

LYDIA'S HOUSE // SUMMER 2019



On March 17, 2019 Lydia's House blessed and dedicated Virginia Coffey Place:
8 units of affordable housing for Lydia's House families. Thank you to the many that made this project possible!



LYDIA'S HOUSE  *offering hospitality in the Catholic Worker Tradition*

WHO WAS VIRGINIA COFFEY?



"If the situation seemed insurmountable,
I always wanted to be there"

1904-1924

Virginia Keys Jones was raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she enjoyed a childhood knowing few racial restrictions. She fondly recalled having neighbors who were Irish Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Assyrian, white Protestant, as well as African American. This reality radically changed when she moved to Cincinnati in 1924, post-graduation, to teach. She discovered that Cincinnati was a place where she would have to "learn her place."

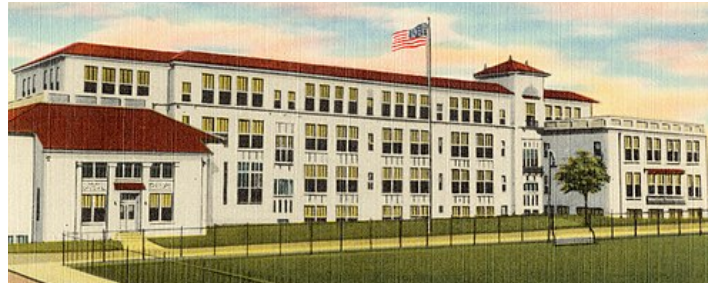


1924-1926

After graduating with a Physical Education degree from Western Michigan University, Virginia took a teaching



job at the Harriet Beecher Stowe School. The Stowe School was established in 1914 by Jennie D. Porter to give African American children access to similar educational experiences that white children received. Porter desired to create an educational environment where African American students could thrive by being connected to positive role models who looked like them. Virginia left the Stowe School because they lacked a gym space for PE classes and she desired to find a position more suited to her skill set.



1926-1941

Virginia took a job as the Girl Reserve Secretary and eventually Executive Secretary at the YWCA in the city's West End. Through the Girl Reserve Clubs, Virginia was able to serve children of different races and ethnicities and help them develop "well balanced personalities, grow physically, and advance in social responsibility."

Her presence at the YWCA was an important first step for breaking down prejudices and addressing racial tensions within programs and communities in Cincinnati.

1941-1948

In 1941, she married William A. Coffey and decided to take a sabbatical from her professional career. During this time, she became a volunteer educator at Carmel Presbyterian Church, which eventually led her to start the first black Girl Scout troop in Cincinnati.

Her troop became a model for other troops and she became the first black field director for Girl Scouts in 1945. Coffey realized there had been no black Girl Scouts before, so she set up a committee to create a five-year plan to integrate the program. In less than five years, the whole program was integrated.



"Separation was a concept that was foreign to me. I couldn't see any reason for it.
It was clear some things needed to change in Cincinnati."

1948-1963

The Mayor's Friendly Relations Committee (MFRC) was a group established in 1943 in hopes to promote tolerance and respect for differences over bigotry and discrimination. The group's work consisted of education and advocacy.

In 1948, Coffey was hired to be the assistant director, which was a very atypical position for a black woman during this time period. During her time in this position, Virginia started a column in local newspapers called "Speaking Out on Race Relations," which led her to speak on human relations issues for various organizations and at events around the city. She also hosted conversations on interracial relations at her home in Walnut Hills.

Virginia continued to advocate for the educational experience of black youth as well as fight tirelessly to end the systems of segregation still present in Cincinnati. She eventually became an international consultant for race relation issues abroad.

Virginia was an important force in the civil rights movement in Cincinnati. She began her work toward integrating the public pools in Cincinnati in 1950. She fought policy that insisted on separate days of use for black and white families. She also pushed back with logic when white families would personally come to her office and complain. After patiently listening to their complaints, she would state the facts, "My husband and I are homeowners, we pay taxes. Other black families are doing the same. Tax dollars fund pools and therefore, we should have equal access to these community resources." Owl's Nest Park in O'Bryonville was the first to integrate in June of 1950.

