

Fully Seen, Fully Embraced: Our Historic 2024 Wedding at SUMC

By Jill C. Reynolds

The history of any sacred space is typically measured in decades, in the weathering of its stone, or the generations that have passed through its doors. But history can also be made in a single, electric hour—in the joyful exchange of promises that change the fabric of a community forever. In September 2024, when Sue and I were married at the Sparta United Methodist Church (SUMC), the air wasn't just filled with the traditional solemnity of a wedding; it was buzzing with pure, unfiltered excitement. We were moving into our future together, and in doing so, we became the very first same gender couple to be married within its walls.

When Sue and I first started attending SUMC in 2021, we fell deeply in love with the community, but we still carried a heavy, familiar worry. For over half a century, the United Methodist Church had maintained strict bans on same gender ceremonies, declaring the practice "incompatible with Christian teaching." While civil law recognized our right to wed, church law still tied the hands of our clergy. We genuinely feared that we would not be permitted to marry in our own sanctuary by our own pastor.

But history was about to catch up with our hearts. In May 2024, the United Methodist General Conference overwhelmingly voted to overturn those decades-old bans, finally scrubbing the restrictive language from the *Book of Discipline* and giving pastors the freedom to perform same gender marriages. With our wedding planned for that September, we were cutting it incredibly close. We were moving lockstep with history itself, stepping through a door that the global church had only just swung open a few months prior.

Our journey to that altar, however, had been decades in the making. Sue and I had met in 1989 and had been together since 2006—building a life and a home, raising two children, navigating health crises, and nurturing a love that anchored us through a rapidly changing world. For the longest time, the law of

the land didn't recognize what we already knew in our hearts. It wasn't even legally possible for us to marry until the federal ruling in 2015, at which point we had already been a committed couple for nine years. Imagine that: living nearly a decade of your life completely devoted to someone, but legally barred from marrying them.

Now, on our wedding day, what made the room feel so profoundly sacred was the presence of some of the very people who had fought tirelessly for this moment. Seated among our guests were dedicated church members who had been on the front lines for years—advocating, praying, and championing the change in verbiage within the Book of Discipline so SUMC could truly become a reconciling congregation. Having them there wasn't just an honor; it was a triumphant, full-circle victory. The rights they had championed, and the deep anxieties we had carried since 2021, were being beautifully resolved right before our eyes.

Looking out at the sea of beaming faces—our friends, family, and the fierce allies who had paved the way—the excitement in the sanctuary was contagious. There were tears, yes, but there was also roaring applause and an undeniable sense of shared triumph. To love someone openly is a gift; to be fully seen, fully embraced, and celebrated by your faith community with such unbridled joy is nothing short of revolutionary.

Being "the first" comes with a unique kind of gravitas, carrying the unspoken hopes of everyone who came before. But as Sue and I smiled at each other and exchanged our vows, the historical weight melted into the sheer thrill of two people promising to navigate life side-by-side. Our wedding day at SUMC remains a milestone, standing as a vibrant testament to what happens when a congregation chooses to open its doors wide enough to let history—and unconditional love—rewrite the very fabric of its story.

To every single one of you who championed equality within the church, we thank you. You didn't just alter church policy; you changed our lives, and you gave us a sanctuary where our love could truly come home.



FATHERS DAY—Remember and Honor

Once again this year, the Sparta United Women in Faith are inviting you to honor the fathers in your lives. In the church bulletin on June 21st we will have a special page listing the fathers you want to recognize.

We are asking that for each name, you donate \$2.00. This money will go to the World Thank Offering of United Methodist Women and be used for mission programs helping women, children, families. Please make out any checks to: Sparta United Women in Faith.

We have two categories: "In Memory of" and "In Honor of". Please fill out the form and put it in an envelope in the United Methodist Women's mail slot or place in the offering plate.

