

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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

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In-Building Worship Resumed

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What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

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Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

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From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

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According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

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Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmarese...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

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Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

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We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



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Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar, etc.) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal
Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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

Pastor L



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshipping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

Trustees Update

The trustees continue to stay busy keeping our building in good shape and updating equipment where needed. Work completed in June included the purchase of two new window air conditioners for the church office. The air conditioner in Pastor Loretta's office has been installed (and is very much appreciated). The air conditioner for the outer office still needs to be installed.

Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



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1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

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If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

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The Chimes

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Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartummc

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“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

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again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

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Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

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However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



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What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

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I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

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According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

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Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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

Pastor L



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshipping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

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Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
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We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

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I thank God always for you.
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Philippians 1:3-4

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A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmarese...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

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2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
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If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
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Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshiping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

Trustees Update

The trustees continue to stay busy keeping our building in good shape and updating equipment where needed. Work completed in June included the purchase of two new window air conditioners for the church office. The air conditioner in Pastor Loretta's office has been installed (and is very much appreciated). The air conditioner for the outer office still needs to be installed.

Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

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Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

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As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

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For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

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As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

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What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

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The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

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According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

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From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

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We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



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Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshiping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

Trustees Update

The trustees continue to stay busy keeping our building in good shape and updating equipment where needed. Work completed in June included the purchase of two new window air conditioners for the church office. The air conditioner in Pastor Loretta's office has been installed (and is very much appreciated). The air conditioner for the outer office still needs to be installed.

Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

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1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

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If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

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The Chimes

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Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

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YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

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“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



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again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

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God bless you as you seek to know and love God fully!
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Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

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However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



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What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

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In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

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According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

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continued

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Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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

Pastor L



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshipping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

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Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

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We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

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I thank God always for you.
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Philippians 1:3-4

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God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmarese...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

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2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
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If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshipping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

Trustees Update

The trustees continue to stay busy keeping our building in good shape and updating equipment where needed. Work completed in June included the purchase of two new window air conditioners for the church office. The air conditioner in Pastor Loretta's office has been installed (and is very much appreciated). The air conditioner for the outer office still needs to be installed.

Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

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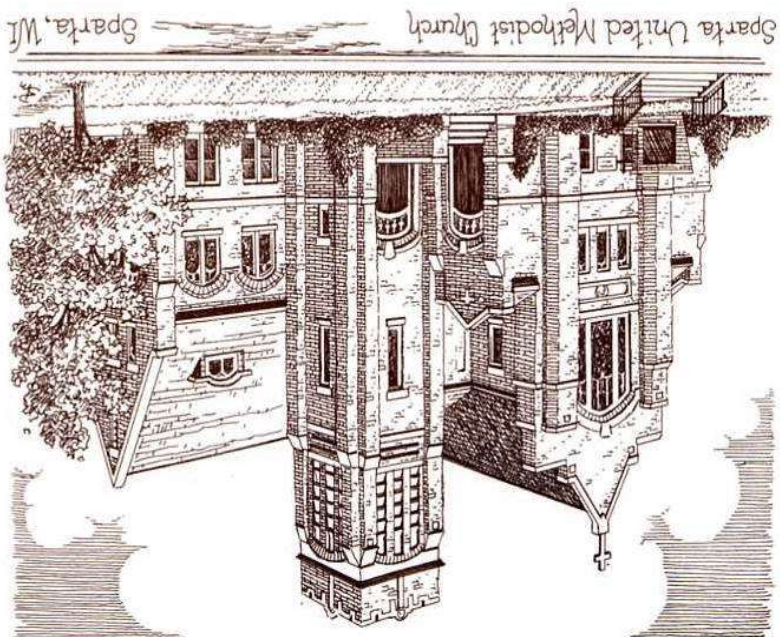
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The Chimes

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Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

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2020

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“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

God bless you as you seek to know and love God fully!
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What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

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Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

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According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

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From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

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We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



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Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmarese...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