Virginia worked with Marian Spencer and many others to integrate Coney Island. During protests at the front gates of the park, she lay down to block entry and had molasses poured on her head by white children. "I got called every kind of name imaginable," Coffey said. "But I didn't become bitter – I never did. Just outraged that black people could

be so denied, so mistreated." Coney Island was desegregated in 1955.

1968-1974

She worked for the Neighborhood Housing and Community Center project and then was elected as the first African American woman to serve as the executive director of the Cincinnati Human Relations Commission (CHRC). She was an integral presence in guiding her colleagues through violent and tense racial situations during that time, including the assassination of Martin Luther King, JR.

She used her extensive knowledge on human relations to restructure and reinvigorate the CHRC. She also initiated new programs for people experiencing poverty throughout the region. She helped reorganize the CHRC into the National Association of Human Rights, which still exists today.

1974-2003

After she resigned from CHRC, Coffey worked as an independent human relations consultant. She was honored throughout her life for her achievements, some of the most notable being the following:

- The Memorial Community Center, for her work at the Center and OTR neighborhoods.
- Cincinnati Enquirer Woman of the Year of 1968
- Governor's Award for Community Excellence of 1973
- UC's Distinguished Alumnus Award of 1972
- The Good Neighbor Award of 1989
- The Great Living Cincinnati Award of 1993

Virginia Keys Jones Coffey died on August 26, 2003.

Through our new building, we honor and remember her work, love of community engagement and dialogue, and all the ways she challenged our region to speak out for justice, equity, and peace for all people in our community.

"A big event of the scouting year was the annual summer outing at a local amusement park, Coney Island, involving travel from downtown to the park on the riverboat, *Island Queen*, both of which barred blacks. Scouting officials came to Coffey and asked her to take her 100 or so black girl scouts to a city park, while

some 1,000 white scouts went to Coney Island aboard the *Island Queen*. Coffey responded: 'You make a decision about what your program is. If your program is for all girls in Cincinnati, then you decide which programs you want to continue and which ones you need to change.'

The trip to Coney Island was permanently cancelled, and the Cincinnati's girl scouts began holding a single outing for girls of both races in an integrated public park"

(Cincinnati Post, 1949).

"I was very intrigued at the time, because all along we were breaking down barriers and creating fellowship among people of all races and all faiths. This was a major motivation and it impressed me that a city agency had such objectives. So, I went."



THE WATERS OF DEATH AND THE WATER OF LIFE

a sermon by Dr. Anne Housholder

I love metaphors. I believe they are one of the best ways to understand things that cannot be seen, empathize with experiences we haven't had, and imagine things that don't yet exist. So, we were fortunate at Lydia's House around the time we were imagining our new building to have a guest with a gift for metaphorical description. After dinner one night, Janell described the foster care system of her childhood and her current need for mental health care and social support, as she tries to build a stable life for herself and her daughter, in this way:

"It's like you are standing in water just over your mouth but not quite up to your nose. But, whenever you try to get to a shallower place where you can at least get your chin out, the system comes and adds more water by cutting your benefits or demanding another form or giving you a court date. They won't quite let you drown and die, but that's about it."

Janell's description has been with us throughout our new project, as we have thought about how to see this housing as not just a better alternative to couch surfing, sleeping in cars or on cots in shelters or in unsafe housing; but rather as a place where the waters recede slightly, where our friend with her lively mind and gift for language can take a deep breath and begin to imagine an abundant life for herself and her daughter.

I share an appreciation for metaphor, not only with Janell, but also with Jesus. He had such a short time to tell us everything we need to know to create and sustain Christian community. I believe His emphasis on metaphor gave us an expansive framework for living together in a community of plenty that can be imagined and reimaged in each age and place, in heaven and on Earth. The treasure in the field, the house built on rock, the leaven in the bread, the mustard seed and living water are all glimpses that point to God's dream for us.

As we dedicate this particular physical space to the work of living out Jesus' vision, I want to contrast the waters of systematic poverty that Janell felt were seeking to overwhelm her with the living water within the scripture story of the Samaritan woman at the well.

It's likely that this woman has quite a bit in common with many of Lydia's House guests. Intimate partner relationships have not worked out so well for her.

