

An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for March 5, 2022

Hello Everyone - This is a difficult week for all of us. We are witnessing an unjust and tragic war erupting in Ukraine. Our hearts are stirred by the bravery of the Ukrainian people. On our own shores democracy continues to be tested and our nation polarized and divided. Within the United Methodist Church we await a decision, to be communicated later this week, as to whether the General Conference and decisions of disaffiliation will be postponed yet another year – prolonging a period of anxiety and uncertainty for United Methodist congregations. New mask guidelines have been issued adding to a confusing complexity of how we protect ourselves as individuals and how we gather as a community. I encourage each of you to be in prayer. Pray for our denomination, pray for the unity of our nation, pray for continued victories in the battle against Covid, pray for one another – our physical and spiritual health, and pray for the people of Ukraine as well as the people of Russia and all those who are engaged in this war, and please pray for those who are seeking paths toward peace.

I have included below links to a prayer from Bishop Easterling, a pastoral letter from Bishop Christian Alsted of the Nordic and Baltic Episcopal Areas in the Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference of the United Methodist Church, and a commentary piece by the Rev. Charles Harrell who is convener of the Baltimore-Washington Conference's In Mission Together Eurasia Committee, and has been engaged in Volunteers in Mission projects in Ukraine

<https://www.bwcumc.org/news-and-views/in-face-of-war-we-claim-faith/>

<https://www.bwcumc.org/news-and-views/a-call-for-peace-in-ukraine/>

<https://www.bwcumc.org/news-and-views/a-prayer-for-the-people-of-ukraine-and-russia/>

Some of you may want to contribute to help Ukrainian refugees and support humanitarian aid to the region. Here is information on how you can do that

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United Methodists and others wishing to provide humanitarian assistance to the Ukrainian people in the wake of the Russian invasion of their country may contribute to Advance #982450, UMCOR International Disaster Response and Recovery. This fund will provide direct assistance to those in Ukraine as well as assistance to Ukrainians fleeing to neighboring countries.

Gifts to support the people of Ukraine can be made in the following ways:

- Online at <https://umcmmission.org/advance-project/982450>

- By toll-free telephone: 888-252-6174
- By check with "Advance #982450-Ukraine" written on the memo line, either mailed and addressed to Global Ministries/UMCOR, GPO, P.O. Box 9068, New York, NY, 10087-9068 or given at or through any United Methodist church

One hundred percent of all Advance contributions go to the designated cause.

The United Methodist community in Ukraine, though quite small, is actively engaged in assisting neighbors in need. Global Ministries is in touch with the church's leadership as well as with church leaders in countries welcoming those who are fleeing from violence in Ukraine.

Please share this information with friends and family. This information will also be posted on our Facebook Page. Please feel free to share on your page!! Thanks!

Mt. Carmel United Methodist Church
is hosting a Covid-19 Vaccination Clinic

4760 Mountain Road, Pasadena 21122

Saturday, March 12, 2022 from 10am to 2pm

1st and 2nd doses available in addition to the booster

Appointments can be made at the link below BUT ARE NOT NECESSARY

<https://www.marylandvax.org/appointment/en/reg/1961660172>

Here's some repeated but important information.

If anyone is interested in volunteering to staff our nursery on Sunday mornings please let me know. We may not be able to staff every Sunday morning but we can let our young families know those Sundays when nursery will be available.

An important reminder to members and friends who enter the building – through either entrance – while the Child Development Center is open and operating: Please be sure you are masked – even if you are just going to the office or sanctuary. This is critically important for keeping our unvaccinated children safe and for setting a tone of caution for those using our facility.

If you have prayer requests, even if you plan to share them at Sunday worship, you may forward them ahead of time to Jen at the church office and she will compile a list to be used on Sunday morning.

Signing On For Zoom Worship Services. As most of you who Zoom our worship services know, I greet Zoom attendees as they sign on, take Zoom attendance, and assign names to phone numbers as phone callers sign on. I open the Zoom meeting at 9 a.m. in order to give people time to sign on. I encourage you to sign on early to avoid the crush of people signing on at the last minute. The earlier you sign on the easier it is for me to attend to the greeting responsibilities. It also gives us a chance to chat, and share prayer requests

The Announcements and Bulletin for Sunday's service are included as attachments to this encouraging word. Please feel free to print them out and either bring them with you to the service or to use them as your guide as you Zoom the service.

