

A Word From the Executive Director



March 2026: Honoring Our Roots, Navigating Our Future

"Change is inevitable. Growth is optional." — John C. Maxwell

Dear friends and family of Third Way Center,

Happy March!

March is traditionally a month of transition—a bridge between the quiet endurance of winter and the inevitable renewal of spring. For Third Way Center, this transition feels particularly profound. As we navigate the complex landscape of 2026, we find ourselves balancing the weight of our history with the urgent demands of our present.

Honoring a Legacy

This month, we continue to hold space for the loss of our founder, Dr. Hildegard Messenbaugh. Her vision was the bedrock upon which this organization was built, and her absence is felt in every hallway and every decision. However, the best way to honor a pioneer is not merely to mourn, but to carry their torch forward. We remember her commitment to the "impossible" cases and her unwavering belief that every individual deserves a chance. That spirit remains our guiding light.

Navigating the "Tidal Wave"

We must be candid about the current climate. We are operating in a “yet to be determined” phase. Across the state, we are seeing a challenging paradox:

- **Escalating Trends:** The complexity of our clientele's needs - driven by a mental health crisis, an ‘always on’ digital environment, biological predisposition,

economic instability, and a fragmented support system.

- **Diminishing Resources:** State-level budget cuts and shifting federal priorities mean we are being asked to do more with less.
- **Increasing Administrative Burden:** Our therapists, mental health counselors, and administrative staff are spending significantly more time managing the continuously changing system requirements and oversight.

We are continually adapting our system and streamlining internal processes to maximize our direct impact. However, the transition of funding allocation to Regional Accountability Entities (RAEs) has created a significant ongoing challenge. This shift has increased bureaucracy, caused communication gaps with state departments, and led to constant changes in regulations, requiring unique forms, processes, and timelines for each distinct system.

A Month of Collective Resilience

As we navigate organizational change and the loss of our founder, we find strength in shared community rituals. March 2026 uniquely aligns many global traditions on **reflection, resilience, and renewal**. Here is a brief guide to spiritual and cultural observances:

- **Ramadan (continues through March 19):** A sacred period of fasting, prayer, and community for our Muslim colleagues and clients. We are mindful of those who are fasting from dawn to sunset while working or receiving care.
- **Lent (begins February 26 and continues through April 9):** A 40-day period of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving for many Christians, leading up to Easter.
- **Purim (March 2–3):** A Jewish holiday that celebrates the victory of courage and resilience over adversity—a powerful message that aligns with our mission.
- **Holi (March 4):** The Hindu "Festival of Colors," celebrating the welcoming of spring and the triumph of good over evil.
- **Eid al-Fitr (starts evening of March 19):** This joyous "Festival of Breaking the Fast" marks the conclusion of Ramadan.
- **Nowruz (March 20):** The Persian New Year, which coincides with the Spring Equinox and focuses on nature's rebirth and new beginnings.
- **Holy Week (begins March 29):** For our Christian community, this week, starting with Palm Sunday, is a time of deep spiritual reflection.

In addition, March reminds us to recognize **Women's History Month**, with its theme "*Leading the Change.*" We celebrate the legacy of Hildegard and the many women on our team who lead with empathy and courage, in a turbulent time, and always towards sustainability. Simultaneously, **Developmental Disability Awareness Month** and its theme "*Nothing About Us Without Us*" reinforce our belief that every individual has a voice and is treated with compassion and respect.

Our Path Forward: In a climate of systemic shifts and financial constraints, the upcoming holidays serve as a powerful reminder that the human spirit consistently finds ways to celebrate renewal, even amidst adversity. We have weathered significant hardships over the years, enduring periods where survival seemed uncertain. Struggle is, in fact, one of our greatest strengths—it is what has historically united us and made us more resilient.

Our core focus remains squarely on the needs of our youth. Hildegard exemplified this unwavering focus; she possessed a unique ability to see past immediate chaos and was not easily diverted. Her early life experiences - being displaced, homeless, having to beg for food, and surviving a camp - seemed to have prepared her for working with the most challenging populations. She had an extraordinary capacity to recognize resilience in others.

She often recounted how her two grandmothers (despite their personal disagreements) protected her at all costs, emphasizing how the adults in her life made her their priority. It took her many years to speak openly about the Holocaust, a topic she long avoided. Third Way was often described by her as her personal form of "Justice."

With Appreciation and Gratitude,

Renee