sundays, 8:30 am Facebook, YouTube, trinitylansdale.com RADIO: 97.1 FM - Sundays, 11 am FEAST COMMUNITY MEAL Every Monday, 5:00-6:00 pm trinitylansdale.com	PRESBYTERIAN Gwynedd Square Presbyterian, PC(USA) 837 Sumneytown Pike, Lansdale, PA 19446 215-699-9159 office@gwyneddsquare.org Sunday Worship 10:00 am Sunday School at 9:00 am Youth Fellowship Sundays at 7:00 pm "Growing Spiritually through Service" For details and program information GwyneddSquare.org	
PRESBYTERIAN Lansdale Presbyterian Church 450 Oak Park Rd. Hatfield, PA 19440 Ph: (215) 368-1119 www.lansdalepres.org Sunday School for all ages 9:15 am Worship Service 10:30 am Nursery Care is available Children Ministry, Jr & Sr High Youth Groups Small Groups, College & Career MOPS & Active Senior Adults Group	METHODIST Lansdale United Methodist 300 North Broad Street, Lansdale, PA 19446 Ph: (215) 855-8364 www.lansdaleumc.org Worship Schedule Join us online at our website www.lansdaleumc.org each Sunday morning. Announcements and Music at 8:45 a.m. Worship at 9:00 a.m.	EPISCOPAL Church of the Messiah 1001 Dekalb Pike, Lower Gwynedd, PA 19002 215-699-9204 office@messiahgwynedd.org www.messiahgwynedd.org Sundays Holy Eucharist at 8 am & 9:30 am Nursery Care & Church School begin @ 9:15 (Children join services @ Communion) Refreshments follow both Services Wednesday Rector's Study at 11 am & 7 pm	

Join Us In Prayer.

For information about this directory call 215-648-1140 or hpolak@adtaxi.com
 Deadlines: Wednesday at 4 p.m.