

Announcements and an Encouraging Word for December 13, 2023

CHRISTMAS SERVICES

Christmas Eve Services:

9:30am Regular Worship Service Beginning with a special children's message

(Child care will be available for the remainder of the morning service)

7:30pm Christmas Eve Service begins with "Music and Meditation" followed by the Candlelight and Communion Service

(please observe silence when entering the Sanctuary area as the music will be playing)

Zoom will continue to run throughout the evening services. Once you join you will automatically be muted.

LAST CALL...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 has been extended to this Sunday, December 17.**

From the Outreach Committee – "It's not too late! We have adopted 6 local seniors from the Holiday Sharing program for Christmas. Outreach will do all the work. But, we need your donation so we can purchase gift cards for each of them. Please make a donation to the church and **write Holiday Sharing in the memo section of your check.** We would like to deliver gift cards to the seniors by December 18. Outreach thanks each of you for all your support throughout the year. Have a Blessed Christmas and peaceful New Year. "

The Church and Child Development Center will be collecting new winter items for local families in need. New adult and new children's items are needed. Gloves, mittens, jackets, socks, hats and cold gear of any kind are welcome. Please place new donated items in the box located next to the Christmas Tree in the church hall. Please contact the office if you have any questions. **Last day of collection is Sunday, December 17th.**

The Faith Hope Circle will meet January 11, 2024 at 12:30pm in the Church Hall. All women of the church and community are cordially invited. Future meetings will resume on the first Thursday of the month. We hope to see you January 11th as we welcome in the New Year!!

THIS IS OUR LAST PUSH!! ~ 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> **We are no longer taking catalog orders BUT you can still shop online via our Personal Store Link listed above.** You can

still pick up a catalog to shop and then place your order online. 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/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'm taking a break from focusing on the stained glass windows in my encouraging word for a bit. Don't worry I'll be getting back to them.)

I've sometimes heard this season leading up to and including the twelve days of Christmas referred to as "the season of forgiveness". That's because forgiveness underlies everything about Christmas. Forgiveness is the basis for all of God's redeeming and restoring activity and Christmas, the birth of God's son into the world, is the center of that activity.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." John 3: 16 – 17

Not to condemn but to forgive, that is God's plan. And that plan began to unfold on the first Christmas and continues to unfold now and into the future.

Forgiveness is essential to God's healing of this world's brokenness. Throughout Advent we light the Advent candles which symbolize hope, love, joy, and peace. Yet without forgiveness hope is not possible, love is not possible, joy is not possible, and peace is not possible. Forgiveness opens the door to all these component attitudes of life whole and complete as God intended. We talk a lot in the church about God's unmerited grace. What we are talking about here is God's desire to forgive even the unforgivable. God loves us and forgives us even though we really don't deserve it and that forgiveness was enfleshed in Christ Jesus. As we prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth we really are in the season of forgiveness.

It is in this season of forgiveness that we need to try, as best we can, to practice forgiveness ourselves. For in so doing we open the door to healing in our own families and communities. This time of year can be really rough on families. Maybe it's because we are all forced to be indoors together. Maybe it's because when we gather together it's a lot harder to ignore differences, resentments, or irritations that fester under the surface and can be disregarded when apart. Whatever the cause it seems that family drama often takes center stage this time of year.

Perhaps it's especially important then, in this season of forgiveness when we celebrate God's forgiving act in Jesus, that we need to practice some forgiveness ourselves. As we practice forgiveness, we will ourselves become agents of hope, love, joy, and peace in our own little corners of the world. We will be not just observing God's act of forgiveness and redemption, we will be participating in it.

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