



2025

# Toby's Sabbatical....

Greetings to my beloved and longed for church family! I am writing this from a coffee shop in Sevilla on my last full day of this trip before I begin the long journey home.

It is completely without exaggeration when I say that this has been the trip of a lifetime! What you all have done for me by providing this two-month sabbatical is, without question, the greatest gift I have ever received. There is no way I am ever going to be able to capture or summarize all that I have experienced in Ireland and Spain in words – written or spoken. But you know me well enough to know that I'm darned sure going to try! Consider this newsletter piece phase one of a conversational journey that will continue for the next few months.



If I had to come up with a single phrase to convey the most prominent theme of this amazing odyssey, I would choose "Overwhelmed by Beauty." In fact, this may well be November 2<sup>nd</sup>'s sermon title – my first Sunday back with all of you. I have never been brought to my knees and rendered speechless as frequently and as powerfully as I have been on this trip. Our loving Creator God did something extraordinarily special with these two amazing

countries. From the Ring of Kerry and the Aran Islands, to Mizen Head and the Cliffs of Moher, from Waterford and Baltimore to the Giants' Causeway, Ireland's coastal beauty all the way around the island is nothing short of stunning. The deep, lush, hilly greens of the countryside run right up to the

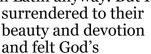
dramatic, craggy cliffs plummeting down to the wild sea.

At every one of these places, I felt something so profound, something so deep in my soul. Perhaps it was a spiritual connection to the Bailey side of my family. (My middle name, for those who don't already know, is Bailey, my late mother's maiden name.) Her people came from the Emerald Isle, and I believe that had a lot to do with why I felt so at home and such profound peace during the month of September. If you think of Ireland as a clock, I arrived at about 2:00, where Dublin is, and headed north up to Belfast which is at about 1:00. This is where I participated in a peacemaking retreat, featuring several folks who were

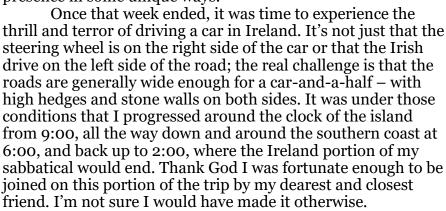


instrumental in bringing about the Good Friday Agreement of April 10, 1998. More on those folks later.

From there, I headed across to County Limerick - at about 9:00 on the Island-Circle- where I sojourned with a community of Benedictine Monks at Glenstal Abbey. This week was one of prayer, worship, and silence, as I entered into the rhythms of these 20 monks. The days there begin at 6:30 am with morning prayer and song. Then there is noon mass, followed by 6:00 pm Vespers. The worship day concludes with 8:30 pm Evening Prayer/Song. All the music at Glenstal is chanted – and by the monks only – NOT the congregation. You can imagine how hard that was for me, not to mention that it was all in Latin anyway. But I



presence in some unique ways.



From Dublin, I flew to Bilbao in Northern Spain – also known to some as the Basque Country or region. My sister's eldest son Max lives near Bilbao in a tiny village known as Busturia with his pregnant wife Bere, who is Basque herself. After a quick night with them for laundry and re-packing, Max drove me a hundred miles across the top of Spain to San Sebastian, where I would begin my Camino de Santiago. For those of you considering a trip to Spain, be sure to put San Sebastian on your itinerary. It is considered Spain's Rio de Janeiro with good reason. From there, I would make my way by mountain bike back across the northern or Cantabrian

Coast to Bilbao.

As most of you familiar with the Camino know, it is designed for walkers, and of the 800 miles that comprise it, the most mountainous and challenging stretch is, arguably, the one from San Sebastian to Bilbao. Lucky me! As I mentioned in the September newsletter, I knew I would not be able to walk the 15-16 miles a day – especially in these mountains – so I came up with the bright idea (can you hear my sarcasm?) of doing this on a rented mountain bike. While most mountain bikes I've ever written have somewhere between 12 and 18 speeds or gears, this company provided me with one only having 5 speeds. Hang on – it gets better!

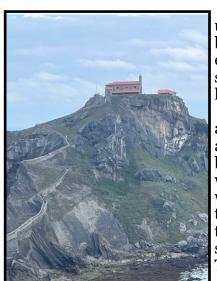




While I thought I might simply follow the same path as the walkers, getting off my bike when necessary, that pipe dream ended rather quickly on day one when it became clear that I was going to have ride on some fairly major roads up mountain passes with anywhere from a 6% to a 15% grade. While I did see other bikers on these roads, they were NOT fellow Camino pilgrims; they were national level cycling teams training for the Tour de France! Yes, one of my days was actually on a Tour de France stage...with a 5-speed mountain bike...with my skinny and compromised legs. Needless to say, I walked almost as much as I rode through these passes, uphill, huffing and puffing, and praying to God that I would make it to the top...which I always did. And when I did, I was treated to two incredible thrills: the first was the views! Wait till you see the pictures. The second was the



absolute exhilarating thrill of going downhill through switchbacks at somewhere between 30 and 40 mph! On one stretch heading into the village of Deba, I covered 5 kilometers (3.1 miles) in under 8 minutes...without ever pedaling – only braking. And I thought the driving in Ireland was precarious!



