

# “The CHIMES” – January

Volume 56, No. 1

2021

## Continuing the Conversation...

*“The LORD rules! Let the earth rejoice!... Light is planted like seed for the righteous person; joy too for those whose heart is right. Rejoice in the LORD, righteous ones! Give thanks to his holy name!” (Psalm 97:1a, 11-12)*

*“Mary said, “With all my heart I glorify the Lord! In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior. He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant. Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored because the mighty one has done great things for me. Holy is his name. He shows mercy to everyone, from one generation to the next, who honors him as God...” (Luke 1:46-50)*



In spite of everything that 2020 threw at us, we ended the year in a pretty good place. Although worship looks and feels very different right now we are still worshiping and we have continued doing important ministries. Studies have been put on hold, but I tried a new thing with a livestreamed daily devotion

for Advent. We are financially in a decent place as we go into the new year and I look forward to the possibilities of trying more new things by building on what I have learned in the past year, even as we slowly move toward getting back to normal life.

You can look at Toni Burrow’s article in last month’s *Chimes* newsletter for some specific highlights of 2020. You can also look on page 5 for a celebration story that helped finish our year out strong. I know sometimes when the challenges of certain days starts to wear on me it helps me to look back at what we have accomplished for the Kingdom of God and then to look up in praise and thanksgiving to the One who holds us in the palm of his hand and loves us with a never-ending love. Knowing I am a beloved child of God gives me the courage and fortitude to keep moving forward.

Looking forward, in the near future, I see us taking baby steps back to worshiping fully in church, livestreaming our services to an online mission field. We will get there, please bear with me. As the Psalmist notes above, “light is planted like a seed...” and seeds don’t sprout and immediately produce fruit.

I know some get frustrated with the slow movement forward and even what feels like a backward step, please know I hear you and appreciate your feelings but I have to consider the bigger picture and do my prayerful best to care for all in our congregation while still working to be a vital and fruitful church.

This is uncharted territory and throughout Advent and Christmas I kept coming back to Mary’s story in Scripture. Mary was on the ultimate journey of uncharted territory as she said “Yes,” to bringing God’s Son to birth, to live among us, to feel what we feel, to experience life as we experience it. As I consider Mary, and how she rejoiced even with all of the unknowns facing her, what we are facing now seems small in comparison. Yes, I know it’s a pandemic and that is big—but birthing God as an unwed mother, in a paternalistic culture? That’s huge, and still Mary rejoices.

It reminds me that we are all here for a bigger purpose (God’s purpose) not just to fulfill our wants, to sing some songs, say some prayers, and get a few warm fuzzies in.

So, what is our purpose? Jesus left a mission for us to complete, to be his hands and feet and heart in the world, carrying his message of reconciling and redeeming love to those who need to hear it. Of course we care for each other too. That is all part of being Christ’s church, Christ’s body in the world.

The looking back I mentioned is helpful because it reminds us we are still faithfully “being” the church. The looking forward is done with a lot of prayer because it requires faithfully and joyfully following where God is leading, even when the circumstances don’t look favorable. The looking forward part also requires joint effort; I need you praying with me and discerning God’s call and direction. That means I need to hear from you also, to hear what you are discerning God calling us to do.

*continued*

2021 will still have its challenges (every year does). But I ask you, who do we trust in? Can we say with Jeremiah: *“I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the LORD; they are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope. When you call me and come and pray to me, I will listen to you. When you search for me, yes, search for me with all your heart, you will find me. I will be present for you, declares the LORD, and I will end your captivity.”* (Jeremiah 29:11-14a)

Join me in daily prayer, asking God to break through in our lives and hearts and direct and equip our journey into 2021 for God’s glory and our benefit as Christ’s Body here as the Sparta United Methodist Church and beyond.

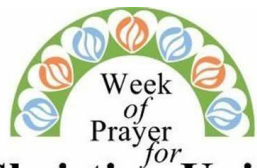
God bless you as you seek to know and love God fully!  
Pastor L

## Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

At least once a year, Christians are reminded of Jesus’ prayer for his disciples that “they may be one so that the world may believe” (see John 17.21). Hearts are touched and Christians come together to pray for their unity. Congregations and parishes all over the world exchange preachers or arrange special ecumenical celebrations and prayer services. The event that touches off this special experience is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Traditionally the week of prayer is celebrated between January 18-25, between the feasts of St Peter and St Paul. The *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2021* was prepared by the Monastic Community of Grandchamp in Switzerland. They chose a theme based on John 15:1-17: **“Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit.”** It expresses their community’s vocation to prayer, reconciliation, and unity in the church and the human family.

A daily resource guide for the week is being included with the newsletter. Please consider taking some time to pray for Christian unity each day during the designated week and join with Christians from across the world and across denominations praying for unity.



