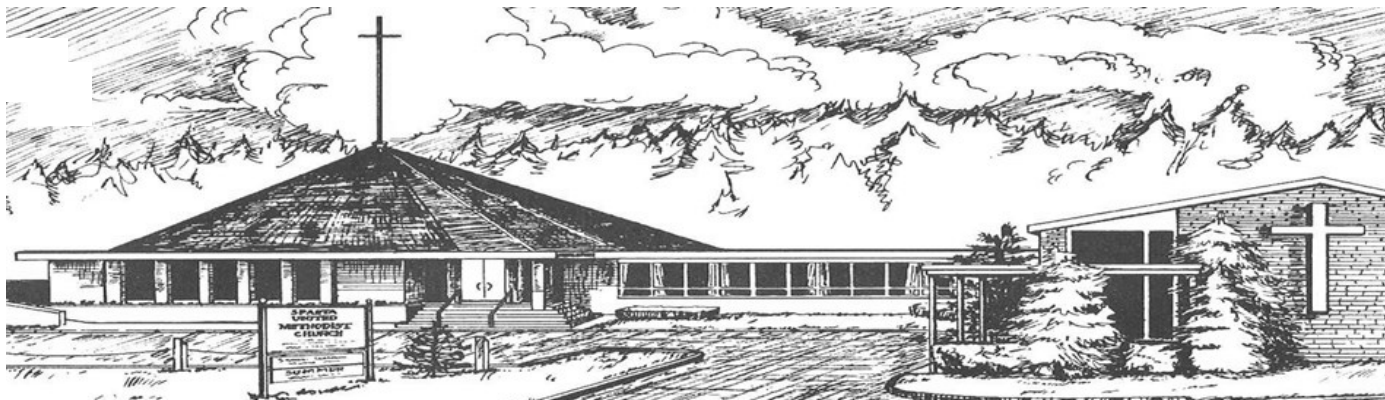


SPARTA

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



NEWSLETTER

March 2024

Dear Friends in Christ,

Last month, we looked at the value of elements of worship that we often take for granted and don't even think about as a part of the service – elements such as preludes and postludes and the visuals of worship. This month, I would like to reflect on some of the other parts of the worship service that are meant to help us reflect and grow in our faith: scriptures and the message. These two parts of the service are often seen as the central focus, but they are really only effective when they are woven in with other parts of the worship.

The pivot point of the worship service almost always begins with the scripture reading for that Sunday. In the Sparta United Methodist Church, the two Sunday services actually use different scriptures. The early service is based on the Revised Common Lectionary, a three-year cycle of scriptures that is used across various denominations of Christianity. What that means is that on any given Sunday, we are reading and reflecting on the same scripture that Christians around the world are hearing in their churches. The second service centers on Scriptures that come together around a theme or a season such as Lent or Advent. The scriptures are a revealing of God's interaction and revelation to the community of faith both in ancient times and in our present day. When we refer to this as the word of God, it is a revealing of the love and grace that is constantly being given to us. Like a loving parent guiding his or her children, the scriptures are an expression of God's love for us. From one of the themes of the scriptures, the message or sermon is then built, seeking to bring understanding, interpretation, and relevance to our contemporary community of faith. Sometimes the message seeks to address the entire scripture, sometimes just a phrase or single sentence. The message is often percolating for weeks before actually being fully developed. The purpose, however, is not to convince or argue a point, but to get the listeners to reflect and think for themselves and the goal is to challenge us to do or think something in response to the scripture.

Sometimes we worship without a spoken message or sermon, such as in our contemplative services, there is still a message that comes to us in our own thoughts and minds. This is where we listen for God's word to us in a still small voice. This means that each participant is developing their own message in their hearts and minds, yet it is still meaningful worship. Prayers, hymns and songs utilize other means to connect our whole selves to the themes that emerge from the scriptures.

