

Mt. Carmel UMC News and Encouraging Word

May 22, 2024

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Please Read...

We have been made aware that someone is using Pastor Mike's name to text members and request gift cards. **THIS IS A SCAM!!** The phone number is **NOT** the Pastor's. Please delete any such texts. Pastor Mike and Mt. Carmel UMC will **NEVER** text you with requests of money, gift cards or **ANY** other monetary gift. If you have any questions, please contact the office.

IMPORTANT DATES

Thursday, June 6 at 12:30pm the Faith Hope Circle will meet at Picantillo's Restaurant. This is in place of their regular meeting. All women of the church & community are invited to join us. Please let Denise Calabrese or the office know if you will be attending.

LITURGISTS NEEDED!!

We are in need of Liturgists for Sunday Mornings. This is a wonderful and easy way to get involved. You do not have to read every Sunday. We put together a schedule that works with your availability. We would love to hear from you! Just contact the office if you are interested.

Graduate Alert

Do you know someone that is graduating high school, college, or graduate school this year? This is the last week to submit their names! We would love to celebrate their accomplishment! Please email Jen in the Church office with all the appropriate information including a photo.

In Other Important News

From Pam Mertz - Craft sales during March and April earned \$78 for the general fund. Once again I'd like to thank Penny Pelligrini for donating her many quilted items. And thanks to everyone for your continued support!

Outreach articles in the Encouraging Word usually request help from the congregation. We are taking a little time this summer to highlight and thank our Congregational Caretakers. The first group that is hard at work is the **Faith/Hope Circle**. This group of ladies put together the funeral/celebration of life luncheons, take care of our seniors and shut-ins by delivering Christmas cookies and meals throughout the year. They send cards to members and friends every month. This group provides lunch for the Day Care workers every May. They help Leslie with the Christmas pageant. This group provides gifts for Bingo games for Autumn Lake Adult Daycare Center. They

donate to various charities. And, lest we forget, provide the goodies for Coffee Hour the first Sunday of every month. Whew, just writing this makes me tired! You ladies rock! Thank you for all your hard work. It is truly appreciated.

Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike

I know this is a long encouraging word but bear with me – it's important.

When I was thirteen years old, I was confirmed in the United Methodist Church. For me it was a rite of passage following a five-month long class, led by Rev. Tom Starnes, during which I was prepared for one of the most important decisions I would make in my life. It was made clear to me that this was to be my decision, made on my own, influenced by no one else. Did I agree with the promises that were made on my behalf by my parents when I was baptized? Was I willing to become a member of the people called United Methodists?

My answer was obvious because here I am fifty-three years later pastoring a United Methodist Congregation. But why did I become a United Methodist? I did so because I found myself accepted in spite of my insecurities, my dorkiness, my awkwardness, and my seeming inability to fit in anywhere else. I had a face full of freckles and zits, a mouth full of braces, and a voice that couldn't decide on pitch. Yes, these were all cosmetic things, and they would pass, but they were a great concern to a 13-year-old boy. Yet these United Methodists didn't seem to care about how different I seemed or how socially awkward I was, there was a place for me with them. I knew I wasn't perfect, and they didn't seem to care. I knew that I wasn't without sin, and sometimes couldn't help it, and they didn't seem to care. I was loved.

Then as I got older and formed opinions that in some quarters might be considered "different" from the norm I found I was still accepted and embraced by the people called United Methodist. We could have differing ideas and opinions, but that was OK, just as long as we had the love of Jesus in our hearts and treated each other with respect. In the United Methodist Church, I wasn't instructed as to what my faith should be; what I must believe and what I must not. I was encouraged to explore my faith, ask questions, push the boundaries, and just to keep the love of Jesus in my heart. In discovering this my decision to join the United Methodists was affirmed.

The founder of Methodism, John Wesley wrote, "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences." In the United Methodist Church, I found a people that lived in the spirit of this quote. Grace, acceptance, forgiveness, and the spirit of 18th century latitudinarianism are a part of the Methodist DNA. If you want a good example, read John Wesley's sermon "Catholic Spirit". It is this spirit of love and acceptance that drew me to the United Methodist Church.

The mission of the United Methodist church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We do so by proclaiming the good news of God's grace and by exemplifying Jesus' command to love God and neighbor. This is a never changing constant. What does change is the societal context in which we do this. That's where the rubber hits the road and where we seem to have the most difficulty. We are called to be accepting and grace filled people

loving others with the same love as Christ loved us. This is without exception, for who are we – imperfect as we are – to judge?

So why am I bringing this up? I do so because at the recent General Conference of the United Methodist Church the values of inclusiveness, welcome, grace, acceptance and loving others in spite of their perceived faults or differences, the very values that moved me to join the United Methodists, were affirmed. By an overwhelming vote the restrictive language concerning LGBTQ people was removed from the United Methodist Discipline taking the state of inclusiveness concerning the LGBTQ community back to where it was in 1972, unrestricted.

To be sure, there was nothing done at the General Conference that requires local congregations to receive the appointment of an LGBTQ pastor. Such appointments, like any pastoral appointments, would be carefully and prayerfully made through the consultative process between the congregation and District Superintendent. Nor does the removal of restrictive language require a congregation to host or a pastor to perform homosexual unions if they are uncomfortable in doing so.

What the removal of the restrictive language does do is affirm the value of every individual as a child of God and of equal worth, irrespective of any differences as to gender, race, national origin, sexual identification, or any other distinctions we might wish to impose, and as such open to God's call in their life which now may include ordained ministry. The removal of the restrictive language also allows members of the same sex to unite in holy marriage where such a marriage is supported by the congregation, and after appropriate premarital consultations with the pastor. Concerning such relationships in the case of ordained clergy the clauses in the Discipline requiring celibacy in singleness and fidelity in marriage ¶ 304.2 and ¶2702 remain in place but with restrictive language removed.

All of this aligns with the openness and acceptance that I experienced in the United Methodist Church when I was a youth, and which compelled me to join with them. People are different in many ways, but it doesn't make them of greater or lesser value – especially in God's eyes. To make distinctions leads to the shaming and devaluing of a child of God. And in this case encourages the devaluing of God's call in the life of someone who may identify differently sexually.

I know that some who are reading this will be quite disappointed. I know that others will be joyful. Such disappointment or joy is to be expected because this involves issues that are close to our hearts. But should we let them be issues that strike at the heart of our faith? Should we allow them to be issues that overshadow our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world? Should we allow them to be issues that divide people who are called to be brothers and sisters in Christ? I think not. We can argue the theological underpinnings of our differing opinions in this matter endlessly. We've been doing so since 1972. There are biblically grounded arguments on both sides. In my opinion the division this has caused has crippled the church. Perhaps now we can put all that behind us and get to the real business of the Church – transforming lives through sharing the love of Christ to everyone no matter who they are, and modeling that in the way we conduct ourselves as a church.

That's all for today. Be well, be forgiving and gracious. Be safe, stay connected, and I'll see you in church or on Zoom this Sunday.

Blessings – Pastor Mike

Weekly Reminders

If you have prayer requests, even if you plan to share them at Sunday worship, please 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. (Join us in your pj's with a morning cup of coffee) I open the Zoom meeting at 9 a.m. to give people time to sign on. 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.**

Mt. Carmel United Methodist Church

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