

The Laity Minute

April 2019

Being in nature of one of my favorite things in the world to do. God's creation is so magnificent! I love the fresh air, the flora and fauna, and the sounds of little squirrels scurrying around in the leaves. (My Mom wrote about her love of nature in the March 2016 edition of The Upper Room!)

Aside from golfing and trail running, one activity I enjoy while being in nature is hiking. We are so lucky to be close to hundreds of hiking trails given the location of local and national parks being in our backyard. Not only is hiking good for the body, it is good for the soul. I admit, however, that after a long hike, I'm tired! My feet ache and my legs are weary. A day in the woods is great exercise but can leave me ready for my couch.

When on a hike, I often imagine the walking that has been done by those in ministry with the Methodist Church. I think about the Circuit Riders. Yes, they rode horses, but they walked hundreds of miles to preach, as well. Or, how about references to walking in the Bible such as Psalm 23:4: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear not evil, for You are with me."

Another ministry that comes to mind for me is one quite unique. You see, the Holston Conference has a hiking chaplain on the Appalachian Trail. That's right! Every year, via an application process, a person is chosen to hike the entire length of the AT to, "greet, equip, enable, and sustain all those who, for six months or so, will call their Trail their home" (AT Chaplaincy). This person walks about 5 million steps which takes him or her from Georgia to Maine. Considering about 3 million people hike at least some portions of the Trail each year, that makes for about 3 million chances for the Chaplain to show God's love.

At this point, several AT Chaplains have made the journey. I have enjoyed reading the AT Chaplain blog (appalachiantrailchaplain.com). You can also access the journey from Facebook (@AppalachianTrailChaplain). It was beautiful to see pictures of Rev. Matt Hall perform a wedding at the top of a mountain in VA. Reading about Minta Ray's hike of 30 miles in one day and seeing her magnificent photos of sunsets and sunrises were inspiring. And, now, this year, Jack Layfield, (AKA: Chappy Jack), who has chosen to make this journey instead of retiring, has just begun. He left March 3 on his northbound hike. (You can donate to the AT Chaplaincy to help with supplies if you like.)

One of the outcomes from this unique ministry is the, "increased awareness and deeper faith" the Chaplains receive themselves and give to others. In addition, this ministry lets us know that there are no boundaries to ministry. Worship can be done anywhere, including a hiking trail. So, the next time you go hiking or even just look at the beautiful Smokies right outside your window, know that the AT Chaplain has traveled those mountains and is doing the good work of the Methodist Church.