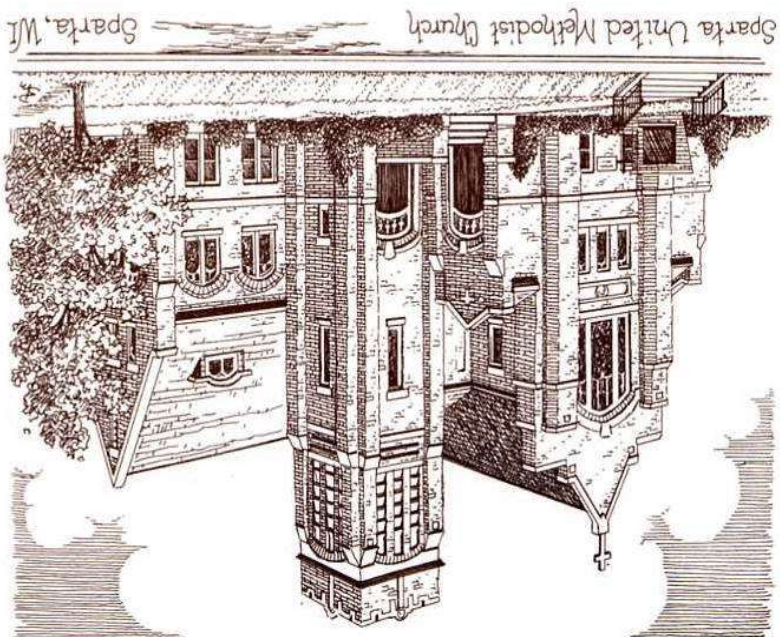
Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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

Pastor L



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshipping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

Trustees Update

The trustees continue to stay busy keeping our building in good shape and updating equipment where needed. Work completed in June included the purchase of two new window air conditioners for the church office. The air conditioner in Pastor Loretta's office has been installed (and is very much appreciated). The air conditioner for the outer office still needs to be installed.

Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

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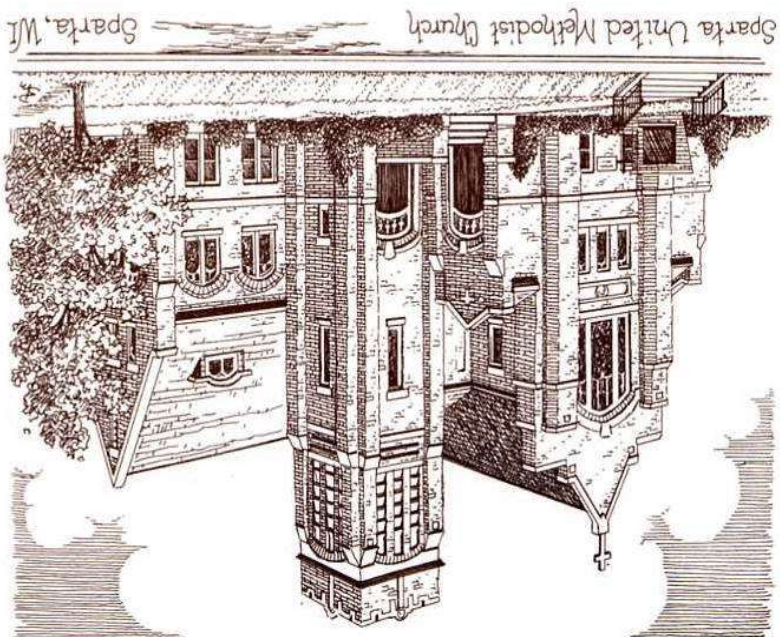
Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
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Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@sparamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartummc

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YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

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For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

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Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

Trustees Update

The trustees continue to stay busy keeping our building in good shape and updating equipment where needed. Work completed in June included the purchase of two new window air conditioners for the church office. The air conditioner in Pastor Loretta's office has been installed (and is very much appreciated). The air conditioner for the outer office still needs to be installed.

Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

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What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

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In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

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According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

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My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmarese...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartummc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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

Pastor L



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshipping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

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For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
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We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

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A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmarese...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

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If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

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The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
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Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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

Pastor L



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshipping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

Trustees Update

The trustees continue to stay busy keeping our building in good shape and updating equipment where needed. Work completed in June included the purchase of two new window air conditioners for the church office. The air conditioner in Pastor Loretta's office has been installed (and is very much appreciated). The air conditioner for the outer office still needs to be installed.

Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

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As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

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For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

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As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

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What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

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The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

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According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal
Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

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From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

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We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



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Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar, etc.) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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

Pastor L



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshipping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

Trustees Update

The trustees continue to stay busy keeping our building in good shape and updating equipment where needed. Work completed in June included the purchase of two new window air conditioners for the church office. The air conditioner in Pastor Loretta's office has been installed (and is very much appreciated). The air conditioner for the outer office still needs to be installed.

Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

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1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

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If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

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The Chimes

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Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

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“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

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As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

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Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmarese...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

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However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



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What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

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I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

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According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

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The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

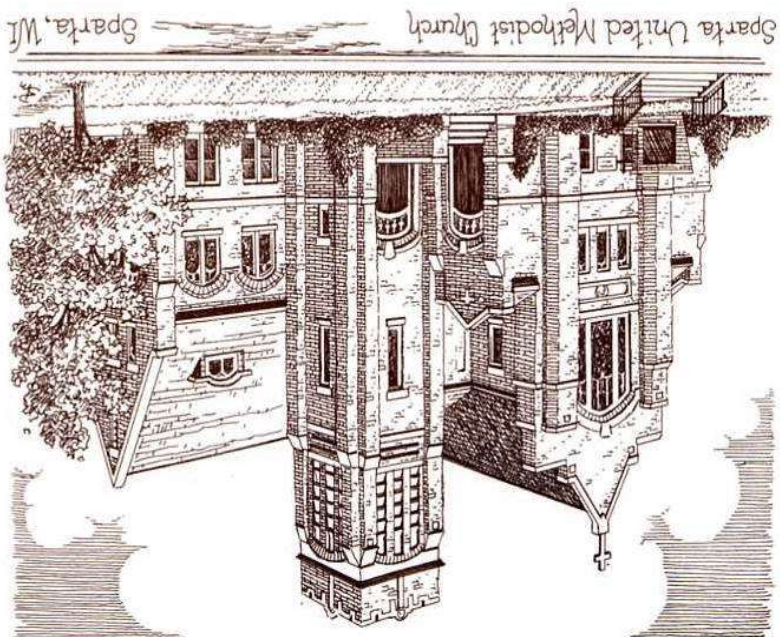
Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, ‘If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.’” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshipping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

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For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
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We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

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A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmarese...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

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If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

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The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
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Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartummc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
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Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, ‘If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.’” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshipping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

Trustees Update

The trustees continue to stay busy keeping our building in good shape and updating equipment where needed. Work completed in June included the purchase of two new window air conditioners for the church office. The air conditioner in Pastor Loretta's office has been installed (and is very much appreciated). The air conditioner for the outer office still needs to be installed.

Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

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Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal
Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

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As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

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What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

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In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.



Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

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According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

