

Dear friends,

My name is Gwendolen Jackson and I am working on a PhD in Theology at Duquesne. My research is on the intersection between craft, church, and the life of faith in Appalachia. I started exploring this topic because I noticed in my own home church in Wheeling, West Virginia, that people on work on handcrafts all the time during odd moments, and when important occasions come up such as holidays, weddings, or births, these handcrafts are often given away as a heartfelt gift (such as a wedding quilt or a baby blanket).

I also noticed that in other locations where I've lived, the making and giving of handmade gifts is not nearly so widespread. Although this is a generalization, in those places, leisure time is used for relaxation or socializing more than for working on projects, and storebought gifts are a fine expression of affection.

My research questions are about why the making and giving of handmade items is so common in Appalachia generally and in churches in particular. It seems that these crafts are an expression of the personality and creativity of the maker, and giving them as gifts is a way to show love from person to person. But why are so many churchgoers also handcrafters? Is the making of handcrafts spiritual in some way?

If you are from Appalachia*, identify as a Christian, and have practiced a handcraft of any kind for at least a few years, I invite you to participate in an interview for my research project. Interviews will take 30 to 60 minutes and will cover questions about where you go/went to church; what you think about the Bible, your community, and yourself in relation to God; what kind of craft you practice; and what insights it gives you about life, faith, or God. I would also love to take pictures of whatever handcrafts you may be willing to show me.

Handcrafts can be anything—I'm sure things I haven't even thought of! But here are a few examples:

- Quilting
- Woodwork
- Knitting/Crochet
- Sewing
- Canning
- Baking
- Furniture Restoration

If you are willing to be interviewed, please contact me by phone or email and I will schedule an in-person or Zoom meeting at your convenience. Prior to that meeting, I will send you a consent form to sign that describes interview procedures, how your confidentiality will be maintained, and what to do if you decide you no longer want to participate.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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* Appalachia is a wide and varied region. If you aren't sure whether a certain location is considered to lie within it, here is a link for the map drawn up by the Appalachian Regional Commission:

<https://www.arc.gov/appalachian-counties-served-by-arc/>