***** PLEASE PRINT *****

Registration Now Open at this link or QR Code

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1VlqEtiEx-VFfIDIC_BwR_4J1BE1zEVxeNiTrtTGs1_o/edit



For Father's Day (please put in United Methodist Women's box by June 14th!)

Submitted by: _____

In Memory of: _____

In Honor of: _____

List names ONLY. Extra words will not be used.

Say it with Flowers!

Acknowledge loved ones or a special occasion with an altar flower arrangement. Reservations are being accepted for July 5 and 12, August 9, 16, 23, 30, or any date in the Fall.

Arrangements cost \$35.00. Please pay the church directly, including a note that the payment is for altar flowers and the specific date requested.

Use this [link](#)* to reserve flowers. We need your name, phone number or email address, and the dedication. Please let us know if you plan to take the flowers after the 10:30 service, or if you want them delivered to someone in need of a pick-me-up. Any questions: Contact Yvonne Roux, yrouxrings@gmail.com, or 973-534-6129.

*bit.ly/4sUELRQ

Scan this QR Code to reserve flowers.



Scan me

Earthkeepers – RENEW

Mark your calendars now to **RENEW! Registration is now open.**

Earthkeepers (a summer camp experience where children will learn all about God's World and Growing in God's Love) will be held the week of **July 27-31** from 9 to Noon.

There will be a "Prayers Around the Peace Pole", Sunday, **July 26**, 7:00, which will include prayers for all our campers, including the adults. All church members, friends, and neighbors are invited to attend.



From Tags To Riches

Our Sparta UWF is supported by Soup and Quiche sales and a new ministry called: **From Tags to Riches.** Jill is turning old/used greeting cards into gift tags! These tags come in an assortment of festive themes. Imagine adorning your gifts with tags featuring delicate butterflies, animals, and flowers for **Father's Day**. Also, **Birthdays** and **Anniversaries** happen all **year long!** Grab a selection of 10 tags for just \$1! Every penny supports the amazing work of United Women in Faith (UWF) at our church. If you are interested in supporting UWF through the purchase of gift tags, please see Sue in the office.

Recycling your old cards is easy! Gather your used cards, pop them in a bag labeled "Jill," and drop the cards off in the Church Secretary mailbox.

Let's upcycle and support UWF together! Thank you.

Donations

When you send your pledge payments via cash, check, or Vanco, if you intend the payment to be split between the Operating Budget and the Capital (Building) Fund, **please indicate how you want it split** on your envelope, check, or Vanco payments.

Sometimes we need to guess, but we don't always get it right. So please tell us.

If you make recurring donations through Vanco and have changed your pledge this year from what it was last year, be sure to make those changes to your account **in Vanco.**

If you look at your Quarterly Statement and think, "That doesn't look right." Please let us know. I might have put the payment in the wrong accounting bucket.



Skyland's District United Women in Faith

Sunday, June 28

Skyland's District UWF will be meeting in our pavilion on Sunday, **June 28** at 2:00 (potluck food) to make some future plans.

If you would like to help us, be part of the Skyland's team, or are just interested, please come to hear more. Input is so important.

Please see one of us if you have questions.

Pat Schutz

Susan Pironti

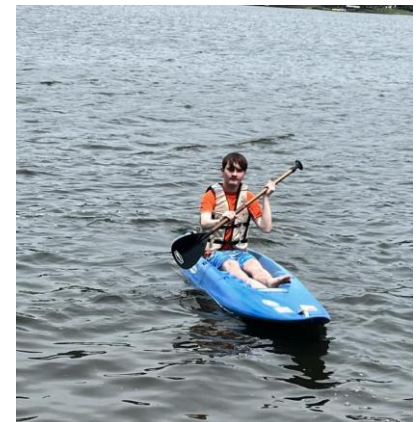
Betty Sayner

Annual Day at the Lake

Saturday, July 11

At the home of Bud and Jean (check with us for address). Saturday, **July 11**, 8 AM (best if you want to learn to water ski) until 5:00 (come and go as you wish).