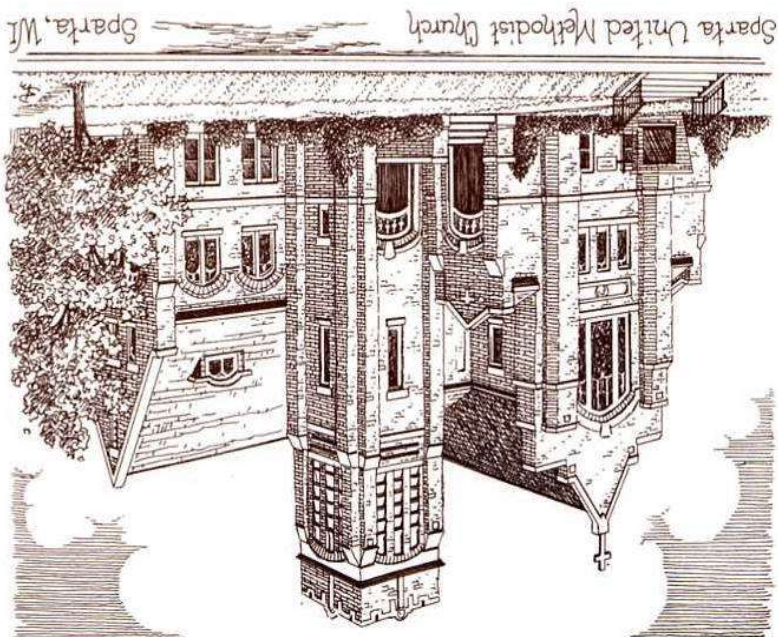
Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

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Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
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We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



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Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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

Pastor L



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshipping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

Trustees Update

The trustees continue to stay busy keeping our building in good shape and updating equipment where needed. Work completed in June included the purchase of two new window air conditioners for the church office. The air conditioner in Pastor Loretta's office has been installed (and is very much appreciated). The air conditioner for the outer office still needs to be installed.

Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



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1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

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If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

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The Chimes

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Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

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“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

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again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

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Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

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However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



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"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

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I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

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According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

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The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

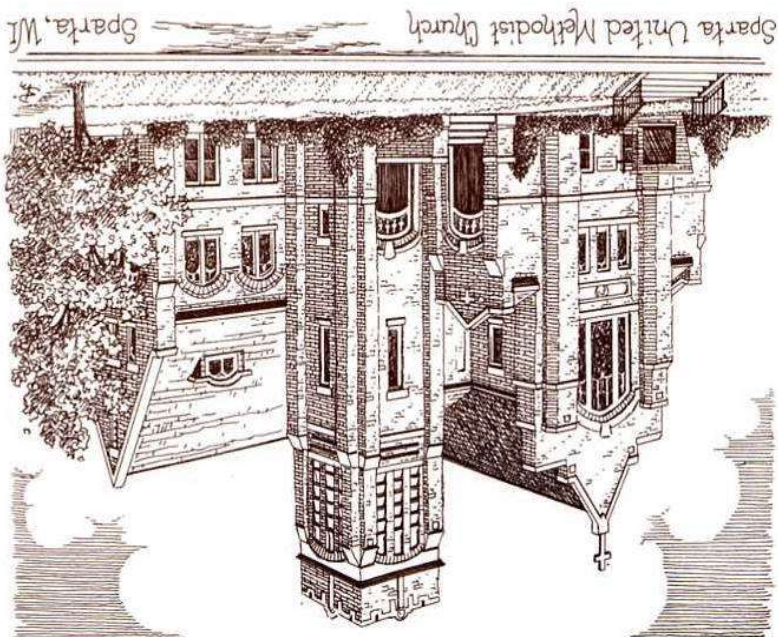
Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, ‘If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.’” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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

Pastor L



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshipping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

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For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
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We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

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A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmarese...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

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If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

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The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, ‘If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.’” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshipping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

Trustees Update

The trustees continue to stay busy keeping our building in good shape and updating equipment where needed. Work completed in June included the purchase of two new window air conditioners for the church office. The air conditioner in Pastor Loretta's office has been installed (and is very much appreciated). The air conditioner for the outer office still needs to be installed.

Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

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Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

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As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

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For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

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As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

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What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

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The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

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According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmarse...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

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From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

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We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



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Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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

Pastor L



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshipping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

Trustees Update

The trustees continue to stay busy keeping our building in good shape and updating equipment where needed. Work completed in June included the purchase of two new window air conditioners for the church office. The air conditioner in Pastor Loretta's office has been installed (and is very much appreciated). The air conditioner for the outer office still needs to be installed.

Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

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1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

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If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

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The Chimes

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Prepared Especially For:



Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

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YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

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“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



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For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

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Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

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However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



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What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

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According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

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Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmarese...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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

Pastor L



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshipping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

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Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

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We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

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I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

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2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
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If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

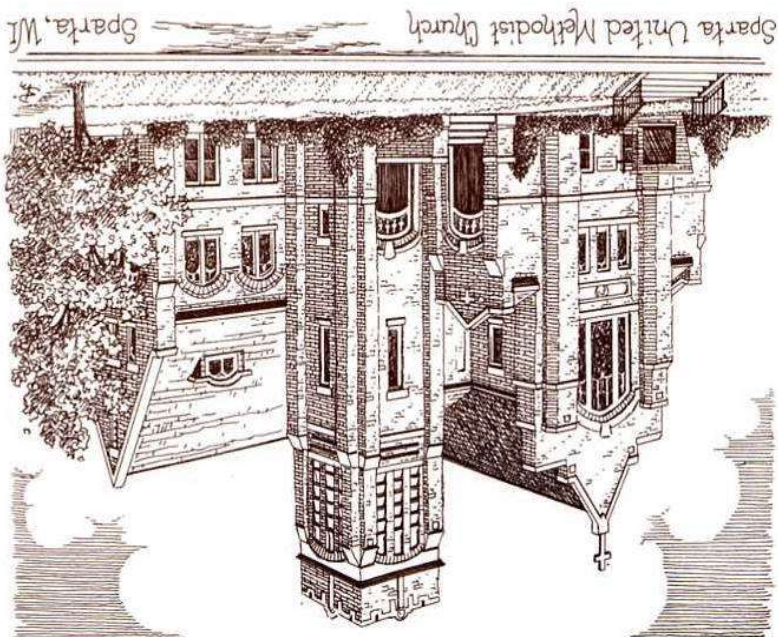
Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

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Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, ‘If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.’” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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

Pastor L



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshipping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

Trustees Update

The trustees continue to stay busy keeping our building in good shape and updating equipment where needed. Work completed in June included the purchase of two new window air conditioners for the church office. The air conditioner in Pastor Loretta's office has been installed (and is very much appreciated). The air conditioner for the outer office still needs to be installed.

Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

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2020

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“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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

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In-Building Worship Resumed

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What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

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In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

Pop tops for Ronald McDonald House

Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

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According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN, Parish Nurse

Dear SUMC Members and Friends,

As we continue to distance ourselves and stay “safer at home,” Pastor Loretta continues to work between the church and her home office, making sure that essential business is still taken care of (paying bills, depositing offerings, etc.). You can reach her most easily on her cell phone at 608-386-1862.

Please do your best to stay in touch through phone calls, texts, Facebook, online worship, etc. Pastor Loretta is still available through all of these means and you can also be there for each other, checking in, finding creative ways to stay in touch.

We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



I thank God always for you.
In all my prayers for you,
I always pray
with joy.
Philippians 1:3-4

 CrossCards.com

I am deeply grateful for all your prayers, kind words, and cards after the death of my mother. You truly helped me get through a difficult time.

