

Announcements and an Encouraging Word for November 8, 2023

THERE WILL BE NO ZOOM THIS SUNDAY!! We apologize for sending out a link earlier in the week.

LAST CHANCE to order your APPLE PIE TODAY! Chocked full of delicious fresh apples and made by volunteers at MCUMC. All pies will be unbaked and can be picked up on November 21st from 9-2pm. We will be making the pies on Monday, November 20th at 12:30 at the church. Pizza will be provided. Contact Jen if you can help!

Christmas 2023 Poinsettia Memorials – 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 7th 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

SAVE THE DATE ALERT!! MCUMC and MCCDC will be presenting a Nativity Play Dinner Theater on Wednesday, December 20!!! More specific information will be included next week.

From Pam Mertz - Craft sales during coffee hour in October earned a total of \$157 for the general fund. The majority of this was due to the generous donations of hand quilted trivets and table runners, as well as many jars of homemade jam, all made by Penny Pellegrini. Please thank her if you see her. As always, thanks to everyone for your continued support.

From the Outreach Committee - Thanks to everyone helping supply food for the Pasadena Food Pantry. For the month of November Outreach is collecting boxed stuffing mix and instant mashed potatoes. The food pantry is experiencing a record number of families this month and feel the numbers will stay large though the holidays. Thanks again for your continuing support.

Are you following the church on social media? If not, you should! Our Facebook account is <https://www.facebook.com/mtcarmelumcconnection/> 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 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

(I receive my inspiration for these encouraging words from many different sources. For this one I was inspired by Adam Hamilton's discussion of Simon Peter's post Pentecost ministry presented in his book, "Simon Peter: Flawed but Faithful Disciple.)

"Peter said, "I really am learning that God doesn't show partiality to one group of people over another. Rather, in every nation, whoever worships him and does what is right is acceptable to him." - Acts 10: 34 – 35

The statement quoted above was a very controversial one in Peter's day. At that time the official church was based in Jerusalem and consisted solely of Christian Jews. It was essentially a sect within Judaism. The leaders of the church believed that only those who had been circumcised (were Jewish) could be baptized into the church. Gentiles (uncircumcised Greeks or Romans) were seen as unclean and a source of corruption. For some Christians baptizing a gentile could be seen as a violation of the true faith. In other words, they couldn't be a part of the church.

However, there were many gentiles that were attracted to and inspired by Jesus' teachings and the evangelistic work of Peter (one of the original disciples) and Paul. Peter was in fact the disciple that Jesus identified as the rock upon which he would build his church. The big controversy of the day was whether or not to include these uncircumcised gentiles in the life of the church. Should they or should they not be baptized? There were passages of the Torah that seemed to suggest that associating with or including gentiles in the community was unacceptable and that this was God's will. Yet the Christian message of salvation was spreading like wildfire among the gentiles.

Then Peter had a dream which was followed by the encounter with Cornelius, a Roman centurion and God-fearer, recorded in Acts 10: 9 – 22 and following. Peter interpreted the dream as a message from God telling him that he should not call any man impure or unclean. God in fact told him in the dream, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." Cornelius sent messengers to find Peter and invite him to bring his message to Cornelius' gentile household. Thus, we find this whole section of scripture conveying a new openness to the inclusion of those whom many considered impure in the growing Christian church.

While at Cornelius' house Peter witnesses the Holy Spirit falling upon this gentile household in a repeat of the Pentecost event. Peter's response to this is recorded in Acts 10: 47 - 48 "'Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.'" So, he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.' Of course, this decision invited the objections of the Jerusalem Council before whom Peter was asked to appear to explain

himself. His testimony before the Council silenced their objections and essentially removed a major impediment for the expansion of Christ's church beyond the confines of remaining a Jewish sect.

So why do I bring all this up? I do so because the church of the present is in the midst of a very similar controversy as we consider including members of the LGBTQ community in the life and ministry of the church. There is no doubt that there are many in the LGBTQ community that are devout followers of Jesus, who have felt the stirrings and promptings of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, who have proven themselves effective messengers of the Gospel, and wish to be included fully in the ministry of the church. Yet they are judged by some in the church to be sinners and unclean. Keeping in mind that no one is blameless, the question we must struggle with is whether or not we can deny them full inclusion in the church.

I find the events recorded in Acts 10 and 11 to be instructive. I see these verses helping to inform our approach to this thorny question. I find myself standing where Peter stood. He understood the Torah's prohibitions concerning those outside the faith who were considered unclean. Yet he was also guided by the Holy Spirit toward the acceptance of those same people. I guess you could say it was for him a head vs. heart sort of thing. He allowed himself to be led by the Spirit in this matter. That made all the difference for the future of the church. To use the words that Adam Hamilton uses in our study of Simon Peter, Peter understood that God "was doing something new". Perhaps God is doing the same in our present day. Who are we to say God is not?

At the very least these scriptures remind us that, like Peter and the Jerusalem Council who listened to him, we need to keep an open mind when it comes to deciding whom to embrace and who not to embrace. We need to remain sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and open to the possibility that God is doing something new. We need to always remember, like Peter remembered, that none of us are perfect and so need to remain humble and open to God's guidance through the Holy Spirit especially in matters such as these.

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