While the message and scripture take up a great deal of the time that we are in worship, it is important to remember that these are only a part of an experience of giving ourselves to God in an attitude of gratitude for all the gifts we have been given, which is the fundamental meaning of worship. Understanding what worship is about is important as it helps us to more fully connect our hearts to the heart of God.

In Christ,

Steve

Worship Information for Lent

Special Worship in March for Lent:

Contemplative Worship for Lent

Wednesday, March 6, 13, 20, and 27 at 12:15 p.m.

In the Sanctuary

Sunday, March 10th – UMCOR Sunday during worship

8:45 and 10:30 a.m.

Sunday, March 24th – Palm Sunday Worship

8:45 and 10:30 a.m.

Thursday, March 28th – Maundy Thursday Communion

7:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary

Friday, March 29th – Good Friday Tenebrae Service

7:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary

Sunday, March 31st – Easter Sunday Celebration!

8:45 and 10:30 a.m.

With Special Music



Altar Flowers

Altar flowers are a way to acknowledge someone special or highlight an important occasion. Many thanks to all who have requested altar flowers. The flower calendar is full through April. Requests are now being taken for May 5th, 12th, 19th and 26th, as well as June 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd and 30th.

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 chosen.

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, or 973-534-6129.

-

PFLAG Meeting



PFLAG MEETING ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20TH AT 7 P.M.
IN DEMAREST HALL

ALL ARE WELCOME!

The next Sussex PFLAG meeting is Wednesday, March 20th, at 7pm in Demarest Hall at SUMC. The guest speaker will be Mary Ann Horton, an early transgender advocate, talking about her experiences transitioning in the early 90s as a star programmer at Lucent Technologies. Sussex County PFLAG will be holding a discussion on Transgender Equality in Corporate America and sharing her experiences and stories from her book, *Trailblazer*. A blurb from the book:

"To have invented the email attachment is one thing. To have done so while transitioning from male to female and paving the way for Trans rights in the workplace is quite another. Trailblazer is a brave and powerful memoir that is both touching and thought-provoking and absolutely worth the read for those who care about equality."

Participants under the age of sixteen must be accompanied by a parent.

Easter Flowers

EASTER FLOWER ORDER FORM

Please join the Worship Committee in decorating the sanctuary with flowers for Easter.

Order forms and payments must be received by Sunday, March 10, 2024.

Cost is \$10.00 per plant. Please make your check payable to Sparta UMC and indicate "Easter Flowers" in the memo section. Place completed form and payment in the offering plate, or mail form and payment to the church office.

Thank you for helping us celebrate the resurrection of our Lord! Donors may choose to take their plants home after the 10:30 a.m. service on Easter or leave them to grace our sanctuary.

NAME(S) OF DONOR(S) _____
 (Please note: Name(s) will appear in bulletin exactly as printed above.)

Lily	Hyacinth	Daffodil	Tulip	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	
				In honor of In memory of In celebration of	
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				In honor of In memory of In celebration of	

Missions Committee

From Missions Committee: We are kicking off a collection to make 100 Hygiene kits for United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) today. They have very specific materials because they are shipped all over the world. Please sign up using Sign Up genius and leave your items in the bin in the narthex. If you have trouble using Sign up Genius, please ask Pat Schutz for help. Always remember that when using Sign up Genius, you need to fill out your name and email address, and then hit **SAVE**. You may have to scroll down a bit to see it. You will get a confirmation email. If that doesn't arrive in your in-box, you are not signed up. If you are purchasing 5 items, you will need to enter your name 5 times. I have signed up so you can follow my example.

Kits will be assembled on **April 21** after church. Put it on your calendar now and plan to stay to help! We hope you can be part of this ministry.

