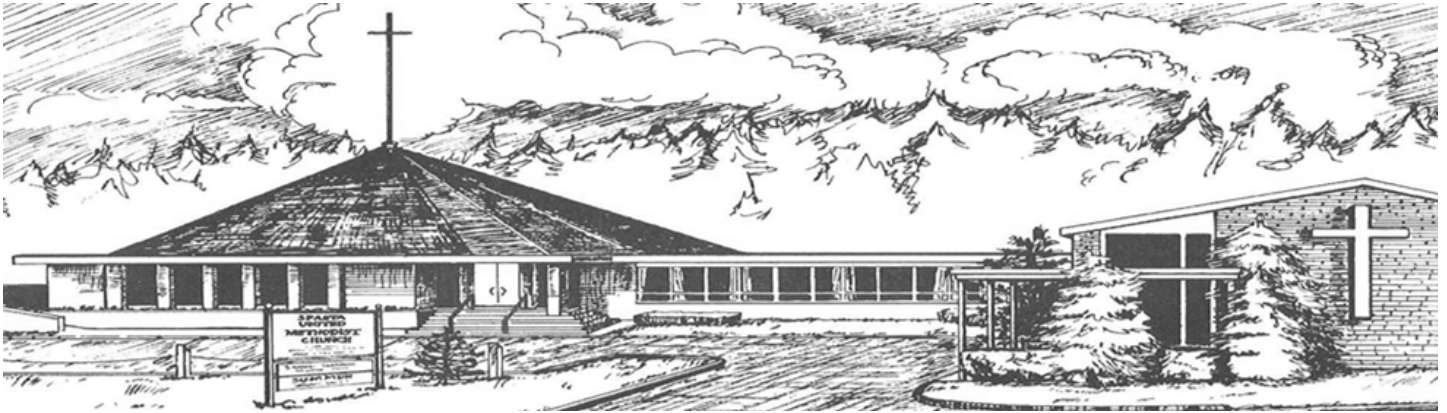


SPARTA

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



NEWSLETTER – September 2026

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I once read an article that posed an interesting question about the Christian journey: are you a tourist or a traveler in the faith? Tourists pick and choose what they want to visit and see, where they want to eat and sleep, and generally make choices based on what is comfortable and convenient for them. A tourist barely scratches the surface of the area or region where they are visiting. A traveler, on the other hand, is one who seeks to learn more, immerse themselves in the experiences and cultures where they visit, and are not only willing, but seek to go off the beaten path and discover new things that might very well be different and even uncomfortable. The traveler digs deeper and therefore has a deeper connection with the community, area, or nation where they are visiting.

The article asked a question that we all need to ask: do we want to be tourists or travelers in our lives as Christians within the church? Jesus calls us to be travelers, committed to the journey, willing to dig deeper, ready to go into places that make us uncomfortable. Travelers have a deep desire to connect with others, even those who are not like them. Travelers have a commitment to strengthen the journey for everyone, and therefore unlike the tourist, they consider the needs of all rather than their own. The traveler knows that the journey is meant to be experienced all along the way, because there is something of value with each step.

As we enter into the fall, there are decisions that we need to be making for our future in the Sparta United Methodist Church. The church of 2026 is not the church of 10 years ago. Our post-COVID life has brought many changes in the culture and the church. What will bring life to the church in the future is to be travelers and not tourists. We all need to be committed to bold initiatives and action, to claim the best of who we are, to reach out to people who are under served and find it difficult to find a spiritual home in other places. We need to commit ourselves to a Disciples' pathway that sees worship as an essential part of bringing the community together, that commits to reaching out to those who need to know that they are accepted and embraced for who they are, that is willing to put ourselves in new places with new ways. Simply said, as travelers for Jesus, we need to be looking forward to where we might go and engage with those we will meet along the way. Jesus doesn't need spectators. Jesus needs us to be bridge builders into the future.

It is a privilege to have journeyed thus far with so many travelers on the journey. I pray that we can not only each commit ourselves to continuing the journey but will invite others to be fellow travelers so that Christ can be glorified in all that we do.

In Christ,
Steve

NEWSLETTER – September 2026

Worship Schedule



Worship Every Sunday at 8:45 and 10:30AM.

The 8:45 service will resume on Sunday, August 30th.

Communion: This traditional worship experience is celebrated each week as a part of the 8:45 service, and at the first Sunday of each month at the 10:30 service.

Contemplative Services are on the first Wednesday of the month at 12:15PM.

Altar Flowers

Celebrate with Flowers!

Acknowledge loved ones or a special occasion with an altar flower arrangement. Reservations are being accepted for September 6, 13, and 27 and October 11, and 25.

