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Along the Way: Using Our Flashlight

A young boy living on the farm was instructed by his mother to go out on a dark night to check if the barn door was closed and locked. The young boy left the house and returned in less than a minute. When asked what happened, he said it was too dark to see where the barn was, and he was afraid to walk out where he couldn't see. His mother handed him a flashlight and told him to try again. But once again he returned in less than a minute, explaining that the flashlight was too weak, and he still couldn't see the barn. "You don't need to see the barn," responded his mother. "You know the general direction, just walk to the end of the light."

Sometimes it is enough to have a basic sense of direction, a clear purpose with intentional outcomes and a willingness to begin the journey in order to learn the steps that are not yet apparent. That's where I think we as a church are right now, heading out with the flashlight. We know the general direction, but we don't know how long it will take to get there and the destination may seem hidden.

This story is told in many ways in our Hebrew scriptures, most notably in the story of the Israelites wandering through the wilderness. The journey was not a straight path. On some days they followed a clear sign in a pillar of fire and other days they were so lost they had to pitch a tent and wait.

Or the story in the Christian Scriptures, where two people walked with a stranger on the road to Emmaus. It was only later in the breaking of bread that they realized it was their beloved teacher. They said: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road?" They knew this stranger spoke words of wisdom, but they were not immediately sure what it meant. It took some time to discern the implication of the stranger's presence.

So, we carry our flashlight, shining it into the darkness, discerning the way and walking in trust and faith that God who began a good thing in this church will continue to do so in the days ahead.

—Paula Northwood

Note: The opening story is adapted from *Quietly Courageous: Leading the Church in a Changing World* by Gil Rendle