God bless you!
Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

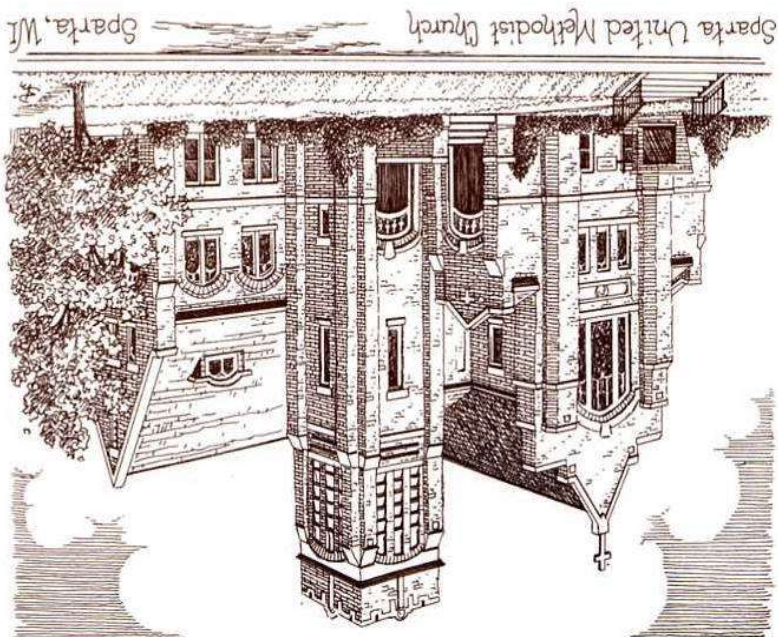
Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

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Member, Helen Radcliffe, has been faithfully saving pop tops for Ronald McDonald House. She sent them to the church so a member of the mission committee could deliver them to McDonalds. Thank you Helen!



Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Mary Ann Radar, mother of Margie Lakowske, for the loss of Mary Ann.

From the Parish Nurse...

My faith in God is what's giving me hope in the midst of this pandemic. Yes, that's right: Faith. It's my faith that I lean on as the death tolls resulting from the coronavirus continue to rise. My faith that keeps me steady as our entire country wakes up every morning to wage war on an invisible enemy. And it's my faith that disarms my anxiety and offers hope—especially through this storm.



I know, Faith is a word that might feel cliché to some—a word that appears on charming rustic home decor and within inspirational quotes on Pinterest. But now more than ever, faith is the reliable constant I cling to as I wake up every morning deeply concerned about, my family and friends, and the fate of the world. And I know I am not alone.

In Cartersville, Georgia last week, hundreds gathered around a local hospital to pray for COVID-19 patients fighting for their lives, as well as the medical staff on the front lines. In Brazil, residents in quarantine went viral for singing a hymn from their balconies. And millions around the globe are logging on to attend church virtually; viewership has jumped over 2,000 percent since social distancing began. Isn't faith in our Lord exactly what we should be turning to?

Fifteen percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, Americans have indeed shifted their religious habits in response to this pandemic; 55 percent of adults studied report praying for the virus to stop spreading. But even more notably, 15 percent of individuals who rarely or never pray say they have turned to prayer as a way to cope, while 24 percent of Americans who don't associate with any religion admit to doing the same.

The fact that more and more of us are turning to God right now isn't all that surprising. Dr. Timothy Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and a *New York Times* best-selling author, says that historically during times of chaos, many have turned to faith, even if we don't quite understand the reasoning.

We do not know what God's reason for allowing a particular sickness is, but we know what it *isn't*—it isn't that He doesn't love us. In faith, it all comes down to whether or not we trust God. And the best proof of His love and trustworthiness is the price He himself paid to rescue us from suffering and death.

Okay, so my faith leads me to believe that God loves me, which means He cares. And because He cares, I can find comfort in my belief that somehow, He's present during every second of this crisis; that none of us are in this alone. Still, that doesn't magically make all the discomfort we're all feeling go away—or explain *why* this is happening in the first place.

So if God is powerful and all-knowing, many of us are wondering right now: *Why* would He allow this pandemic to occur?

It's impossible for the human mind to fully grasp divine reasoning. Even though hindsight will sometimes provide a window of clarity about difficult times, we will often be left without any sure understanding of why bad things happen.

Even if we mere mortals never fully comprehend God's plans for us, there is one sure thing we *can* cling to: If God allows something, there is a reason...even for something as horrific as the coronavirus. It will not have been in vain. Somehow, this will become a breeding ground for beautiful outcomes that would not have otherwise taken shape.

