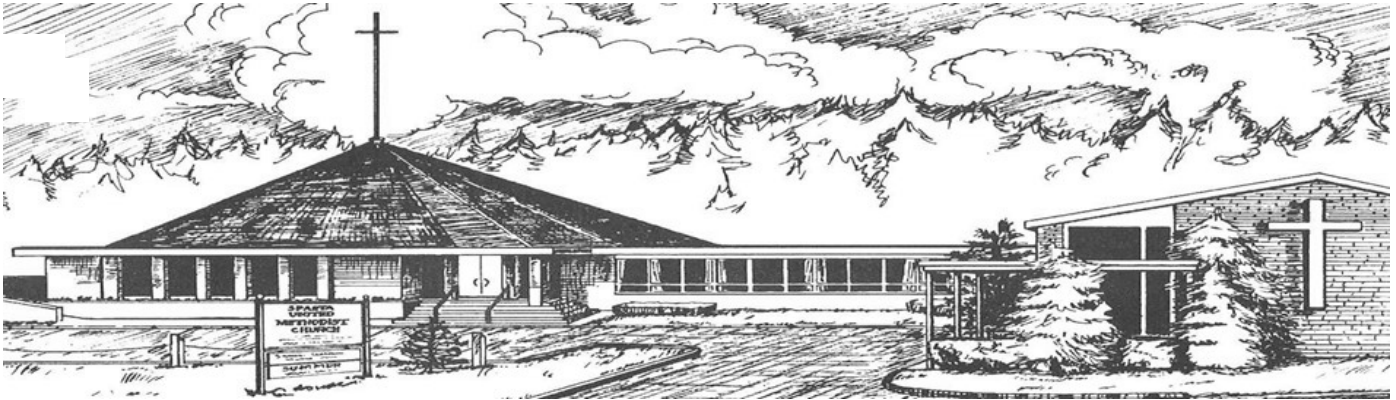


# SPARTA

## UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



## NEWSLETTER

### December 2023/January 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It's beginning to look a lot like ..... Chaos! Do you feel that way as you look ahead to the celebration of Christmas? I certainly do. I looked at my calendar and realize that from November 30<sup>th</sup> through December 26<sup>th</sup>, I don't have a single day without a commitment somewhere or at some time. That doesn't mean that there isn't any downtime, but with each day's "downtime" there is also preparation that needs to be done for some future event such as worship or sermon preparation, study group reading and planning, looking ahead to what's coming in January and the coming of Lent (yes pastors look that far ahead), Christmas shopping and at least some modest decorating, and a variety of Christmas events that I will attend in both the Sparta church and in Milton with my wife's congregation. This isn't new or a surprise. I've been doing this for more than 46 years. That's why it seems like chaos.

However, what has kept my sanity and my ability to deal with this is that in the midst of the chaos is the true meaning of Christmas. While we like to call it Jesus' birthday, that in my mind trivializes the essence of the story of the Nativity which is a celebration of the Incarnation, God becoming flesh and coming among the people. A birthday celebration makes sense to children and is helpful to them, but this is a season to embrace the radical and unprecedented meaning of God choosing to be one of us in the person of Jesus who has shown us how to live with peace and love for one another. Four words are often associated with the season of Advent, the preparation period before Christmas. They are peace, hope, love, and joy. In the midst of what is for many people a chaotic time, we are reminded that the peace of Christ is what settles our spirits and equips us to find the hope, love and joy in life, not just in the Christmas season.

Perhaps the church knew what it was doing when the season of Advent was first practiced. Life is and has been chaotic and stressful. But God's presence in Jesus Christ is the answer to our human dilemma of experiencing peace in the midst of the chaos, hope in the midst of despair, love in the midst of indifference and hatred, and joy in the midst of sorrow. That's why we need Christmas – to welcome the One who brings us life once again in our hearts.

In Christ,

Steve

# Advent and Holiday Worship Schedule

## Advent Worship Schedule

**December 3, 10, 17, and 24** – Advent Worship each Sunday at 8:45 and 10:30.

**December 6, 13, and 20** – Contemplative Worship at 12:15 p.m. in the Sanctuary  
A 30 minute time of quiet reflection and prayer in the middle of this busy  
and sometimes chaotic season

**Wednesday, December 20<sup>th</sup>** – Blue Christmas Indoor Labyrinth Walk in the  
Narthex – a time to connect with the hope and promise of the season. The  
Labyrinth will be available from 4:00 p.m. through until 8:00 p.m. Come when  
you can, journey through the labyrinth, and stay for as long as you would like.

