

Announcements and Encouraging Word for January 31, 2024

The Faith Hope Circle will meet this Thurs. Feb.1 at 12:30 pm in the church hall. All women of the church & community are cordially invited. Bring your lunch; dessert will be provided.

Love is in the air again and we are gathering Valentine wishes to share at the February 11th 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 9th.** In the spirit of the holiday – wishes can remain anonymous!

A quick note from the office...Typically emails for zoom worship go out on Monday mornings and the Encouraging Word and Announcements on Wednesday. But sometimes these notices get shifted to a different day dependent on extenuating circumstances beyond our control. If you notice that you have not received the Zoom Worship information by Friday, please contact the office and we will get that to you. As always, if you have any additional questions or need assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us. Thanks!

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!

Giving Envelopes are available in the Narthex. A heads up, some of your giving numbers have changes as we needed less envelopes this year due to people using our e-giving option.

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

Last Friday was an absolutely beautiful day so I decided to go down to Down's Park and walk the loop. When we started from the church parking lot it was clear and beautiful. It stayed clear and beautiful until we turned in at the park and proceeded to the parking lot. As we came around the bend heading into the lot we hit a wall of fog! The fog grew even thicker as we approached the water. Sitting on one of the benches and looking out at the bay we were only able to see perhaps twenty yards. I've never been on a boat lost in the fog, but it was easy to see how precarious a predicament that could be.

I heard a ship's horn out on the bay, and it stirred a memory from my childhood. My family's Lake house where we vacation in Summer is only about six miles as the crow flies from Tibbet's Point Lighthouse. This lighthouse guards the entrance to the St. Lawrence River from Lake Ontario on the U.S. side. When I was a child, I remember hearing the haunting sound of that lighthouse's foghorn warning ships away from the dangerous shoals. It was the same mournful bellow that I heard out on the fog shrouded bay warning and guarding other mariners of danger.

That is the purpose of a lighthouse foghorn or ship's horn, to warn and to guide. That is God's purpose as well when it comes to human beings; to warn and guide. Our futures are as impenetrable as the fog shrouded bay was last Friday. The further into the future we look the more obscure it becomes. At best we only have a fairly good idea concerning the next few days and even that's not a sure thing. In this world taking the next step is a perilous thing. There are many hazards ahead and plenty of opportunities to run our lives aground. It's difficult to see where we are going and set a safe course.

We do have one dependable source of guidance on our life journeys. God's word and the Holy Spirit are available to guide us. God's word, like the foghorn, guides and warns us away from the dangerous pitfalls. God's Holy Spirit, like the beacon of the lighthouse, does the same. Jesus' teachings help us lay our course.

The rocks, shoals, and hazards are many. Fear and its child which is anger can lure us off course. Pride or a lack of humility can make us ignorant or dismissive of obvious dangers. Prejudice and injustice, the discounting of other fellow travelers on the sea of life can lead to tragic circumstances for others and ourselves. But in God's Word, the teachings of Christ Jesus, and in the promptings and guidance of the Holy Spirit we can find valuable guidance to guide us through the fog of life and safely reach our destination.

So, this week I encourage you to practice some situational awareness and take note of the hazards that you may be flirting with on this shared voyage we call life. Take care to allow God to guide you through the especially tricky bits. And always remain open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

That's all for today. I'll see you on Sunday on Zoom. 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