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](https://bit.ly/4sUELRO)* 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/4sUELRO

Scan this QR Code to reserve flowers.



Scan me

Picnic

All Church Picnic: Sunday, September 13th following the 10:30 service in the Pavillion. Hot dogs and hamburgers will be provided. Each household is invited to bring a dish to share. A sign-up genius will be sent out for you to sign up.

Publication Deadlines

The deadline for the Newsletter is on the **15th of the month before**.

For the weekly bulletin and announcements, the deadline is the **Wednesday before**.

NEWSLETTER – September 2026

Feed the Body/Feed the Soul

John 13:14-15: Jesus washes His disciple's feet and tells them, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

Each month, Sparta UMC church gives a free bag lunch, a \$20 Shop Rite grocery card, and we serve communion to people in need. On **August 14**, we served **280** families.

The next FTB/FTS is on Friday, September 11. We welcome volunteers to help. Invite your caring friends to help with you. Please click on the Sign up Genius link below to see how you can be of assistance. After you've signed up, you will get a confirmation reminder. <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/60B0D4EAAAE23A3FD0-65135724-feed#>



The Gratitude Box



Focusing on the Positive: The Gratitude Box

Actively focusing on gratitude helps foster a sense of joy, peace, and abundance, even amidst the challenges we all face. When we deliberately seek out and acknowledge our blessings, it can profoundly improve our outlook and well-being.

Please use the provided forms, which are next to The Gratitude Box, to write down what you are grateful for and anonymously place it in the box. Each month, our Admin, Sue, will collect these notes and share them in the SUMC Newsletter, creating a beautiful collective testament to the goodness we share. Start reflecting and writing today!

Or you could e-mail your submissions to

OfficeAdmin@SpartaUMC.org

Here are the three from last month...

I'm + hake
to you.

Such a loving,
caring community.

I am Thankful
for the Daily
Devotion

NEWSLETTER – September 2026

Church Mouse Thrift Shop

71 Sparta Ave.
Sparta, NJ 07871
973-729-9121

Hours:

Wed. & Sat.: 10:00AM - 2:00PM.

Thur. & Fri.: 1:00 - 4:00PM.



Since **June 19th**, the Church Mouse has been 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!



Did you know the Church Mouse Thrift Shop has a Facebook Page? **The Church Mouse Thrift Shop of The Sparta United Methodist Church.**

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

Did you know the Church Mouse has Gift Certificates?

We're always looking for **new volunteers** to help in the thrift shop, especially on **Thursdays and Fridays**.

Semi-Annual Changeover Day

***** **The Church Mouse will be closed Saturday, August 29th.** *****

No donations will be accepted that day.

Extra Hands are needed on Saturday August 29th and Sunday August 30th to pack up summer items and do a deep cleaning before restocking. All ages are welcome starting about noon each of these days.

New LiveStream

Instead of using FaceBook Live we have been using a YouTube account called **Sparta UMC NJ** (the YouTube account called Sparta United Methodist Church NJ is no longer active).

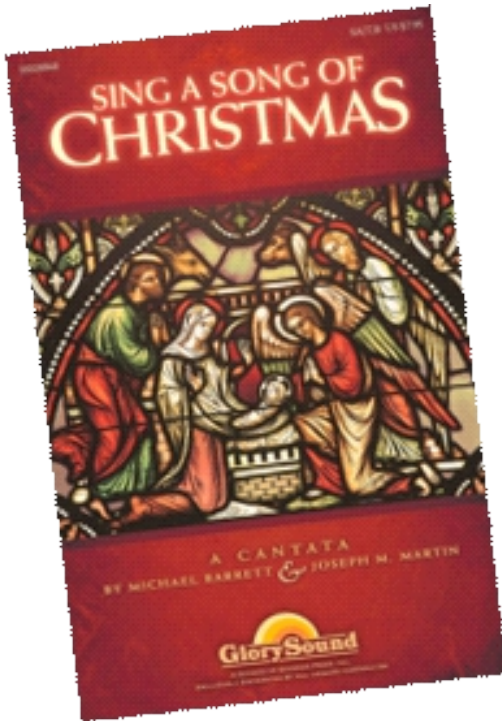
The link for our livestreams is <https://www.youtube.com/@SpartaUMCNJ>

NEWSLETTER – September 2026

Christmas Cantata

Christmas may be months away, but the Sparta UMC Choir is planning ahead for our 2026 Cantata entitled “Sing a Song of Christmas.” The Cantata will be performed on Saturday, December 12th, and you are invited to be a part of this event that welcomes the community in

to celebrate the joy of the season. You are invited to sing with the choir for this event. The cantata will begin rehearsals in September during the first 20+ minutes of weekly choir rehearsals at noon on Sundays. While you are always invited to join the choir and sing each week, you may only be able to do this one event and that is certainly welcome as well. A second way to be involved is to sponsor one of the extra musicians who are hired to enhance the performance. Each musician honorarium is \$250.00, and we already have a commitment for one of four that we will be needing. You are invited to sponsor one, or commit to a partial sponsorship at whatever amount is comfortable to you. Please see our Director of Music, Bonnie Pomeroy, for more information, a copy of the music, or to make a commitment for sponsorship.



