

## **Announcements and an Encouraging Word for November 29, 2023**

**The Christmas Bazaar is THIS Saturday, December 2, 9 am – 2 pm.** We will be having an assortment of vendors, games and kiddo activities, Jenos Steaks FOOD TRUCK and a visit from the one and only Santa at 12:45 If you have signed up to make baked goods, please make arrangements to have them here by Saturday morning. And thanks for helping out!

**We are looking for blue or white rope lights to use for the CDC's Nativity Play.** We would love to have 24 feet but any length would be helpful. If you are able to donate, please bring them by the church labeled with your name and we will make sure to return them after the show. Thanks!

**Christmas 2023 Poinsettia Memorials (We need your help to make the sanctuary look festive and beautiful!!)**– Remember or honor a loved one this Christmas. By purchasing a poinsettia to decorate the church you are doing just that and making our little chapel beautiful for Christmas! You may prefer to donate to the general fund or to the trustees' fund. Or BOTH! Complete the form attached to this email and return it to the church. (Forms can also be picked up at the church) The deadline is December 13th.

**The Annual Faith Hope Circle Christmas Luncheon will be held at the Pasadena Greene Turtle restaurant Thursday, December 7<sup>th</sup> at 12:30.** All ladies of our church and community are cordially invited. Please contact Denise Calabrese, or the office if you plan to attend. Hope to see you there! Happy Holidays

**From the Outreach Committee** - Mt. Carmel has been participating in the county's Holiday Sharing program for over 40 years. The program has evolved over time to include seniors as well as families who struggle to make ends meet. This year the Outreach Committee requested names of 6 seniors in our area who need extra help. And we are making things easy on the congregation. Instead of asking individuals to adopt the people on our list, the committee is taking care of all the details. We will contact the seniors, purchase the gift cards to grocery stores of their choice, and deliver them the week before Christmas. **But we are asking our congregation and friends to donate the funds to purchase the gift cards. We have just 3 weeks to work on this project. Please send or deliver a check payable to the church and list Holiday Sharing in the memo section.** Let's make Christmas a little nicer for a few seniors this year. Merry Christmas from the Outreach Committee!

**Be prepared for the holidays when you support our group Mt. Carmel United Methodist Church through this Rada Cutlery Fundraiser!** Here is our Personal Store Link to share on social media. Every purchase made using this unique shopping link helps Mt. Carmel UMC reach our fundraising goal! <https://radafundraising.com?rfsn=7718469.cc0da5&subid=JenniferHarris> Catalogs are also available in the Church Hall. To be clear, **orders can be taken via catalog and delivered to the office OR online at our Personal Store Link listed above.** If you have any questions, please contact Jen in the office 410-255-8887 or mtcarmel21122@gmail.com.

**A little about RADA Cutlery:** "Every one of our knives is handcrafted in the heart of the USA, with materials only from America. Our strong heritage and Midwest values assure dependability you can believe in and sharp good looks you'll love.

For more than 75 years, we've been crafting knives that stand the test of time. Our blades are created with surgical-quality, T420 high-carbon stainless steel and each is meticulously hand-sharpened to a razor-sharp edge. We build each with the highest expectations ... a lifetime of use, guaranteed."

**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/>

**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](mailto: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



Though there is illiteracy even in developed nations, people in our modern world are, for the most part, literate. We are used to our ideas being expressed through our words, through our speech and in our writing. Yet in the early days of Christianity, especially before the advent of the printing press, ideas were conveyed to a largely illiterate world through the use of icons, pictures, and symbols. These icons and symbols served as a kind of shorthand for ideas that, if put into words, most people wouldn't be able to read. The stained-glass windows of the great cathedrals of Europe were

commissioned to tell the story of salvation, not through words, but through symbols and pictures that everyone, even the illiterate, could understand. Some of the symbols that were first used in those ancient windows endure in our present day and can even be found in the stained-glass windows of our own sanctuary where they continue to tell a story.

Today I want to focus on the second window from the rear of the sanctuary, the one next to the "Lord and Savior" window I discussed last week. This is the Susan Paige Chalk window given in memoriam by her family. Once again, we see two symbols that are combined. A butterfly is superimposed over a depiction of the Lily of the Valley.

The lily of the valley has traditionally symbolized hope and new beginnings. This flower is mentioned only once in scripture. It's found in the Song of Solomon (Song of Songs) 2:1. "I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys". Here it refers to the purity and beauty of "the beloved" to whom the poem is addressed. In the Christian era Jesus was at times referred to as "The Lily of the Valley". In this use it was a metaphor for the purity, beauty, and redeeming power of Jesus. The flower also came to symbolize the Virgin Mary. As it is used in our window it is an icon symbolizing Christ Jesus. The butterfly has long been a symbol of resurrection, rebirth, and transformation in many different cultures including Christianity. Superimposed over the Lily of the Valley as it is in our window it reminds us of the rebirth and transformation that we find in Jesus Christ. It reminds us also of the resurrection promised to all who look to Christ Jesus as their savior.

Living in our world is spiritually exhausting. It is easy to become overwhelmed by our world's spiritual brokenness. This window reminds us that spiritual renewal, transformation, and rebirth can be found in Christ Jesus. We will each face periods in our life, or situations that seem hopeless. We will encounter events that are crushing and discouraging from which we may even feel we will never recover. This window declares the source of our restoration, Christ Jesus.

As I read the inscription on the window, I realized that here was a gift presented to the church by a grieving family who had lost a beloved daughter. I have never been in that position, and I never want to be. The pain and hopelessness of that sort of grief I imagine to be almost unendurable. Yet in this window that family presented to the church a message of hope that sustained them even at the most desolate point in their lives. In the midst of despair, death, spiritual desolation, and what may seem complete hopelessness we can find renewal, rebirth, and resurrection in our Lord Jesus, the Lily of the Valley, as did the family who presented the window. Jesus has the power to transform grief into joy, despair into hope, and death into life. Now that message shines into our sanctuary with every morning's light.

In looking at that window I'm also reminded that this same message of hope and salvation is one that we should allow to shine through our lives into a world in despair. We are each called to be living windows through which the transforming light of Christ will shine, reminding everyone that our source of hope and renewal is Jesus.

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, and please stay connected to each other and to God.

Blessings & Peace, Mike