She's there alone at the well. Scholars suggest that being at the well at midday means she might be avoiding the common times that women gather to get water and chat. Whatever her social standing, she doesn't have someone to do this repetitive basic task for her. Like most people in Samaria, the Roman occupation is almost drowning her in the deathly waters of empire and oppression.

The water is quickly rising up to her nose. So, when Jesus starts talking about living water, she's thinking indoor plumbing, perhaps the famous baths that privileged Romans

enjoyed - a better life for herself and her family, not spiritual graces or gauzy inner peace. And here's the thing, I actually think Jesus is offering a life that's tangibly better too. It's easy to turn Jesus and his metaphors into a means to achieve a vague personal sense of well-being, but that's not what happened in this story. After some back and forth about her marital state, the Samaritan woman recognizes Jesus as the Messiah, testifies to her community and brings them to meet Jesus. Fourth century theologian, John Chrysostom said she offered, "the actions of an apostle, preaching the gospel to everyone she could and calling them to Jesus. She even drew out a whole city to hear him." Maybe she doesn't get a new faucet in her kitchen, but through this interaction she gets a purpose and a place of importance in her community; perhaps she joins the followers of Jesus or stays to grow a Christian community in her town. Her work and the work of many



Janell, her daughter and Anne at Christmas.

unnamed women and men build the Kin-dom inspired by Jesus' metaphors: the communities in Acts that shared everything they had, the Christians who got a reputation for adopting children their parents planned to abandon, those who organized to care for the sick and widows. Through encounters with Jesus, women like the Samaritan woman turned from marginalized and drowning to agents of their own destiny.

I'd like to turn now to a woman central to our story today: Virginia Coffey – Presbyterian Sunday School teacher, hospitality provider, and tireless, passionate and effective worker for the cause of justice and the end to racial bias, systemic racism and discrimination. Virginia turned the tides of oppression into living water here in our region. It is not just through Jesus' life, but also Virginia Coffey's, that we know what living water is. It is water that doesn't threaten to drown any of God's

children, but rather flows freely and cleanly, creating both material good and relationships of love and support. Today, as we open and bless this building, I'd like to say this to Janell: Our dream and God's dream is that these homes are places where warm waters clean hands, where flowing water gives baths, where cool water runs sprinklers to grow food and create fun, where free water cleans floors and clothes, and cold water satisfied thirsts. Like the woman at the well, may you no longer imagine water as a tool of Empire used to drown and shame, but instead may living water flow through your veins, as it flows through the taps of the Virginia Coffey house and flowed through Virginia Coffey's veins. Thanks be to God for the pipes and plumbers, donors, workers and the witness of saints of every age. Through each one we can see Jesus' metaphors made real. Amen.

THANK YOU TO OUR 4502 CARTER AVENUE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN MAJOR DONORS

Phase 1: Lead Sponsors for Purchase and Development

Housholder Family Fund
Christ Church Cathedral
Ohio Finance Fund
Greater Cincinnati/ Northern Kentucky LISC
Hamilton County HOME

Phase 2: Demolition, Roof and Gutter replacement

Bishop Family Fund
Kohnen Family Foundation
in memory of David A. Kohnen
Ruth J. and Robert A. Conway Family Fund

Phase 3: Major Systems Overhaul

Anonymous
Weston and Roberts Families
Sutphin Family Foundation
Province of St. John the Baptist,
order of Friars Minor
Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio
Women for Women Fundraising Event
Redeemer Episcopal Church
The Carol Anne and Ralph V. Haile Jr./
U.S. Bank Foundation
Bank of America
People's Bancorp
Marge and Charles Schott Foundation

Phase 4: Unit Interiors including kitchen, appliances, trim, fixtures, flooring and paint

Unit 1: Lydia's House Volunteers and Province of St. John the Baptist
Unit 2: Spaulding Foundation
Unit 3: Steve and Amy Whitlatch
Unit 4: Women for Women
Unit 5: BGR and the Backsheider Family
Unit 6: Redeemer Episcopal Church
Unit 7: The Virginia Weston Fund and The Sauerland Foundation
Unit 8: Anonymous

Laundry Facility: Bellarmine Chapel
Windows and Solar Panels: US Bank Foundation
Exterior: Norwood Friends and Neighbors
Furniture: The Heil/ Guthrie Family and The Kohnen Family Foundation





JOIN OUR TEAM

We're hiring a maternal care advocate to live in our main property and support homeless mothers as they prepare for childbirth, labor, and new motherhood.