A Word About Giving. As we begin a new year, we face several challenges as a congregation. One of those challenges is financial. Your faithfulness and diligence in giving helped us weather many of those challenges and for that I and the leadership team thank you. However, last year we also had federal help, and assistance from our annual conference, which we will not receive this year. This presents yet another challenge – to meet the financial obligations of our congregation while supporting the mission and ministry needs of our community. Our greatest and perhaps only means of support in meeting this challenge in this coming year will be through your prayerful and faithful giving. You can help in several ways. First by prayerfully considering increasing your weekly or monthly offering. Secondly by enrolling in our E-giving program. However you choose to support this ministry know that it is deeply appreciated and will enable our continued ministry presence in this community.

An Encouraging Word

"Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" - Matthew 4:4

One weekend, early in September in 1978, I was floating down the Holston River in Eastern Tennessee in a military issue rubber raft. It was ninety-five degrees and extremely humid. Sloshing around in the inch or so of water in the bottom of the raft were several dead Carp – our intended supper. My companions and I were on an Army ROTC field training exercise. This was survival training. We had to live off the land, depend on whatever the land could provide, for seventy-two hours, hence the Carp. Our evening meal would be field corn (mistake), and Carp that had been floating in the bottom of a raft in the heat for 8 hours (huge mistake!). We survived the exercise (there was just one hospital admission) but discovered we had a lot to learn about surviving in

the wilderness. We also learned to appreciate just how tasty LRRP's (Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol rations – Lurps) can be. Never again would we complain about those freeze-dried concoctions.

Surviving in the wilderness is what the season of Lent is all about; not a physical wilderness but a spiritual one. It is in the spiritual wilderness of Lent that we come to admit our need for God and acknowledge that without the spiritual resources that God provides we are nothing, that we "are dust and ashes". It is during this time that we come face to face with our dependence on God for our spiritual and physical survival. In the wilderness stories that we encounter in scripture "the wilderness" represents chaos – that place where everything we depend upon for support is withdrawn. It is a place where we encounter isolation, temptation, and an understanding of how tenuous our lives really are. It is the place where we learn to depend on God or abandon ourselves to the forces of destruction.

It was in the wilderness that Moses, stripped of everything, came face to face with God and was prepared to lead Israel out of bondage. It was in the wilderness that the prophet Elijah had an encounter with God that shaped the rest of his life. It was in the wilderness where Jesus spent forty days, was tested, and was prepared for his saving work that would follow.

This year, as we enter the liturgical season of Lent, many of us are already engaged in a wilderness survival experience and we are being tested. Our lives have been upended, enduring two years of a pandemic where we have experienced isolation and a distancing of relationships with others. We have been divided as a nation and live in a resulting wilderness, a desert, where civility is lacking, and it's difficult to be open and honest with each other. As I write this, we are helplessly watching a conflict explode in Ukraine and Eastern Europe and are experiencing, grief, anger, and fear as we worry about how deeply we will be drawn into this crisis. As we enter this Lent, we need no reminders about how tenuous and fragile the veneer of civilization, human community, and life as we know it actually is. We are finding ourselves in a kind of wilderness, where some things we have come to depend on have been removed. The question is, how will we respond? Will it be with trust and faith in God? Will we depend upon and seek to follow God's word or instruction, or will we try to navigate this wilderness according to our own inclinations. Will we seek the right spiritual food, or will we feed ourselves the poisonous fare of fear and anger. Will we trust in the one true God, or place our trust in lesser gods. These were the tests faced by Jesus in the wilderness. It is the same test that we face in our present wilderness.

The disastrous field training exercise that I mentioned at the beginning of this encouraging word was disastrous because we thought we could manage quite well by our own wits. We had received survival training. We even had the handbook in our

packs. If we had bothered to apply that training and refer to the handbook we would have fared a lot better. Good food was all around us but we were disastrously sure of our own wisdom – and we paid the price by poisoning ourselves. I think the applicable term here is hubris.

We can survive our present spiritual wilderness unscathed just as Jesus did, trusting in God, feeding our spirits on God's word, applying that word to our lives as we navigate through these treacherous times. God's grace is all around us. The rich spiritual food of God's word is in our possession. As we remain faithful to God and as we follow Jesus lead, we will exit this testing of our present wilderness even stronger than we were when we entered it.

That's all for today. I'll see you on Sunday either on Zoom or at in-person worship. Until then be well, stay safe, make good decisions in this Coronavirus environment, and in please stay connected to each other and to God.

Blessings & Peace, Mike