Hamburgers, hot dogs, and drinks provided, bring a dish to share (optional), a towel, and your beach/camp chair (if you have one). Boat rides, skiing, tubing, swimming, kayaking, stand up paddleboard. Come to have FUN! Invite friends, ages 1-99 years.



BEYOND THE BASICS - (ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL)

Sunday Mornings at 9:30 A.M. in the Wesley Room

MONDAY NIGHT BOOK GROUP

The Book Group meets by ZOOM at 7:00 P.M.

Currently reading *Being Jesus in Nashville* by Jim Palmer.

Feel free to join on any Monday. Zoom Link is:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/771970415?pwd=bFdUQk9YQUlyZXRhYUZhNVhRVEZvUT09>

TUESDAY MORNING HEALTHIER LIVING GROUP

Join Zoom Meeting on Tuesdays at 10 A.M.

https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85294018790?pwd=bScXggjh6RICDFWN93I16_aMcguqx.F.1

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

WEDNESDAY MORNING MEN'S STUDY

Wednesday Mornings at 7:15 A.M. at Angelo's Franklin Diner

FRIDAY MORNING READING TOGETHER/BIBLE STUDY

Fridays, at 10 A.M. *What Paul Really Said About Women: The Apostle's Liberating Views on*

Equality in Marriage, Leadership, and Love by John T. Bristow. Have questions? Need more info?

Please contact Laura Kempson, likempson27@gmail.com. Please come join this hybrid study group in person at the church in the Wesley room at 10 A.M. or via Zoom.: <https://zoom.us/j/389284226>

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

Christian Outreach Project (COP)

June 28 – August 4. Prayers for our COP Team are appreciated. Keep your eyes open for how we can help provide the dinner for the team on Monday night (**June 29**).

Church Mouse Thrift Shop

Last minute Father's Day shopping? All Father's Day Gifts AND everything in the men's Department will be 50% off from **June 17-20th**. **July 1-3** will be 50% off all "4th of July" merchandise. Get ready for "Christmas in July" starting **July 6th**! All Christmas merchandise will be 50% off the rest of the month of July!

We will be suspending new Volunteer training until August due to vacation absences. Applications will be accepted and put on hold until then. Thank you for your understanding.

Starting **June 19th**, the Church Mouse will be having "Freebie Fridays" for June, July, and August. There will be bins of free merchandise at the top of the wheelchair ramp available to everyone. Be advised this is weather permitting! Enjoy!

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61578137110625>

June 14, 2026

Thank you to our Worship Leader this morning:

Pat Schutz

The Altar Flowers are given by:

Kimberly Noel

Happy 17th Birthday, Bree!

Join us for Coffee Hour

Immediately following worship, please join us down the hall in Demarest Hall for light refreshments and beverages. All are welcome!

Sunday School

All children and youth are invited to go to Sunday School immediately after A Time for Young Disciples. Follow the noise.

Uplift and Support

Donna and Clyde Younkin; Kathie Mackey's niece, Sheri Chamberlain; John Young; the Aughenbaugh Family; Kimmy Trevot; Sig Binder; Jill's mom, Tibbie Reynolds; Mike & Debbie LaRose; Brooke; the family of Sally Yellinski; Abbie Wright; Edith VanHousen; Alba Haas; Diane Cironi; Sharon Gordon; Lester Hemphill; Rich Kelley; Linda Giammanco; Janet Hoffer; and Brenda Losey.

Before you place anyone on our prayer list, please make sure you have permission from the person to do so.

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We would like to thank— Pat Harvey, Jen Hutchison, Yvonne Roux, Ruth Fulgenzi, David Foote, Sue Reynolds, Susan Foy, Nathaniel Noel, and all those who help to make Livestream Worship Services possible. **We're always looking for more folks to help with the livestream.** (Especially folks who are not in the bell choir.) Please see Yvonne.  
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