I also got lost an average of once or twice every day at some point, usually when I got off the road to push the bike up a steep, off-road path because Google Maps seemed to think it was a good idea. But, again, even when I was hopelessly lost, exhausted, and, at times, generally scared, I would look up to see yet another stunning vista that let me know I was not alone.

Eventually, after 6 days of riding and walking, I made it to Bilbao, an absolutely gorgeous Basque city, where I celebrated with a massage and some incredible seafood. My nephew picked me up and drove me back up to Busturia, where I'd spend the next week with his loving and welcoming Basque family – all 22 of them! They even threw me a wonderful birthday party that started with a day of picking the last of the apples from their farm and making the best apple juice I have ever tasted. That week also featured trips to surfing beaches, historical seaside towns, and a chapel that was actually featured in Game of Thrones!



From Bilbao, I flew to Barcelona for four days, visiting some incredible sites from La Sagrada Familia to many of the private homes designed by Antonio Gaudi. I took an amazing bike tour with a super knowledgeable guide, and since no one else showed up, it was a one-on-one tour for four hours. What a gift. In the spirit of my theme of "overwhelmed by beauty," I had to keep stopping for photo after photo.

Next I took a bullet train down here to Sevilla in Southern Spain, where the beauty and history reached even greater heights. There are two buildings in particular that have risen to the very top of my list of man-made wonders I have experienced in these two months. One is the Royal Alcazar of Seville, which is a series of royal family castles built between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, blending Christian and Muslim history. The palace is enormous with various wings and floors sprawling on and on, each featuring tile and stonework that is hard to fathom, given its date of construction. But the gardens were my favorite part. But it was when I stumbled upon La Plaza de Espana that I literally dropped to my knees in wonder. It is the most amazing, beautiful, and majestic edifice that I have ever seen. It, like so many of the other wonders I experienced on



this trip, is simply impossible to capture with a camera, though I certainly tried to the tune of almost 50 pictures. Apparently this massive, semi-circular series of archways, towers, bridges, - and, yes, a mote! – has been featured in several Star Wars films, Game of Thrones, and countless other films. When I first caught sight of it, I literally thought I was seeing some huge CGI i-Max hologram or something. I just couldn't fathom that it was real, much less that it was constructed between 1914 and 1929 for a World Expo. This is the one place on my entire trip that I went back to a second time, just to sit and try to take it all in.



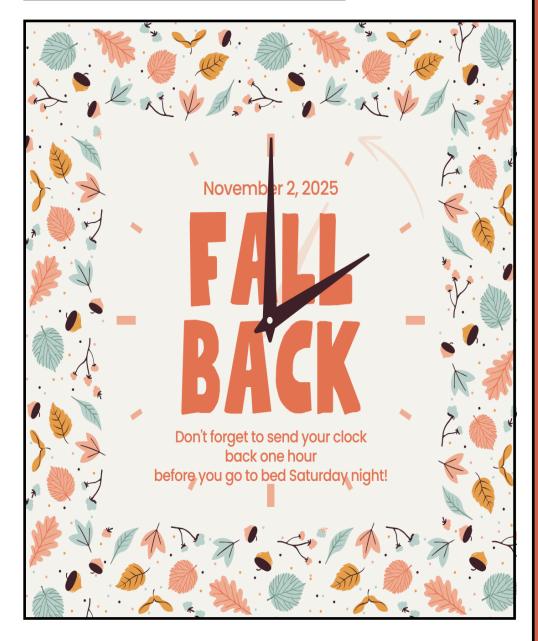




My heart is so full right now. God is so good and such an amazing creator. Not only is what She gave birth to in the natural world unspeakably beautiful, what She, in her creative wisdom, inspired humans to do over the centuries is an equally powerful testament to the goodness and grandeur of God. As David put it in the 8th Psalm, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" And, as I sit here on my last day in Sevilla, let me offer this prayer: "O, loving and constantly creating God, thank you for overwhelming me with beauty in these last two months. Thank you for every view, every monument, every street scene, every tour, and every moment. Thank you for every single person in my church family, whose generous gifts have made this powerful and unforgettable trip possible. Thank you for every single person in Ireland and Spain who have stopped to help me when I needed it. Thank you for all I have learned, experienced, and now have the opportunity to share with my unique and amazing church family. Amen



# **Important Reminder!**







## NOVEMBER VOLUNTEERS

#### **GREETERS**

Nov 2 .... OPEN

Nov 9 ... **OPEN** 

Nov 16 ... **OPEN** 

Nov 23 ... **OPEN** 

Nov. 30 ... **OPEN** 

# COFFEE & CONVERSATION HOSTS

Nov 2 .... **Judy Seibert**, **Michelle Babcock**, & Ellen Zienert

Nov 9 ... **Dave & Darlene Heine** 

Nov 16 ... Sue Fowler

Nov 23 ... The Ogdens & The Herberts

Nov. 30 ... **Max Carthew, John Howard, and Hagen Manker** 

#### **LAY READERS**

Nov 2 .... **Q&A** 

Nov 9 ... Bruce Herbert

Nov 16 ... **Denise Fate** 

Nov 23 ... **OPEN** 

Nov. 30 ... **OPEN** 



Bakers are needed for our annual Cookie Walk! A signup sheet will be in Ransom Hall for those who would like to participate in this popular annual fundraiser.

