

An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for December 7, 2022

Christmas Eve Services: 6pm Children and Family Service, 6:45-8pm Music and Meditation, 8pm Candlelight and Communion Service

Sunday Christmas Service will be brief and at our regular time of 9:30am. Please note, there will be NO SUNDAY SCHOOL on Sunday December 25th.

Christmas 2022 Memorials – Would you like to remember or honor a loved one this Christmas? You may do so by purchasing a poinsettia to decorate the church; or, instead, you may prefer to donate to the general fund or to the trustees' fund. To honor or remember family members or friends, please complete the form attached to this email and return it to the church. (Forms can also be picked up at the church as well)

The deadline has been extended to December 14.



Our Holiday Bazaar benefitting both the Child Care Development Center and our Church is THIS Saturday, December 10th 9-2. Please invite everyone you know so that we can have a big crowd. We will have lots of Vendors, Jeno's Steak Food Truck, Wonderful Homemade Baked Goods, and Photo Sessions with The Grinch! We hope to see you there!

The Staff Parish Relations Committee would like to thank all who made it possible for us to give Pastor Mike a gift of appreciation. He has done so much for our church and this is only a small token of our gratitude. Hopefully, it will make his and Leslie's Christmas a little brighter. They deserve it. We again thank everyone and wish you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

From the Outreach Committee – "We currently are participating in the county's **Holiday Sharing program**. Our church family is providing Christmas dinner and presents for 5 local families and 5 local seniors. We appreciate everyone who is helping with this event.

Our church is also teaming up with the Child Development Center by providing **socks, mittens, and gloves** for children and adults in local homeless communities. You can place your donation in the bin next to the Christmas tree in the church hall.

We are still collecting food for the local soup kitchen. You can bring meal-stretching items like **instant mashed potatoes, boxed mac & cheese, rice, and stuffing mix** to the church and place those items in the box in the narthex. Every item already received has been given away.

The committee appreciates all the help our congregation gives to both our local projects and global projects throughout the year. Merry Christmas to you and have a blessed New Year."

As mentioned above...Mt. Carmel Church and The Child Development Center will be sponsoring a Christmas "Sock and Mitten Tree" again this year. We are asking for donations of socks, gloves, mittens, hats, and scarfs (adults and children's sizes). You may bring these items into the school **between December 5th, and December 16th.** The items collected will be donated to local families in our area who are in need for the winter season and will help keep them warm. Thank you and May God Bless all of you, Mt. Carmel Church and The Child Development Center

If you are visiting the church during the week, please be careful of the children at the school. We ask that if you are driving in during drop-off or pick-up hours that you wait behind the cars as to not endanger any of the children getting in and out of the cars. These lines move rather quickly. Morning hours are typically 8:15-9:15 and then afternoon is usually 11:30-12:30. If you have any questions, please contact the office.

We want to remind you that we are still using Zoom for our Sunday

Services. Zoom allows you to join us from wherever you may be!! (Join us in your pj's with a morning cup of coffee) 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. 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.

If you should have any problems logging in, please alert Jennifer in the office.

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.

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.

An Encouraging Word

Have you ever found yourself in the uncomfortable state of being completely off the map on your journey through life; up against situations you never wanted or anticipated? Most of us have at least a general idea of where we want to be in life and where we want to end up. Yet life has a way of throwing us curve balls and suddenly we are in unfamiliar territory and completely clueless as to next steps. We realize that we have wandered off the map and are in a strange and frightening land. Your medical tests return with a diagnosis of cancer. A loved one dies suddenly and unexpectedly. Family tensions arise and what was a friendly place of security no longer seems friendly or safe. A friend or a loved one betrays you. There are lots of situations that can erupt

into our carefully planned or ordered lives and throw us into what is, for us, uncharted territory. Then the realization dawns that we "aren't in Kansas anymore" and the landscape is pretty terrifying. What do we do?

Who knew ten years ago that we would collectively be facing a world where the political and financial landscape has so completely changed? We're off the map and forced to muddle through. Who knew that a pandemic would paralyze the world and so completely disrupt our lives and the ways we gather and associate with each other? We are in uncharted territory. Who could have anticipated a war ravaging the people of the Ukraine, the financial fallout, a renewal of cold war terror, and the possibility nuclear catastrophe? We're heading off the map.

Each day seems to bring new challenges both globally and individually, challenges we never anticipated. Many of us may wonder how to find our way through this mess, whatever the mess may be. How do we navigate in this constantly, and increasingly changing world where being off the map has become the norm?

The good news is that God anticipated this was going to happen. God understands the human condition of perpetual brokenness and our tendency to live in ways that take us into uncharted and difficult territory. God has made provision for us finding our way through the uncharted terrain we often find ourselves in. In this Advent season we recognize and celebrate the good news that God has charted a straight path for us to follow and presented that path in Jesus Christ.

Prophets declared, "A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." (Isaiah 40:3) "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts".([Malachi 3:1](#)) These prophets announced that God would provide a new way for those who find themselves off the map wandering in brokenness and sin. That way is presented in Jesus who shows us the way. Jesus himself declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

Jesus shows us how to live through those situations when we are wandering cluelessly in the unfamiliar landscapes of life that we find ourselves in. In Jesus we see a life of faithfulness, compassion, forgiveness, humility, and mercy. In that we find direction for our own lives lived in humility and faithfulness with compassion, forgiveness, and mercy toward those we encounter on our way. No matter what "off the map" territory we find ourselves in these qualities of character and living will see us through. In Jesus we see a life focused on God through prayer and we are encouraged to live through the uncertainties of our lives with the same focus on God through prayer. Further, we have the assurance that as we claim Christ in the midst of the confusion our lives can become, we will never be lost, that Christ will redeem and save us.

Our paths through life, our plans and our dreams for the future are never guaranteed. We will often find ourselves facing an uncertain future and find ourselves continually "off the map". But we have this assurance, that with Jesus as our guide we will find our way through.

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