Ideally the maternal advocate would serve as a friend and companion as women learn to care for babies and young children, understand female and child health needs, parenting on a budget, and developing coping skills. The maternal advocate will offer physical and emotional support and guidance for mothers as they work toward stability and grow in wholeness. The term of service is a minimum of one year (with possible extension).

Qualifications: Advocates will be challenged with a job that includes direct service, program planning, administration and political activism. Advocates should be strong communicators, self-directed, and have previous experience working with individuals or families in crisis, particularly in a setting that involved parenting or prenatal care. Experience as a live-in staff person with program planning responsibilities is also very helpful. Advocates will be expected to do 20 hours weekly of on-site duty at the main shelter property, which will include guest accompaniment, meal preparation, house management, transportation, and childcare. Occasional overnights or childbirth accompaniment/ hospital accompaniment is likely.

Compensation: Each advocate receives a monthly stipend, all food, housing, and transportation and a generous self-care allowance including counseling and retreats. Maternal Advocates will also receive doula training and certification as part of their one year commitment. Applicant should be passionate about living alongside the poor and living simply. For more information and the application, visit our website at <http://stlydiashouse.org/associate-program/> or send a resume to maryellen@stlydiashouse.org.





PRACTICING RESURRECTION AT HOME: THE ROLE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY AT THE VIRGINIA COFFEY PLACE

Laura Menze, OTR, Occupational Therapist

The before pictures of Virginia Coffey Place are startling - ceilings collapsing, mold growing over walls, possessions and debris filling the space. In the hours leading up to the grand opening I mopped the floors of the units and gazed at these before photos that we'd hung on the walls for guests to see. Moving back and forth methodically my mind turned to a line from the poem "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front" by Wendell Berry. It reads, "So, friends, every day do something that won't compute... Practice resurrection." One could look at the Virginia Coffey Place and declare a miraculous resurrection of an abandoned building turned beautiful home for eight families; announce a miracle of loaves and fishes with 1 million dollars raised primarily through family foundations and individual donors. However, from behind the scenes many hours of hard work preceded these reveals. Practicing resurrection suggests repeated action, growth over time. Practicing resurrection looks less like magic tricks and more like showing up with hope and faith to many hours of work. It is standing at an abyss that looks impossible to cross and praying for wisdom of how to take the first step...and then the second step... and then the third step.

In the five years of Lydia's House, we have served 56 families experiencing housing crisis. That mission has yielded many families entering permanent housing, obtaining needed benefits, and enrolling in school or getting a job. That said, we have also come to know with unsettling clarity that housing and income does not make a life inherently easy, meaningful, or abundant.

Limited social support, a history of trauma and intimate partner violence, mental illness, and physical health concerns exacerbate the challenges of single parenting small children and building a life that one might call "whole."

Case management within the context of community and relationship is a key part of the services that Lydia's House provides - the tangible needs are many and the systems to navigate are complex. In addition, we have introduced occupational therapy services as an important part of the Lydia's House program. Occupational therapy aims to maximize health, well-being, and quality of life for all people through effective solutions that facilitate participation in everyday living. The field of occupational therapy leans into holistic care, problem solving, and creativity to enable people to do the occupations, or daily activities, that they want and need to do. Occupational therapists can work with kids who have developmental delays to older adults who have experienced a stroke, and everything in between. My career has focused on life skill and coping skill development for individuals with serious mental illness and those experiencing homelessness.

Over the past two years, we have found occupational therapy to be a unique and important piece of the services that Lydia's House provides. Occupational therapy can address skill deficits by considering and providing interventions to address underlying impairments that are necessary for engaging successfully in tasks. Examples of underlying skills that many of our guests have not had



MANIFESTO: THE MAD FARMER LIBERATION FRONT

By Wendell Berry

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready-made. Be afraid
to know your neighbors and to die.
And you will have a window in your head.
Not even your future will be a mystery
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card
and shut away in a little drawer.
When they want you to buy something
they will call you. When they want you
to die for profit they will let you know.