Sign-up Genius link: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/60B0D4EAAAE23A3FD0-47963395-umcor>

Hygiene kit materials (for 100 kits):

- 100 hand towels (15 x 25 –17 x 27 inches) - No kitchen, cleaning, or microfiber towels
- 100 washcloths - No kitchen, cleaning, or microfiber towels
- 100 combs - Must be sturdy with at least 6 inches of teeth No pocket combs or picks Rattail and combs without handles are acceptable but must have at least 6 inches of teeth
- 100 toenail or fingernail clipper - No emery boards or metal nail files
- 100 Bath-size soap (3 oz. bar or larger) No Ivory or Jergen's soap. Do not remove from packaging
- 100 adult toothbrush - Do not remove from packaging, Personal advertising not acceptable
- 1000 adhesive bandages (¾ by 3 inches) - Common household bandages acceptable
- 100 one-gallon size re-sealable bags

FEED THE BODY—FEED THE SOUL

Do you know that Sparta UMC provides a lunch and a \$20 grocery gift card to an average of 170 people experiencing food insecurity every month? We also offer communion, prayers, and a smile. We do this with profits from our Church Mouse Thrift Shop and your help!

Feed the Body/Feed the Soul takes place this week and requires no experience. In addition to helping others, you will get to know members of the church better. It's also a great way to involve your children in helping others. It's a win/win!

Here is the link to sign up:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/60B0D4EAAAE23A3FD0-48262553-feed>

If you have questions, please see or text Pat Schutz at 201-230-5504

Church & Society



**The Church and Society Committee
of the Sparta United Methodist Church
Pursuing Peace; Seeking Justice; Living Faith**

UNITED METHODISTS “MARCH” ON WASHINGTON

United Methodists from Sparta, Denville, Hackettstown, and Belvidere



For the past two years, United Methodist Churches, as well as members from other denominations in Sussex, Morris, and Warren counties and surrounding areas, have joined together to examine the threat of food insecurity and the ties to racism. For this purpose, representatives from Denville Community Church (UMC), Trinity UMC (Hackettstown), and Sparta UMC worked together to receive a grant from the Greater New Jersey Conference. The grant has been used to advance understanding of the issues, as well as to develop a plan for advocacy. As part of the advocacy initiative, members of four UMC churches (Sparta, Denville, Trinity Hackettstown, and Belvidere) traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with the staffs of Senator Menendez, Representative Tom Kean, and Representative Mikkie Sherrill. The substance of the meetings focused on stressing the urgency of the need for the continued support of programs such as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and WIC (the nutritional needs of low-income women, infants, and children), and the expansion of the Child Tax Credit. All of these programs have proven to nourish young children, as well as raise their living conditions above the poverty line.

The united work of these churches will continue beyond the benefits of the grant. If you would like more information, see Sandy Svenningsen, Marilyn Giordano, or any member of the Church and Society committee. Anyone is welcome to join us at any time.

Church & Society

Faith In Action

Call for an Immediate Ceasefire and Humanitarian Access in Gaza

“We cannot stand by as though God is not weeping when the innocent, including children, are dying. We cannot abandon the way of peace.” said the Council of Bishops.

The UMC Council of Bishops, The UMC General Board of Church and Society, as well as the United Methodist Federation for Social Action, condemned the ongoing violence in Gaza and have **called for prayer and action.**

We, the members of the Church and Society Committee, are heartbroken by the ongoing violence in Israel and in Gaza, as well as in the West Bank, Palestine. We condemn Hamas’ attacks and inhumane treatment of hostages and call for their immediate release. We also condemn the indiscriminate and violent Israeli bombing of Gaza that has resulted in 28,000 dead, 68,000 missing, and 1.7 million displaced. What is truly sad is that the killing is carried out with US supplied bombs; Congress gives Israel \$3.8 B annually in military aid and just promised it an additional \$14B.

The Church and Society Committee sent a letter to Senator Cory Booker, Congressman Josh Gottheimer, and Congressman Tom Kean on December 5, 2023 urging them to oppose all weapons shipments to Israel until a permanent ceasefire is in place.

Hospitals, universities, churches, mosques, homes are demolished. According to the U.N., Gaza is “uninhabitable.” The World Food Program warned that 93% of displaced Palestinian households lack adequate food; some are forced to eat grass.