The Bells are Ringing!

Heavenly Metal Ringers, our handbell choir for high school students and adults, meets on Tuesdays from 7 pm to 8:30 pm. Members must be able to read music. Heavenly Metal Ringers plays in church once a month at the 10:30 service, as well as at the German Christmas Market.

Genesis Ringers is an intergenerational group for students grade 3 and up and adults. In this group, young people and adults can learn to read music. Concepts of melody, rhythm, and dynamics will be taught through games and other activities. The day and time to be announced.

Children, ages 4 to 8, may join the Chime Choir. This group learns musical concepts through games, movement, singing, and ringing. The day and time to be announced.

Questions? Contact Yvonne Roux, at yrouxrings@gmail.com, or 973-534-6129.



Art Show and Sale

THE *art* OF Giving.

Support local artists and find the perfect gift!

3RD ANNUAL ART SHOW AND SALE

AT THE
SPARTA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
71 S Sparta Avenue, Sparta, NJ 07871

Saturday
NOVEMBER 14
10 AM TO 4 PM

All are welcome -
art makes great
holiday gifts!

Original Art
Paintings
Photography
Jewelry
and More!

WHERE CREATIVITY GIVES BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

NEWSLETTER – September 2026

From Tags to Riches

Our Sparta **United Women in Faith** is supported by Soup and Quiche sales and a 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 holiday gifts with tags featuring delicate butterflies, animals, birds, snowmen, landscape, and flowers. Also, **Birthdays and Anniversaries happen all year long!** Grab a selection of 10 tags for just \$1! Every penny supports the amazing work of 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.

And if you are interested in joining our chapter of **United Women in Faith**, see **Jill Reynolds**, our new president! There are some exciting events coming up: Mission u in at Centenary in Hackettstown later this month and a Skylands District event here in September.

Chair Yoga

Coming to Sparta United Methodist Church



No Yoga Mat required!

Description of Class: Discover the joy of movement in a chair yoga class that celebrates all bodies, all abilities, and all stages of life. Using the support of the chair, we will move through gentle stretches, strengthening exercises, breathing techniques, and relaxation practices that leave you feeling refreshed, confident, and connected. Length of class is approximately 45 minutes. Wear comfortable clothing.

** Yoga class is free - Donations are greatly appreciated*

When: Fridays: September 11th; September 18th; September 25th

Time: 12:00 p.m. - 12:45 p.m.

Where: Sparta United Methodist Church, 71 Sparta Avenue, Sparta NJ 07871

Contact: Church office (973) 729-7773

NEWSLETTER – September 2026

Meeting Groups

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 9:30AM in the Wesley Room

MONDAY NIGHT BOOK GROUP

The Book Group meets by ZOOM at 7:00PM.

We will be starting a new book on August 31st:

Marcus Borg's *Speaking Christian*. All are welcome.

Feel free to join on any Monday.

For more information, see Pastor Steve.

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

TUESDAY MORNING HEALTHIER LIVING GROUP

Every TUESDAY Morning at 10AM. Join Zoom Meeting

https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85294018790?pwd=bScXqgjh6RICDFWN93l16_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 7:15AM. at Angelo's Franklin Diner

FRIDAY MORNING READING TOGETHER/BIBLE STUDY

Friday's at 10:00AM

The Friendship of Women by Joan Chittister.

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

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

Sunday School

Starts on Sunday, September 13th concurrent with the 10:30 service.

Donations



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



Sometimes we have 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**.



NEWSLETTER – September 2026

United Women in Faith



Skylands United Women in Faith

B.R.E.W.

Be still
Recieve God's Love
Embrace Yourself
Welcome the day

Slow Down. Breathe
Deeply. Begin Again.

Your 4 Session Experiences Include:

- Chair Yoga
-
- Silent Meditation
-
- Mindful Breathing
-
- Lunch
-
- Herbal Teas



Friday September 18th
8:30 – 3:45

Sparta United Methodist Church
71 S Sparta Ave Sparta, NJ

For More Information -
email Barbara Miller
1thess51522@zohomail.com



Please RSVP so we know how much food to order:
E-mail Jill at hugsnothate@yahoo.com

The Power of Staying

by Jill Reynolds

When someone breaks a bone or gets a difficult diagnosis, our natural reaction as friends and neighbors is to step up. We drop off meals, send flowers, and check in often. But when the struggle is on the inside—when someone is carrying the weight of depression, anxiety, or deep despair—we often freeze. Silence settles in. We get nervous about saying the wrong thing, so we end up saying nothing at all.