**Christian Unity**

## Welcome to the Family



On Saturday, December 12, Harper James White was baptized. Harper is pictured with mom and dad, Destiny and Cody White and big brother Hayden. She is the granddaughter of Rose White and Scott Naeseth. Welcome Harper!



## Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Murray Burfeind, our former organ tuner, who passed away on December 16.

## Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program.

The next scrip order will be going in on **January 10**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl Isensee at: 9262 Festival Avenue, Sparta, WI 54656. If you have questions or need an order form contact Pastor Loretta at the church (269-6949) or on her cell phone at (608-386-1862).

If you find yourself in need of a card before the next order goes in give Cheryl a call and ask if she has the card you need. She sometimes has a few extra scrip cards for local businesses on hand.



## Because our Giving Is Worship

*"You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God." (2 Corinthians 9:10-12)*

God established a design for worshipping when God revealed to Moses the plan for the Tent of Meeting (aka Tabernacle). Central to that worship was sacrificial giving. God required gifts of animals and grain be brought to the Tabernacle to be sacrificed and offered to God because it was pleasing to God. These gifts were the first fruits of the agricultural work of the people representing a tithe (10%) of their production.

God knew that an institution like Temple worship would require resources to be sustained. We read in the Old Testament that the people's gifts of meat and bread, cooked in a way pleasing to God, directly provided food for the priests, guards, and caretakers of the temple and the spiritual leaders of the tribes. Sharing the fruits of the harvest became the large feasts we read about in Jesus' time.

In the modern Christian church, we maintain this pattern of giving designed by God. Now, people are called to give in a way pleasing to God: first fruits representing 10% of each family's productivity. Though, in modern times, it is money rather than agricultural produce.

These gifts to God, offered and dedicated in our worship services, are used to maintain the institution of the church by supporting its ministry and mission. This includes worship, congregational care, spiritual development, hospitality and outreach, and missions by way of support for clergy and staff, building maintenance and other budgetary items.

What we can conclude from this is that we give first because it is a gift pleasing to God. As a result of our giving to God in worship, we also support all aspects of the important work of the church.

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation  
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at  
[www.wumf.org](http://www.wumf.org) or [Facebook/wumf.org](https://www.facebook.com/wumf.org)  
Or call 1-888-903-9863



## Financial Focus

The following was adapted from a talk by Martin Lee, Director of Congregational Development Northern Illinois Conference UMC.

In the United States we give one another gifts to mark important occasions. What kind of occasions prompted these gifts. Maybe a birthday, a wedding, a baby, Christmas, or just to say thanks.

We give gifts to mark important moments in our shared life together. Sometimes we give gifts because we are suppose to. But most often we give gifts as a way to say, "you are important in my life."

We give to our church's ministry because we are thankful for ways Sparta UMC touches our lives and the lives of many through our missions and outreach programs.

As we begin a new year what do you have to celebrate? A birthday, an anniversary, a blessing from God. Might that Blessing move you to be a giver in new ways this year. What might God be able to do if we thought about thanking God for his blessings and sharing those Blessings with our gifts. John Wesley reminds us to earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can. Wise words to live by in 2021.

Submitted by Paul Foulke, Finance chair



## From the Parish Nurse...

### Happy New Year!

The arrival of a new year brings a great opportunity to renew our faith and love for God and Jesus. It's also a wonderful time to renew the joy of salvation in our hearts, as a new creation in Christ. *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."* (2 Corinthians 5:17)



Whether 2020 brought you success, fulfillment, and joy or you faced grief, setbacks, and struggles, as so many have, let's look ahead to 2021 with hope. Jeremiah 29:11 tells us "for I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Let's end this year with a thankful heart and start the new year with peace and faith. Let us release the bitterness and frustrations of the past year. Let us move into the next year knowing that God loves us and wants the best for us. Let's pray that the new year will be focused on healing ourselves through repentance and the renewing of our minds. We were not meant to do life alone! We can bring the light of hope into our own heart, home, church and world.

*"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."* (Romans 12:2)

### Our Prayer for the New Year:

Dear God, Thank you for helping us to make it through this difficult year. Thank you that you've carried us through the uncertainty of deep waters, through the flames of trials, and through the pain of hard losses. We are constantly aware of how much we need you, your grace, your strength, your power working through even the toughest days.

Fill us with your joy and the peace of your Spirit. Direct our hearts and minds towards you. Thank you for your reminder that both in seasons of celebration and in

seasons of brokenness, you're still with us. For you never leave us. Thank you for your daily powerful Presence in our lives, that we can be assured your heart is towards us, your eyes are over us, and your ears are open to our prayers. Thank you for our Pastor and our Church/Your House. May we be able to be together this year.

Thank you that you surround us with favor as with a shield, and we are safe in your care.