Displaced by bombing, Gazans were told by the Israeli army to move south toward Rafah, next to the Egyptian border, for safety. 1.4 million people are now trapped in Rafah with barely any food, water, power, or access to medicine. In addition, they are now told by the Israeli army to leave Rafah because Rafah will be bombed. The Egyptian government refuses to allow them in. They have nowhere to go.

There is something each one of us can do:

We can pray that President Biden and Congress will say NO to sending any more weapons to Israel until Israel withdraws from Gaza.

We can call Senator Booker (202) 224-3224 and Representative Josh Gottheimer (202) 225-4465 (5th CD), or Representative Tom Kean (202) 225-5361 (7th CD) **to ask them to support a permanent ceasefire, vote against sending more weapons to Israel, permit humanitarian aid into Gaza, and secure the release of hostages.**

Church & Society

Guantanamo Bay Twenty-Two Years Later

The military prison at Guantanamo Bay opened over twenty-two years ago with the primary purpose of confining suspects who engaged in the terrorist attacks on 9/11. Thirty men continue to be held who have never been charged or brought to formal trial, while US citizens continue to pay more than half a billion dollars a year to house them. Both President Bush and President Obama agreed that Guantanamo should be closed, yet the prison remains open. Probably more egregious than the cost is the fact that this continued imprisonment without any due process flies in the face of American ideals. These men are not Americans, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't uphold our values by following the rule of law and our commonly held moral principle of treating all people fairly and humanely, regardless of their place of birth. The twenty-second anniversary of their imprisonment prompted more than one hundred human rights, religious, and advocacy organizations, including the September Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, to call upon President Biden to finally close the facility.

ENVIRONMENTAL CORNER

Tennessee Gas Pipeline Compressor - For several years a gas compressor expansion of the Tennessee Gas Pipeline has been proposed in Wantage NJ. These gas compressors along the route of a pipeline, at first glance, seem harmless. But one of the things that these large compression stations do is periodically blowdown fumes. These events are as loud as a jet engine and release a toxic plume of cancer causing gases. In addition, these facilities have exploded causing wildfires, or caused sinkholes and mudslides impacting drinking water.

Construction of the gas compressor in Wantage has already started and the Tennessee gas company called the work "routine." But three environmental groups — Food and Water Watch, the Sierra Club, and the New Jersey Highlands Coalition — responded with a lawsuit, arguing that the expansion project was anything but "routine." And a pause on the work is currently in place. To find out more follow this link: <https://www.nj.com/passaic-county/2023/09/controversial-nj-gas-pipeline-project-in-question-after-court-victory-for-environmentalists.html>

Church Mouse



VISIT THE CHURCH MOUSE!

Don't forget to stop in and check out the latest bargains at the Mouse!

March 20th – 23rd: EVERYTHING IN THE SHOP IS 50% OFF, EXCLUDING EASTER ITEMS

MARCH 27TH – 30th: ALL EASTER ITEMS ARE 50% OFF

SHOP HOURS: WED & SAT: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Thurs & Fri: 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

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. in Room 8

MONDAY NIGHT

Monday evenings at 7:00 p.m. via ZOOM

The Monday Night Group will be reading Howard Thurman's "Jesus and the Disinherited" through the month of February in recognition of Black History Month. Thurman was an acclaimed theologian at Boston University School of Theology and an influential teacher for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. For February 5, we will read the preface and the first chapter.

All are welcome to join for this book discussion held on ZOOM from 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

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

Even if you can't come each week, please feel free to join whenever you can. If you need help finding the book, please see Pastor Steve

HEALTHIER LIVING GROUP

PLEASE NOTE NEW TIME!! Every TUESDAY Morning at 10:30 a.m. Join Zoom Meeting

https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85294018790?pwd=bScXqgjh6RICDFWN93I16_aMcguqxFL

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 2ND WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH IS UMW BOOK GROUP

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89033468706?pwd=M3FYTHZPcm55SmIjdGIRckRXTjgrQT09>

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. If God Is Love Don't Be a Jerk

Book by John Pavlovitz

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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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.

Happy
Easter