**December 24<sup>th</sup>** – Christmas Eve Services

### **4:30 p.m. Family Service**

featuring carols, bell choir, candlelighting and  
A Christmas Story – Max Lucado's The Crippled Lamb

### **9:30 p.m. – Candlelight Communion**

Featuring carols, Choir, Special music, Communion and candlelighting  
Message for Christmas Eve: And the Angels Sang



# Altar Flowers

## Say it with Flowers!

Do you want to let someone know they are special? Do you have an important occasion to remember? You can acknowledge that special someone, or special occasion, with a gift of altar flowers.

The 2023 calendar is full. We are now taking reservations for 2024. The following dates are available: January 21, 28, February 4, 11, 18, 25, March 3, 10, 17, and 24.

Altar flowers cost \$30. We keep costs low by reusing containers and vases. Please pay the church directly and include a note that the funds are for Altar Flowers and the date.

When requesting flowers please provide your name, phone number, email address and dedication. Let us know if you plan to take the flowers after the 10:30 service, or if you want them delivered to someone needing a pick-me-up.

Use this [link](#) to reserve your flowers.

Any questions? Contact Yvonne Roux, [yrouxrings@gmail.com](mailto:yrouxrings@gmail.com), or 973-534-6129.

# Christmas Extravaganza

## **Christmas Extravaganza**

Friday, December 8, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.

Demarest Hall

An evening of music, fun, food and fellowship in

Celebration of Christmas

All are invited - all ages - bring your neighbors, friends and family.

# Rise Against Hunger

Rise Against Hunger Food Packing Event  
Saturday, February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024 from 10:00 – 12:00  
Demarest Hall  
Sparta UMC

**What is it:** In a two hour period, 35 to 50 volunteers will gather to pack 10,000 meals that are sent throughout the world to feed hungry people.

**What do I need to bring:** Yourself. We are asking persons to register for the event and make a donation towards the cost of the meals and shipping expenses. However, this should not stand in the way of anyone participating in the event. *Rise Against Hunger* brings the meal components, vacuum sealed bags, boxes, music, motivation, and lovely hair nets!

**Who can participate:** People of all ages and abilities. There are a number of steps in the packing process, from measuring the amount of rice, beans, nutrients, etc. for each bag, weighing and sealing the bags, packing them in shipping crates, cheerleading, you name it. Generally this is an event for children and adults ages 5 and up.

**Can I invite my friends to participate:** Absolutely. We want to make this a community event.

**How can I register:** On-line registration will be up and running immediately after the New Year (let's get through the Christmas rush). You will also have an opportunity to register during coffee hour on Sundays.



# UWF

## Book Group

The next meeting of the Women of Faith Book Study will be Wednesday, December 13 at 10am on zoom. We will be choosing books for 2024, from the United Women of Faith Book Program Catalog. We also sometimes select a book that is not in the catalog.

The catalog is found at <https://uwfaith.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/ReadingProgramCatalog2024.pdf>

Check this website out and come to the meeting with all of your suggestions.

The date of the January's meeting will be Wednesday, January 10, 2024 on zoom. It's bound to be a good group discussing good books, Join us.

## Healthier Living Is a Lively Group

Healthier Living is a group that discusses pertinent books to how to live a healthy life in all dimensions---physical. mental, spiritual. Our topics have covered a range of books in those areas, plus our own wisdom.

We meet each Tuesday at 10 am on zoom.

*Merry  
Christmas*

Don't follow the path. Go where there is no path and begin the trail. ---Ruby Bridges

# Christmas Angel Tree



SUMC is requesting your help to put a smile on the faces of children this Christmas. You can sign up using this link:

[Sparta UMC: Christmas Angel Tree. Please return your wrapped and labeled gifts to the church by Sunday, December 10 \(signupgenius.com\)](http://Sparta UMC: Christmas Angel Tree. Please return your wrapped and labeled gifts to the church by Sunday, December 10 (signupgenius.com))

Names and requests will be added to this list as we get them so please check back if you don't see something you'd like to buy.

Gifts, are due back at the church by Sunday, December 10, wrapped and labeled with the family's name.