We choose to press in close to you today and everyday and keep you first in our hearts and lives. Without You, we would surely fail, but with you, there is great hope. Thank you for your healing power, thank you for bringing us into this new season up ahead. We look forward to all that You still have in store. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

With Love, Priscilla



## Family Promise Update

The week of December 6 through December 18, we hosted our second family, a mom and her 8-year-old son. Family Promise



housed them at an area hotel, it was our responsibility to furnish them with breakfast and lunch items along with a hot meal in the evening which were delivered to their hotel room.

I would like to Thank Toni, Margie, Cyndi, and Marta for furnishing meals. I know Cheri (mom) was very appreciative of the good cooking. I would also like to thank EVERYONE who brought items for the Kitchen Shower! I know Larry and I were overwhelmed by our church family's generosity. Cheri and April thanked us over and over. Cheri said she was in tears so many times because she has never felt such a love from people who had no idea who she was.

Thank You and Happy New Year!

Lynn Humphrey, Family Promise Coordinator



## We Asked, You Delivered (Again)

Last month we again had our turn at hosting a Family Promise family. This time was different from our first hosting stint, compliments of COVID 19. Instead of hosting at the church, the family was housed in a local motel and volunteers brought food. Thanks to everyone who stepped up and supplied those meals.

As our week of hosting was coming to an end, we got word that this family would be graduating from the program and moving into their own apartment. You were invited to participate in a “Kitchen Shower” to help make this apartment a home. You stepped up in a big way (along with other Family Promise churches who provided for other rooms) to make sure this family has a home for Christmas and beyond.

In an email celebrating this step forward for this most recent Family Promise family, the mom shared, “When [my son] and I moved here from California, we basically moved here and became homeless. We lived with my best friend for a while, and then another friend. My mother used to take good care of us, and I’ve always allowed others to take care of me... until I realized it was time for me and [my son] to make the best of our own situation and get our own place without having to depend on others to care for us.”

April Buchanan, Family Promise director, further stated, “the mother shared with me that the volunteers were very helpful, she will never forget what Family Promise has done for her, working alongside her and leading her into the right direction. When one of our churches finished loading the items she needed for her kitchen, her son turned around and hugged me with tears overflowing his cheeks.”

This is what it feels like to do God’s work right here where we are and make a difference in people’s lives. Thank you for your faithfulness in **being** the church as we do our best to obediently follow our Lord, Jesus Christ.



Here are a few pictures of the wealth of donations you gave.

*Thank you*



Tim and I are blessed and very grateful for the Christmas greetings and gifts we received. Thank you!

*Pastor L*



### January Anniversaries

- 3 Larry & Lynn Humphrey
- 8 Eloda & Jerry Miller
- 12 Andrea & Eric Cole
- 27 Bob & Cyndi Wise

### January Birthdays

- 1 Aylah Hanson
- 7 Evan Wiedemann
- 8 Shirley Fokema
- 9 Barb Zucco
- 11 Todd Loeffelholz
- 11 Roy Peterson
- 14 Lauren Zucco
- 15 Dennis Hanson
- 18 Mary Talsky
- 19 Dani Glut
- 20 Sara Angle
- 21 Emily Axelsen
- 21 Jackie Vaver
- 23 Pete Foss
- 24 Austin Goodenough
- 24 Norm Warthan
- 25 Mark Halverson
- 26 Rose White
- 28 Kurt Kiefer



## Church Facebook Page

Have you checked out the church's Facebook site? It's a good place to keep up with what is going on in the church and easily access the online worship services.



You can find that site at:

<https://www.facebook.com/UMCsparta/>. Once you are there just "like" the site and you will receive updates when new information is posted.

### Thank You SUMC...

We received a nice thank you letter for our support of **Sojourners Journey**. The letter reads in part:

"...Because of you and the support of our community we are now able to serve both men and women in the Monroe County. We have the Honor of being the first men's home in Monroe County. Sojourner's Journey has been able to help so many women and men, both homes are at capacity and the men and women are making big strides in their relationship with Christ and rebuilding their relationships with Family and in the community.

Here at Sojourner's Journey our goal and our passion is to help every single person we come in contact with. If we are unable to house someone because we are at capacity, we do everything we can to find a place for that person to go... We pray with them and give them the opportunity that everyone that has fallen on hard times deserves..."

I want to take a minute to thank everyone for the warm welcome, the kind, generous gifts, thank you's and support I have received. You have made me feel so welcome and I am overwhelmed by the kindness I have been shown in the short time I've been here. Thank you for allowing me to be part of this amazing family. I feel very blessed every day. The most difficult part so far is not being able to hug you all! I'm a hugger, be prepared when that is not taboo again! Thank you so much!

Happy New Year from my family, to yours.

