

An Encouraging Word for January 25, 2023

Fundraising Committee NEEDED!! – If you are interested in being a part of raising funds AND awareness for our church and child development center, please come to our meeting after church this Sunday!! We are planning a spaghetti dinner for the month of March. Dates and details will be discussed, along with other ideas we are working on for the year. If you can't make it to the meeting but want to be involved, PLEASE let Jennifer know in the church office.

Love is in the air again and we are gathering Valentine wishes to share at the February 12th Worship Service. There are 3 ways to communicate your wishes to the office. 1. Fill out the form attached to this email and return it to the office either electronically or physically, 2. Email me directly, without the form, mtcarmel21122@gmail.com, or 3. Call the office directly at 410-255-8887.

Deadline is February 8th. Limit 3 per person please (and, just like last year, in the spirit of the holiday – they can be anonymous!)

We are looking for more liturgists. If you are interested in being a reader on Sunday Mornings, please contact Jen in the office.

From the Outreach Committee - "Baby It's cold outside! It makes us think of all the people who have to decide if they are going to heat their homes or buy food this winter. That is why we are continuing our food collection for the Pasadena Food Pantry. As the cost of food continues to rise, we see more people stop by on Mondays for whatever the pantry can supply. If you see a box of rice on sale, or instant mashed potatoes, or a jar of peanut butter, a can of tuna, or any product that will stretch a budget, please purchase it, and place it in the box in the narthex. Just remember that the pantry is located in the 7th Day Adventist Church and they do not eat or distribute any pork products. Thank you for helping with this vital local outreach program. The Outreach Committee"

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 church email is mtcarmel21122@gmail.com and our phone number is 410-255-8887.

Prayer Cards are also available in the Narthex on Sunday morning. If you have a prayer or concern, we encourage you to fill out a card and it will be collected and read that morning.

BE ON THE ALERT!!!! Scammers are getting mighty clever these days. A member of our church received a text from a person posing as Pastor Michael Fauconnet. (the cell phone number was NOT Pastor Mike's number) In the text the person claimed to be in a meeting and in need of a favor. The favor was to pick up some Apple gift cards for "some women battling cancer in the hospital."

Thankfully our member knew enough (having a son-in-law in cyber security) not to fall for the scam.

Please be aware that NO ONE at the church will ever text or email you requesting money OR gift cards at any time. Here are some online articles that can help better explain the many scams that are going around

Scam Text Message Examples and How to Identify Them

<https://www.textmagic.com/blog/spam-text-message-examples-and-how-to-identify-them/>

10 Spam Text Message Examples (& How to Identify Them)

<https://blog.textedly.com/spam-text-message-examples#a-family-member-needs-help>

End of Year Giving Statements - Once again, to save paper and postage, the church will not be doing widespread printing up and distributing annual giving statements. Everyone can now easily generate their own statements from their Realm account whenever they like. **If you do require a hard copy done the traditional way, please just let the office know and we can provide one.** If you haven't accessed Realm and need a new invite sent, just let the office know. You can also see all your current giving and history all the way back to 2008. Below are easy step by step instructions to print your giving statements.

Accessing Giving Record & End of Year Giving Statements

To generate and print out giving statements from your Realm account-

- Log into Realm
- Click on "Giving" on the left side of the page. It will automatically show your gifts for *this* year, to date, to verify your gifts.
- For Yearly Statements, click the Filter button (that droopy triangle symbol) and change the Gift Date Range to "Last Year". then click the blue "Filter" button.
- To print, simply click the Printer Icon. A report will generate, and you can click the Printer Icon in that window to print your statement.
- Done! 😊

Respectfully, The Church Office & Finance Committee

2023 Giving Envelopes are now available in the Narthex.

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.**

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 from Pastor Mike

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." - Matthew 5: 14 - 16

Well, it's official. Christmas 2022 is history. The store shelves which only a month ago were stocked with Christmas fare are now loaded with Valentine's Day fare. The Christmas lights which decorated the homes in our neighborhood are gone. In our home we try to leave our Christmas tree and decorations up well into January. Our tree is artificial so it's safe for it to linger a while. Now that tree is down and the decorations packed away, the place where it stood seems empty and sad. The mantle over our fireplace is also empty awaiting the Spring/Easter decorations; the angels and garlands that occupied it packed away. The world is moving on. We are moving on.

Part of me wishes the Christmas tree could stay up all year long. Yes, I know that doing this risks losing the power of its symbolism, that we would stop seeing it, and that it would become like just another piece of furniture. But I need reminders of Christmas comfort and joy often and all year long! There are times, often on the other side of the year, when I'm really struggling. These are times that it would be nice to see the Christmas tree sitting there, reminding me of the peace, love, and joy of Christmas. It would be nice to look up to the mantle and see the angel figurines staring back down at me in silent assurance that everything will be alright. I really don't want to move away from Christmas, I don't want to move on.

When all the signs and symbols of Christmas are absent, I need to remind myself that the values of Christmas remain. Trees and decorations are merely symbols of good news of great joy that is lasting, that is present even when the symbols are not. Our Christmas decorations are merely icons or symbols that arouse heart feelings that never need go away. The hope, joy, and comfort I feel when I gaze at the Christmas tree are permanent parts of me that should remain when the tree is gone. The symbols and icons merely remind me of these gifts already given to me; already a part of me.

Christmas trees, resin angels, strings of lights, and boxes of ornaments are not really portable. They are only symbols of wonderful, good news, icons of God's love that are sequestered, shut away in our homes. We can't carry them around with us. But the truth, joy, comfort, and hope that these decorations symbolize should not be shut away. These are things that we can carry with us wherever we go. These are wonderful gifts we can share with others wherever we go. There are many places in our world that are in need of hope, comfort, and joy. It would be inappropriate, even wrong, to plant a Christmas tree in those places and think that we've planted hope. But it is entirely possible and incumbent upon us to plant ourselves in those places and live in ways that bring hope, comfort, and joy.

Christmas trees and decorations are momentary reminders to us of what we are called to be all year long; messengers of comfort, hope, and joy. When people around us are struggling, can they look to us to find comfort and joy? Yes, we can put away the Christmas decorations, the trees, and the lights. We must never put away the comfort, joy, and hope that these icons symbolize. We must become living icons of "the joy that came down at Christmas" and radiate that joy all year long. Yes, we can move on, we just need to remember to carry Christmas with us.

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