Thank you for making Christmas a happy memory for a child.

## Poinsettia Order Form

**The deadline to order is Sunday, December 3rd.** Cost is \$10.00 per plant. Please make your check payable to the church and indicate "Poinsettias" in the memo section. Please complete the form below and place it in the offering plate along with your payment, or mail the completed form with your payment to the church office.

**Thank you for helping us celebrate the birth of our Lord! Donors may choose to take their plants home after the Christmas Eve or leave them to grace our sanctuary.**

**NAME(S) OF DONOR(S)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please do not leave this line blank!** Name(s) will appear in bulletin exactly as printed above.)

Red	White	Pink	CIRCLE ONE	Dedication (please print clearly)
			In honor of In memory of In celebration of	
			In honor of In memory of In celebration of	
			In honor of In memory of In celebration of	
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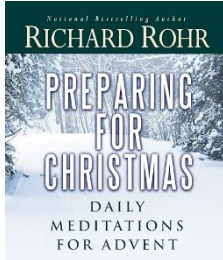
## **SMALL GROUP OPPORTUNITIES**

***For all Zoom Gatherings, you may use either the Video Link or the Phone in # with ID #***

### **BEYOND THE BASICS - (ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL)**

Sunday Mornings at 9:30 a.m.

Join us in Room 8 **OR** contact Bud by Saturday night to set up a Zoom link



### **MONDAY NIGHT ADVENT STUDY**

Monday evenings at 7:00 p.m. via ZOOM – December 4, 11, 18

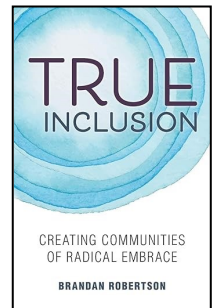
**Zoom link:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/771970415?pwd=bFdUQk9YQUlyZXRhYUZnNVhRVEZvUT09>

Richard Rohr's *Preparing for Christmas* available on Amazon in either paperback or Kindle editions

**January Special Study and Time of Conversation:** Two Thursday Evenings, January 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> hybrid in person and via ZOOM -

**True Inclusion: Creating Communities of Radical Embrace** – a book by Brandon Robertson that explores how we take the next steps in being open and inclusive to all people, to embrace fully how we can live into being a church for all people where all means all.

**Zoom link:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83672145778?pwd=b2RvZi9kZlVWIDBjhrTS84Rks0QT09>



### **HEALTHIER LIVING GROUP**

Every TUESDAY Morning at 10:00 a.m. Join Zoom Meeting

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85294018790?pwd=bScXqgjh6RICDFWN93II6\\_aMcguqx.F.I](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85294018790?pwd=bScXqgjh6RICDFWN93II6_aMcguqx.F.I)

Meeting ID: 852 9401 8790 Passcode: 389789

One tap mobile +16465588656,,85294018790#

Dial by your location +1 646 558 8656 Meeting ID: 852 9401 8790

### **UMW BOOK GROUP-**

THE 2<sup>ND</sup> WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH IS UMW BOOK GROUP

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89033468706?pwd=M3FYTHZPcm55Sm1jdGIRckRXtjgrQT09>

Meeting ID: 890 3346 8706 Passcode: 681008 -- One tap mobile +13017158592,,89033468706#

Dial by your location: 1 301 715 8592, Meeting ID: 890 3346 8706

### **WEDNESDAY MORNING MEN'S STUDY**

Wednesday Mornings at 7:15 a.m.

Angelo's Franklin Diner

### **READING TOGETHER/BIBLE STUDY**

Friday's at 10:00 a.m. Simon Peter: Flawed But Faithful Disciple

Book by Adam Hamilton

Join Zoom Video Meeting: <https://zoom.us/j/389284226>

Alternate Phone in #: +1 646 876 9923; Meeting ID: 389 284 226 -- Passcode: 7773

### **SATURDAY PRAYERS & CONVERSATION GATHERING**

Join a ZOOM gathering on Saturday mornings at 10:30 a.m. just to touch base and connect with others from the congregation just to check in and share with each other. Join Zoom Video Meeting: <https://zoom.us/j/826747498> Phone in #: +1 646 876 9923;

Meeting ID: 826 747 498 Passcode: 7773

# SPARTA

## UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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spartaumc.org

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### Thrift Shop

973-729-9121

Wednesday 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Thursday 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Friday 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Saturday 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