So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
Denounce the government and embrace
the flag. Hope to live in that free
republic for which it stands.
Give your approval to all you cannot
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man
has not encountered he has not destroyed.

Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophecy such returns.

Put your faith in the two inches of humus
that will build under the trees
every thousand years.
Listen to carrion – put your ear
close, and hear the faint chattering
of the songs that are to come.
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts.
So long as women do not go cheap
for power, please women more than men.

Ask yourself: Will this satisfy
a woman satisfied to bear a child?
Will this disturb the sleep
of a woman near to giving birth?

Go with your love to the fields.
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is highest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.



the opportunity to develop effectively include planning, learning from performance, organization, regulating emotions, social skills, as well as having supportive habits and routines. For instance, food stamps are helpful, but less so if you run out within the first week of the month or you do not have the cooking skills to make healthy food, often leading to additional health concerns. A house is critical, but can become unsafe if you have roaches due to lack of cleaning routines and safe baby crawling is obstructed by piles on the floor.

In the past months, I have helped a former guest set up a budget in her banking app after her benefits were cut when she started making more at work. I have discussed



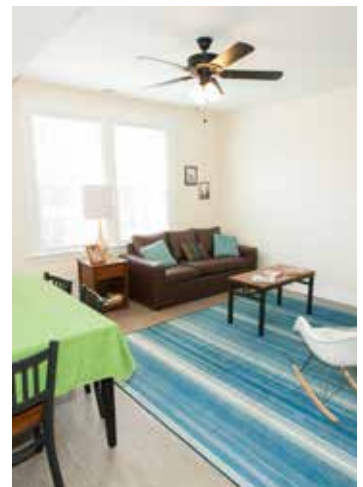
and practiced pain and stress management strategies with a guest hindered by chronic pain and paralyzed by a poor job fit, including making a weighted blanket with her and simultaneously teaching her how to use a sewing machine. I provided education on sleep hygiene and depression with a guest sleeping 16 hours a day and when she identified needing to have a reason to get out of bed, we wrote a resume which created a pathway and motivation to obtain a job. I've discussed life balance in daily routines, encouraged early intervention for developmental delays, and encouraged development of strategies to maintain a clean house. My days and interventions are varied, but the goal remains constant – supporting current and former guests to build meaningful lives.

At Virginia Coffey Place, we are excited to have occupational therapy services as the primary service provided to the tenants. Already, I have developed a training program teaching tenants about things such as pest management, safety, and home management routines. This training will eventually be offered to all guests of Lydia's House. I look forward to offering individual goal setting and support, life skill training, parenting support, education and child enrichment support, advocacy, and mental health support, and accompaniment for medical and legal system navigation. Though these supports have been offered in the past, I look forward to offering these services in a more robust and comprehensive manner to the tenants. We pray, and have good reason to believe, that providing occupational therapy interventions to our residents will aid them in having a life that is more meaningful and help them create a higher quality of life.

As we look towards the next leg of this journey, as leases are signed and tenants move in, I recall the words of warning others have given us: landlording horror stories, and the looming prospect of pests, rent nonpayment, and rule violations. It is tempting to brace for impact and anxiously spiral what-ifs. However, this



Wendell Berry poem rooted in Christian hope says, "Invest in the millennium. Expect the end of the world. Laugh. Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful though you have considered all the facts." Apartments beautifully staged will not be kept with perfection and the coming months will hold a steep learning curve. Once again we stand on the edge of an abyss, uncertain of how we will proceed and step forward in faith and prayer for this continued work of practicing resurrection. And yet we choose to proceed - proceed out of love for our guests turned friends, proceed for the sake of their children we love and want to see grow up with stability and safety. We choose to believe and act in faith, using our gifts of providing meaningful community and relationship, as well as my professional skills as an occupational therapist, so that the lives and homes of former guests can be resurrected from crisis.