A link to Signup Genius will also be sent out in the coming weeks. Please keep an eye out for it!

Thank you to all who are helping now, and who have helped in the past.

# Info on the Lunch & Learn...



#### Lunch & Learn: The Sermon on the Mount

Many of you enjoyed our recent Lunch & Learn study of Dallas Willard's book on the Parables. Participants dove deeper into Jesus's teachings and considered how they shape our daily lives.

Your Reaching In Committee invites you to join us for a new study, beginning in November. Our focus will be the **Sermon on the Mount**. Under Toby's leadership, we will be reading *Following the Call: Living the Sermon on the Mount Together*, edited by Charles E. Moore.

Reflections from more than 100 voices across the centuries are gathered in this rich volume offering diverse perspectives from the likes of Augustine of Hippo, Meister Eckhart, and Søren Kierkegaard, to Dorothy Day, Wendell Berry, and Howard Thurman. These commentaries ask us to wrestle with questions like:

- What do Jesus's ethics demand of us today?
- What in us must change?
- How can we live more faithfully considering these teachings?

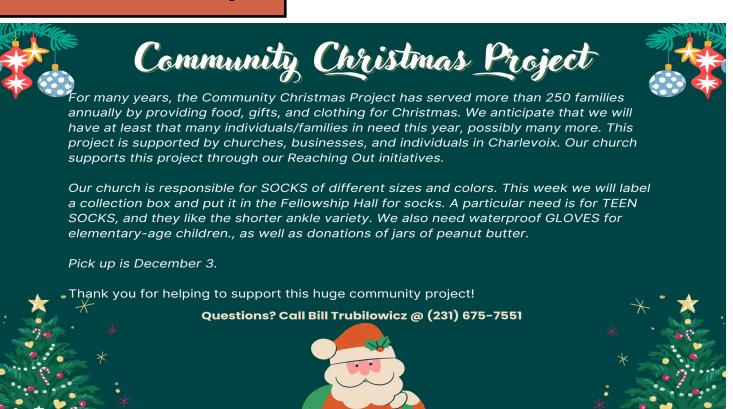
At every turn, the book points us back to Jesus and the radical call of His words.

#### **Details:**

- \*Following the Call is designed for group reading and discussion.
- \*We will gather on Wednesdays at noon in Ransom Hall or via Zoom: November 5, 12, 19; December 3, 10, and January 7, 14, 21.
- \*Books may be ordered at Dockside Books in Charlevoix or on-line.
- \*Don't worry if you can't commit to all of these Wednesdays. Just come when you can.

Bring your lunch, your curiosity, and your heart for learning. Together, let's discover what it means to live the Sermon on the Mount.

# Chx Christmas Project



# Handling the Holidays...

### Handling the Holidays During Coffee & Conversation Nov. 9



The Reaching In Team is planning on hosting a "Handling the Holidays" meeting after the service on November 9th, in Ransom Hall, and all are welcome. The presentation will be delivered by Erin Gray, Bereavement Coordinator, Munson Hospice in Traverse City. She will be attending our service, as well.

Join us for a thoughtful discussion on navigating grief during the holiday seasons. Traditions & routines can feel overwhelming when someone is missing, & it's often hard to know where to begin. This event is open to ALL - those grieving & those supporting someone through loss. Together, we'll explore ways to prepare for & find meaning during this time. You don't have to do it alone.



# NOVEMBER MEETING TIMES:

Reaching In Team, 11/5@ 9a

Reaching Out Team, 11/12 @ 9a

Church Council, 11/16 @ 11:45

Board of Trustees, 11/16 @ 11:45a

Reaching In Team meets on the 1st Thursday at 9:00a

Reaching Out Team meets on the 2nd Wednesday at 9a

Church Council meets on the 3rd Sunday at 11:45a

Board of Trustees meet on the 3rd Sunday at 11:45a, temporarily

#### THOUGHT FOR THIS MONTH



#### JUST A REMINDER...



The Church Office will be closed on Thursday, November 27 for Thanksgiving. The office will reopen on Tuesday, December 2 at Qa.

The Community Thanksgiving Dinner will once again need pies. More info to come in a weekly update or separate email.

## November 2025\*





# NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE, OR WHERE YOU ARE ON LIFE'S JOURNEY, YOU ARE WELCOME HERE!



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**Our Covenant** 

"Our church community seeks to embody God's Spirit and live the teachings of Jesus. We offer a sense of belonging to each other and to all our neighbors, as we build a just and sustainable world for all."