

Announcements and Encouraging Word for March 22, 2023

TONIGHT, March 22nd, at 7 p.m. there will be an important church meeting that everyone is invited to. THE ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL MEMBERS ARE STRONGLY URGED TO ATTEND! This meeting will be held in person and led by our District Superintendent Sarah Schlieckert. Not only do we need to put in a good showing, this meeting will be important and instrumental in setting our course as a congregation moving forward. The environment within which we do ministry has changed dramatically within the last several years. District Superintendent Schlieckert will be sharing with us some insights concerning demographics, the changed ministry environment, and resources we may want to consider as we plan for the future. She also wants to hear from you your thoughts concerning ministry as expressed by our congregation. **IT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT THAT COUNCIL MEMBERS BE PRESENT BUT WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE AS OTHER MEMBERS ATTEND AND PARTICIPATE AS WELL.**

Would you like to remember or honor a loved one this Easter? You may do so by purchasing a flower to decorate the church or you may donate to the Trustees Fund or to the General Fund. Please complete the form attached (and found in your bulletin on Sunday and copies in the Narthex) and place it in the offering plate or in the lockbox on the Church office door. Checks should be made payable to Mt. Carmel UMC. **Deadline is Friday, March 31st.**

Holy Week and Easter Services

Holy Thursday (Maundy Thursday) – April 6, 2023 – Communion – 7:00 p.m.

Good Friday - April 7, 2023 – Worship Service – 7:00 p.m.

Easter Sunday – April 9, 2023 - Easter Sunrise Service 6:30 a.m.

8231 Bayside Drive, Pasadena

(Home of Dave Shelton's Sister, Joanne)

Easter Sunday – April 9, 2023 – Easter Celebration Service – 9:30 a.m.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!! PASTA NIGHT WILL BE SUNDAY APRIL 2, 4-7PM. Buy your tickets today. \$12 for adults and \$8 for children. You can contact me by phone or email in the church office. We are also selling tickets on Sundays. **Please spread the word. I've attached a flyer. Please feel free to print it out and distribute it in the community. We need your help to make this night a success! We need you to spread the word!!**

Are you following the church on social media? If not, you should! Our Facebook account is

<https://www.facebook.com/mtcarmelumconnection/> And our Instagram account is

<https://www.instagram.com/mcumc21122/>

Please share this with everyone!!! Mt. Carmel Child Development Center has an immediate opening for a full-time, energetic and creative teacher to work with their 2's, 3's, and 4's combined class. The hours are 7:00 am - 4:00 pm, Monday - Friday (1 hour lunch break). A 90-hour Child Care Certification and a minimum of 1 year related work experience are required. If you want to work in a supportive, fun environment, this is the job for you! Please send a resume to Dawn Rey at mtcarmelcdc2@gmail.com.

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.

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

A despair of loss seems to me to be an apt description of what many in our nation, and perhaps our world, are experiencing these days. I refer to the loss and the accompanying despair arising out of the divisions that seem to be taking place all around us. There is a struggle of cultures going on that is resulting in divided congregations and denominations, divided communities, even divided families, as people take sides politically or theologically, each judging the other and claiming they are right. In this separation we grieve the loss of community, the loss of relationships, and a loss of the support those relationships provided.

This week I learned that 85 congregations in our conference have entered the process of disaffiliation. Disaffiliation is the formal process through which congregations separate from the United Methodist Church. I am grieving this separation and the loss of fellowship with these congregations and pastors. As a United Methodist pastor, I do not belong to a church or congregation, my membership is with the Annual Conference, and over the last 39 years of my ministry the Conference has been my constant "church family" as I've itinerated between appointments. I've worshipped alongside pastors that are now leaving, fellowshiped with them, and served on committees with them. I've worshipped with congregations that are disaffiliating and even served several of them as pastor. Faces that I greeted with joy at Annual Conference sessions will be absent. They wish to separate, and I am grieving. This is just one example of the kinds of divisions taking place in our nation in this unsettled time. It casts a pall over the lives of many of us leaving us feeling fearful and disconnected, despairing in our loss of fellowship and goodwill.

As I contemplated all of this I was reminded, by the scriptures that we will be reading on Sunday, that we are resurrection people and that the Lord we worship is one who revives, restores, and claims us back from death and despair. The scripture we will focus on this Sunday is Jesus' raising of Lazarus. (John 11: 1 – 45). I won't quote the whole reading here, hopefully you are familiar with the story.

Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha fell ill. Jesus was sent for but before he could arrive Lazarus died and was sealed in a tomb. Jesus arrives on the scene and is brought to tears by the grief being demonstrated by Mary and the people of the village. Jesus commands that the stone be removed from the entrance to the tomb, reminds Mary to have faith in him, prays, and then commands Lazarus to come out of the tomb. Lazarus, bound and wrapped in burial cloths emerges and Jesus commands him to be unbound and set free.

This scripture has a great deal to say to our present situation. First that Jesus grieves with us as we face the various disaffiliations we encounter in our lives and the accompanying loss; the greatest disaffiliation being death. Division and separation are not Jesus' intention for us and our community, and Jesus grieves with us that these separations occur. In the face of the community's despair Jesus grieves with us. Secondly, as we trust in Jesus, Jesus has the power to remove that which causes separation. In the story it is the separation of physical death symbolized by the stone. In our present situation it is the separation caused by the walls of culture and opinion that have come to divide us and bring death to community and fellowship. Jesus' love has the power to remove these as well as he commands us to love one another in spite of our differences. In the situation at Lazarus tomb Jesus demonstrates his power as he revived Lazarus, restored him to the family and community that loved him, claiming him back from death – the ultimate separation.

The divisions we face in our present reality are a form of death. They certainly result in the same kind of grief and sense of loss. We need to remember that Jesus has the power to revive us, restore us to community, and reclaim the sense of community that has been lost through our divisiveness and discord. It was Jesus' love for Lazarus that saved the day. If we love, as Jesus loved, in spite of differences, that love has the power to reunite us. It will, at the very least, heal the wounds of division. In this I hope and pray especially in these challenging days.

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