Some of those outcomes might be already taking shape. Social distancing and more time at home has meant families are creating memories they wouldn't have otherwise, whether it's by shared meals, group activities with your children, or tackling academic course loads. Many people have already taken advantage of the opportunity to realign priorities, rediscover lost passions, adjust misplaced perspectives, and rebuild relationships that have been neglected in the business of everyday life.

The truth is that none of us knows what we're doing, and admitting that in the presence of God could be the most authentic act of faith we could practice. This is not a time to look too far into the future, or even the next few weeks or months. This is a time to think in terms of moments.

continued

Leaning into your faith during this pandemic means asking yourself, “What is my next right thing I need to do?”

My suggestion to people who want to build their faith is simple: Read God’s Word, invite a friend or two to share the troubles of your soul, and pray with each other, trusting that God is near.” Even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good.

For me, my faith also offers peace because of God’s words. Early on in my spiritual journey, I wanted to decide how I viewed the Bible. Was it a tool used to condemn others? A buffet table where I could just take what I wanted, but leave what didn’t taste good? Or was it the Truth from God Himself? I decided that my own belief was the latter.

Once I decided where I would hold God’s Scripture in my life—front and center—I began to look at each passage of the Bible differently. Now, that has helped me understand that this novel coronavirus doesn’t get the final say; God does. That even if I cannot see it or fully comprehend it, God is working out all things for a greater good. And it’s possible some things aren’t even meant for me to fully grasp on this side of eternity.

Whatever your relationship is with faith, I hope I can encourage you to consider that we were made for much more than what this virus can take from us. For me, at least, it’s faith that’s holding me together as I pray for a better tomorrow for all of us.

In Christ’s Love,
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We will get through this together and hopefully stronger.

Pastor Loretta



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Pastor L



A word from our Bishop

Take Time to Talk, Prepare to Act

Published: 8 June 2020

We can be better. We MUST be better. And the only way this can happen is if we all work together to bring about revolutionary systemic change. It is time.

The COVID-19 global pandemic occupied almost all of our time and attention, interrupted briefly by the Ahmaud Arbery tragedy and the killing of Breonna Taylor. Then, the senseless and brutal murder of George Floyd knocked the 24-hour news cycle reporting of the pandemic almost completely off the screen, and our country erupted in protests for justice, for retribution, for restoration, and above all for change. The mask was ripped away revealing the deeply seated, pervasive, and highly resistant racism at the core of our culture.

For some, the issue of race is so huge and overwhelming that they don’t want to face it. Many still deny that racism is much of an issue in the United States. A few are actually proud of their racism and believe that there are qualitative differences between nations, races, and cultures. Too many believe that racism is simply too difficult to address and that nothing much will ever change. For Christians, at least, apathy and indifference are not options. The people of God, baptized in Christ, filled by the Holy Spirit, are agents of God’s mercy, love, peace, justice, equity, compassion, and grace. It is impossible for Christians to stand by and say, “this is not our issue.” Any time a child of God is abused,



oppressed, unjustly treated, or violated; it is the responsibility of every Christian to get involved.

At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmar...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

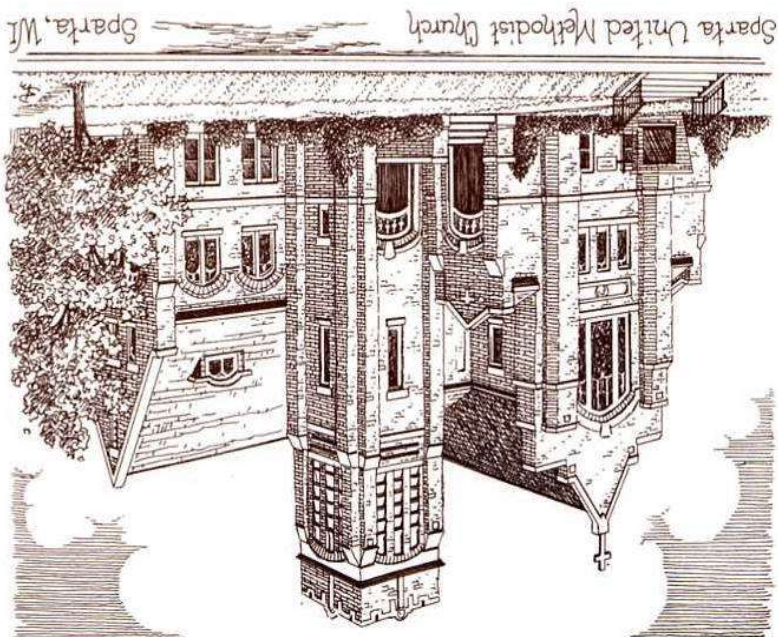
Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal
Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year