With Suicide Prevention Month in September, it's a gentle reminder that staying silent doesn't protect anyone. Talking about mental health isn't just about sharing statistics—it's about making real, human connections that can literally save someone's life.

Shame grows best in quiet corners. When we treat mental health as a secret or something to be embarrassed about, the person who is hurting absorbs a painful message: *I'm broken, and I need to hide this.*

When we talk openly about emotional pain, we take away that shame. It lets people know that struggling is just part of being human, not a personal failure. There is so much relief in simply naming what we are going through. It gives those around us permission to take off the exhausting mask of "I'm doing great" and just be honest.

So often, we only start talking about mental health when someone reaches a breaking point. But we shouldn't have to wait for a full-blown crisis to offer support.

When checking in on someone's emotional well-being becomes as natural as asking how their week is going, it gets a whole lot easier for people to ask for help early on. People learn to raise their hand when they first feel themselves sinking—long before they reach a place of complete hopelessness.

This isn't an abstract topic for me; it's the very foundation of my life today.

Back in 1988, while I was in college, I reached a place so dark that I tried to end my life. In that terrifying moment, despair convinced me that my story was over and that ending the pain was my only option. But I survived. And slowly, step by step, I worked my way back into the light.

When I look back at that young version of myself in 1988, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the life that was waiting for me on the other side of that night. If my attempt had succeeded, I would have missed every single chapter that came after. I never would have had my children, held them in my arms, or watched them grow into the incredible people they are. I never would have met my spouse, or built a life rooted in love, partnership, and quiet everyday joy.

Even now, all these years later, I am not immune to finding myself back in the dark from time to time. Mental health isn't a destination where you arrive and never struggle again. But the difference today is that when those shadows creep back in, I force myself to do the work to get through it. I remind myself of what I survived, I use the tools I've learned, and I lean on the life I built.

Surviving gave me a future I couldn't even imagine when I was at my lowest—and working through the hard days keeps me here for it. That is the message we need to share with anyone sitting in the dark right now: there are moments, people, and joys waiting for you down the road that make staying here and fighting through it worth it, even if you can't see them yet.

When one person is brave enough to share their story, it creates a ripple effect. Hearing someone say, *"I've been in that exact dark place, and I made it through"* gives someone else a tangible reason to keep going.

Real human stories turn abstract ideas into genuine hope. They remind us that no matter how isolated we feel in our pain, we aren't alone. A single moment of honesty can give someone the strength to reach out for a hand and hold on for one more day.

At its heart, suicide prevention comes down to connection. It's about building communities where people feel truly seen, heard, and cared for. Learning to talk about mental health helps all of us become better friends, family members, and neighbors. It teaches us how to ask honest, caring questions, how to sit with someone without trying to instantly "fix" everything, and how to spot when someone might be quietly slipping underwater.

This September, the challenge before us doesn't require specialized training or having all the right answers. It just takes a willingness to listen without judgment and the courage to speak up.

Reach out to someone you haven't heard from in a while. Share a piece of your own story if it feels right. Ask someone how they are really doing—and stick around to hear the real answer.

Our words have the power to break down walls, quiet the loneliness, and anchor each other to hope. By choosing to talk, we choose to look out for one another.

NEWSLETTER – September 2026

Volunteering

Here's a list of the various committees and other activities we have going on here at the Sparta United Methodist Church.

Something here might spark an interest to get you involved.

Choir: Every Sunday 9:45 & Noon.

Church Mouse Board: 1st Monday of the month 12:00 PM.

United Women in Faith: One Monday a month 12:30 PM.

Mission Committee: 1st Wednesday of even # months 7:00 PM.

Bell Choir: Every Tuesday 7:00 PM. (September – June)

Church Council: Usually on one Wednesday a month 7:00 PM.

Trustees: Usually on one Thursday a month 7:00 PM.

FTB/FTS Setup: The evening before the 2nd Friday 7:00 PM.

Feed The Body/Feed The Soul: 2nd Friday 10:00 AM.

Church & Society: 1st Saturday 10:00 AM.

Memorial Committee.

Art Show Planning Committee.

Worship Committee.

Sunday School.

Finance Committee.

Earthkeepers.

Lay Leaders.

Church Mouse Volunteers.

Coffee Hour

Join us every Sunday after the 10:30 service

Please join us down the hall in Demarest Hall for light refreshments and beverages and conversation! All are welcome!

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SPARTA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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