*Michele Thornton*

# Thank You!

To my dear friends of the Sparta United Methodist Church,

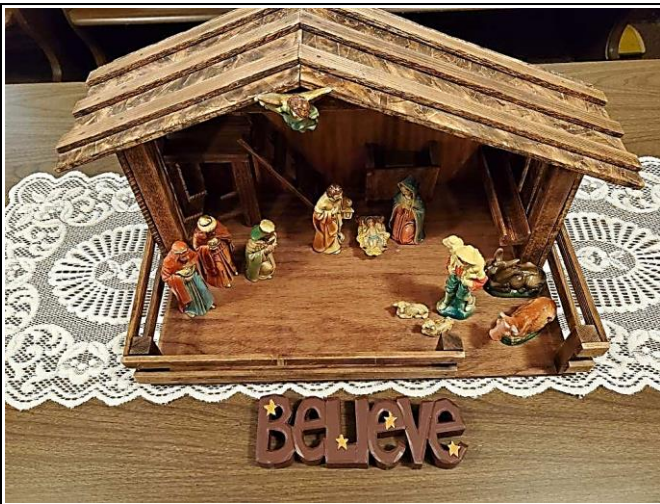
Thank you so much for the wonderful gift of goodies I received from my friends. Of course I loved the goodies and I really enjoyed reading and doing “Worry Ties Us Up in Knots”! Oh how true. Thanks to Toni for delivering them.

Love you all,  
Bev Laufenberg

Dear Sparta UMC,

Thank you for the caring gifts. I appreciate your thoughtfulness during this time.

Sincerely,  
Dana Kemp



Thank you, Mary Lou Cole, for the gift of the beautiful nativity scene and crèche. The musical stable was made by Alvin Gamble (Bev Gamble’s late husband and Mary Lou’s brother-in-law).

This will look lovely in the sanctuary when we are able to gather again for Christmas. What a loving gift!

## Community Blessing Bags

Thank you to all who put a “Blessing Bag” together and dropped it off at the church to be handed out when needed.

Priscilla Hemmersbach, our parish nurse, has been putting them to good use. If you know of someone in need let Priscilla know she can also help connect people with local resources.

**THANK YOU** to those who have given in-kind gifts of stamps, and cleaning and disinfecting products to the church. They are very appreciated as it can be difficult to find those items in bulk these days, but when you are shopping and pick up one or two items at a time they certainly add up and are put to good use in keeping the church clean and disinfected. Thanks again!

Items still in short supply:

- Spray disinfectant (like Microban 24 or Lysol)
- Disinfectant wipes
- Forever stamps (the stamps are more important than ever because we no longer have enough people on our mailing list to do a bulk mailing; not even if we mailed the newsletter and other information to every household on our mailing list).



## Church Web Page Update

Our church Web site has been updated with a new page that has direct links to our 2020 worship services and our 2020 newsletters. You can find it at: [lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc](http://lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc)

Once you are at our Web site, click on the “Stay Connected” link and it will give you options to go the worship or Chimes newsletter sites.

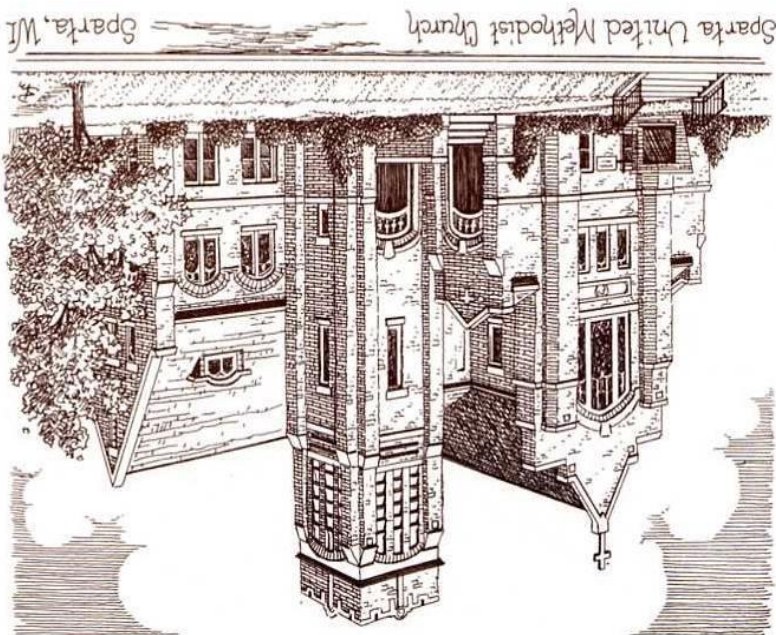
We hope you find this new feature helpful.

# The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church  
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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

*Prepared Especially For:*



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## **SUMC Worship Schedule**

### **In-house Service**

In sanctuary worship services are on hiatus  
until further notice because of COVID 19

### **Online Service**

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year