SUPPORT OUR PLAYSPACE CAMPAIGN

Thank you to all who contributed to our crowdfire campaign for the nature playscape at Virginia Coffey Place. Over 3 days we raised almost \$5000!

For more than a year we've been busy getting the apartment units completed but there's still more to come at 4502 Carter Avenue. In addition to the apartment building, we actually bought two additional adjoining parcels of land: a parking lot and an empty lot. By the summer of 2020 we hope to repave the lot, create a nature playscape for Lydia's House families and the pre-school, and add a mural to the back wall. If you'd like to give to this campaign please contact Maryellen@stlydiashouse.org. You can also donate in the enclosed envelope by writing in the memo "Playspace". We're excited to not just make beautiful apartments for our families but to contribute to the beautification of west Norwood.



AZALEA MONTESSORI: OPENING SOON

What do these three cuties have in common? Well, they've all been around Lydia's House since they were babies and come September they'll all be together at Azalea Montessori School in the storefront of the Virginia Coffey Place. Lydia's House is so excited to be partnering with Azalea to offer authentic Montessori to

3-6 year olds in the heart of Norwood. Azalea is currently enrolling for part time and full time students and will accept both full pay and ODJFS voucher students. If you'd like to learn more email mindie@azaleamontessori.org or visit wildflowerschools.org/azalea/.





THE BLESSING AND DEDICATION OF VIRGINIA COFFEY PLACE

PRAYERS OFFERED AT OUR BUILDING OPENING

Celebrant: Visionaries, your vision for affordable housing in our neighborhood and in our ability to bring it to life, helped us to believe. Your first gifts of listening, resourcing, and encouragement brought this dream to life. We are grateful for your saying yes and calling us forward. Will you continue to hold us in prayer and call us to live into our mission in the future?

Visionaries: We will continue to believe in the mission of Lydia's House, as a place of radical hospitality and a community of hope. Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh upon this place, may you guide and direct this community in all it does and ensure that all these things may work together for your glory.

Celebrant: Community Development Partners, your knowledge, support, and generous funding have shown us a way forward to expand our ministry and create a wider network of care for homeless families. Will you continue to offer your support and expertise as we live into this new ministry?

Community Development Partners: We will walk with you as you welcome families and work to create safe, affordable housing. Creator of all, we ask you to give courage and strength to under resourced neighborhoods and families seeking housing. Grant that all are given the resources and care that they need to live life to the full.

Celebrant: Elected Officials, you have cast a vision of justice and peace and you have served as

faithful partners with us in working to build this neighborhood to reflect God's kingdom. Do you commit to support those who are seeking stable, supportive housing?

Elected Officials: We will support all who seek a home in this community and we pray for our common life - Holy One, help us to renew the ties of mutual regard which form our civic life, enable us to eliminate poverty, prejudice, and oppression, that peace may prevail with righteousness, and justice with order, and that those who live here may find this a place of hope.

Celebrant: Virginia Coffey offered her life as an advocate for people of color, an agitator for racial equality and a trail blazer for human relations in Greater Cincinnati. During her career she mentored and educated women and girls, raised funds for families in poverty and supported settlement houses for the displaced. She stood as one among us who put love into action. We are grateful for her sacrificial service and tireless devotion to justice. Will you, her friends, remind us of her witness and call us to live up to her dedication?

Friends of Virginia Coffey: We will keep Virginia's memory alive and commit to sharing the story of how this new building is a living memorial to her ministry. Almighty God, you have surrounded us with a great cloud of witnesses: grant that we may all be encouraged by the example of Virginia, and supported by this fellowship of love and prayer, knowing ourselves to be upheld by her witness to your power and mercy.

Celebrant: Clergy and faith leaders, you are called to gather God's people and to send them to work for the healing and repair of the world. Do you offer your blessing for this new home?

Clergy: We offer our blessing and the support of our faith communities to the Lydia's House community and the families who will find a home here. May God bless this home. Bless all who live here with the gift of your love; and grant that they may manifest your love to each other and all whose lives they touch. May they grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of you. Guide, comfort, and strengthen this community in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.



Rev. Jane Gerdson officiating



Janell reading Scripture

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LYDIA'S HOUSE

LIFE LATELY AT LYDIA'S HOUSE

