

Amidst the Mountains

OSL REGION 2 SPRING CONFERENCE

BY VICTORIA DUNCAN



In barely-there light on the first morning of the OSL Region 2 Spring Conference, I peer out at a landscape different from the stately palms and seagulls of my South Carolina home. Yet, this Pennsylvania mountain is beloved by my heart and the tug of home and heritage feels intense. As I consider my return to these hills and to White Sulphur Springs, just outside of the wee town of Mann's Choice, a scripture comes to mind. *"God works all things for the good of those who love Him"* (Romans 8:28). Indeed, He does and I give thanks for that fulfilled promise.



As I reflect on the previous evening, I observe how wisps of fog have marched into the valley while more reticent remnants of the night clouds remain curled on the hillside. Our conference opened with praise music, led by Rick Flint, and a warm welcome by our regional director, Michael Malloy. So many have worked hard to bring this event to life and deserve our gratitude.

Pastor Don Brown, from Pittsburgh, initially speaks this morning with a fresh review of the healing miracles in the Gospels and in the Book of Acts. An important take-away challenges a well-worn excuse for doubts about healing that have, most likely, been uttered by believers since the days of the early church. How often have we said or thought: *But wait, I'm not Jesus—or an Apostle! They did these miracles, but how am I expected to do this stuff?*

Yet, as Pastor Brown reminds us, Jesus, although divine, performed miracles while fully human and in accordance and in obedience to the will of the Father. Those, called to healing ministries have the opportunity and need, like the Apostles, to seek guidance and help from the Holy Spirit to accomplish the work set before us. Another scripture, Philippians 4:13, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,"* comes to mind.



After lunch, Pastor Sharon Lewis, begins her keynote presentation. Ordained in the Episcopalian Church, Pastor Sharon is President of the Board of the International Order of St. Luke. An author and the founder/director of Amazing Love Healing Ministry, a ministry of God's healing and reconciliation. Pastor Sharon

focuses on the theme "Free Indeed". Her powerful modules include: 1) The Son sets you free, 2) The truth sets you free, 3) Forgiveness and grace set you free and 4) The Holy Spirit sets you free.

Throughout Pastor Sharon's two-day presentation, it is abundantly clear how blessed we are to be in the presence of a teacher, a leader and healer whose heart is dedicated to our Lord and to helping others to overcome past traumas and wounds. Additionally, we experience and witness the work of the Holy Spirit upon attendees and, even, upon the retreat center staff itself.

In fact, it is the efforts of the Holy Spirit that has brought this conference to this location. White Sulphur Springs, operated by Officers' Christian Fellowship, is a charitable organization whose mission is to advance God's Kingdom within the military and in the world. Although White Sulphur Springs primarily provides programming for military families, it also functions as a resource for churches, Christian organizations and individuals without military affiliation.

My connection here extends into past generations but my OSL experience is very recent. Four years ago, while living in Maryland, I fled to a South Carolina beach to try to heal from a significant loss. In search of comfort, I reached out to the pastor at a nearby Christian retreat center, Camp St. Christopher. Pastor Sandi Kerner, then the camp chaplain, held weekly healing services, open to the community.

Attending these services piqued my interest in Christian healing which, even as a pastoral counselor, was new to me. When I returned home, Pastor Sandi—a board member of OSL—suggested I attend my region's conference. I knew nothing about OSL but needed help. Professionally and personally, I doubted my own ability to help anyone, even myself. Spiritually, I questioned my own salvation and wondered if there was space for me on Team Jesus.

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At that time, Region 2 conferences were held in the Virginia countryside. Upon attending, my eyes widened as people spoke about their relationship with the Holy Spirit. Growing up as a United Methodist, we didn't talk much about that Trinity member, at least, not as a viable presence. I felt mystified and a bit envious of those profound encounters and I doubted I could ever have this kind of relationship with the Divine. But I began praying for it.

Later, as I walked by a huddle of regional leaders, I overheard someone mention searching for a more centrally located retreat center. My steps faltered. I knew such a place, nestled in the foothills of the Alleghenies. White Sulphur Springs was situated in a cove where my Pennsylvania ancestors, in the early 1800s, had offered summer lodging for city visitors who came to "take the waters." Although the property had passed through other hands in the interim, my family still owned adjacent



acreage and my early childhood home was a short distance away.

In one aspect, White Sulphur Springs seemed like a great fit. But yet, I was completely new and not even an OSL member. And I took another step away before I felt a force blocking my momentum. More than just a

nudge from the Holy Spirit, this felt like a shove from above. In a brief moment of trust and obedience, I turned and suggested White Sulphur Springs. When I moved on, the force was gone and a sense of peace settled around me.

Subsequently, our region's leadership investigated and relocated their meetings to White Sulphur Springs. Since then, I moved to South Carolina but return for each spring conference. Two years ago, Pastor Sandi Kerner, who first introduced me to Christian healing and OSL, was the conference's keynote speaker. When I told her how Region 2 came to this new place and her part in making that happen, we praised the Lord. How great is our God!

Now, a new tradition has been established. Region 2 enjoys a new location on a 1000-acre property and the center's staff value the mission of OSL. The retreat center sponsors a 1-2 year internship and fellows programs to a group of young people. At our OSL lectures, it is not unusual to see both staff members and young people in attendance. Often, they stay afterwards for healing prayer—and God's kingdom advances. We know not what seeds we plant and we trust that God has a plan. To be a small part of that plan is a blessing.

Before I check out, I pause beside one of the historic photographs lining the halls. This poignant image features a trio of young women, dressed in high-necked, long dresses standing by a burned-out building. You can almost smell the charred wood, probably originating from a kitchen fire, of the destroyed inn where my ancestors offered hospitality to guests. From what I know, these were people of deep faith and I like to think they'd be pleased with the establishment of White Sulphur Springs Conference and Retreat Center and approving of my very small effort in introducing Region 2 to this slice of heaven on Earth.



Victoria has worked as a registered nurse, a pastoral counselor, and a personal growth columnist for a regional magazine. A mother of two grown sons, she now resides on Seabrook Island, South Carolina with her husband, Ron, and persnickety pup, Ceci. She is eternally grateful to Jesus for beckoning her home to himself again and again, even as her heart has been prone to wander!