“The CHIMES” – July

Volume 55, No. 7

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” —Exodus 16:2-3

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.” — Psalm 130:5



As we prepare to turn our calendars to July, it feels in some ways, like we have already endured the longest summer ever. Just when many were hoping that social restrictions would begin to loosen up, COVID 19 cases began to increase. Some businesses have had to close

again and nursing homes have had to tighten restrictions for the safety of residents and staff.

For people who are used to being independent and able to go anywhere at any time it is frustrating. In fact, it can be downright depressing as we impatiently wait for life to get back to normal. We might feel inclined to complain, forgetting all the ways we are still blessed by God, even as we continue to wait for some kind of return to normal.

As I thought about our current situation, I was reminded of the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and how they frequently complained to Moses in their waiting. The above verses from Exodus are just one example of that. Most people are not very good at waiting, whether it's for a promised land, food to be served, a traffic light to change, or test results to arrive. In our fast-paced world, waiting is usually an irritating inconvenience.

As a child, I eagerly anticipated Christmas. As a teen, I counted down to graduation and leaving the nest. As an adult, the longest months I ever experienced were those during my daughter-in-law's cancer diagnosis, treatment, and subsequent scans that confirmed the treatment had been successful. As I pondered this, I wondered if there isn't a better way to wait. As is often the case when I am struggling with some deep feelings and frustrations, God guided me to the Psalms—specifically Psalm 130. If you are struggling with the waiting during this pandemic, I invite you to read and linger prayerfully over that Psalm.

When the psalmist writes that his “whole being waits,” perhaps you—like me—can relate to that feeling. His heart and soul long for a sign from God, a flicker of light while hanging out in the depths of darkness. He wanders back and forth between calling out to God and reminding himself of the goodness and faithfulness of God.

Fear creeps into our waiting when life feels so out of control—and that can make the situation feel unbearable. Like the psalmist, we must keep our eyes fixed on God, the source of hope for this life and forever. There is no outcome that God will not help us handle. What are some ways that you can remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness?

If you are feeling unbearably alone in your waiting for life to return to normal please know that you can always give me a call. In the meantime, join me in praying: *Dear Lord, we cautiously pray for patience as we deal with irritating little things and major, life-altering, fearful things. Thank you for your infinite mercy. Fill us with unshakable hope in your Word. Amen.*

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



In-Building Worship Resumed

Worship services resumed on June 21 with social distancing precautions in place. We had 22 people in attendance for this service. Everyone wore masks and found the pews had been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance was kept between those in attendance that didn't live in the same household.

There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who don't come with a mask. The ushers did a very good job of helping people understand the social distancing measures in place.

Because safety precautions prevent us from using bulletins and hymnals, Pastor was very happy that we were able to get the big screens installed in the sanctuary. Even though we are not able to sing at this time, the congregation could still participate in the worship service with responsive readings that were shown on the screens. Announcements were also shown on the screens before worship began.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance were happy to be back worshipping in the sanctuary, we all understand that not everyone is ready to come back for many good reasons. If you are one who is not ready, please do not feel like you have to explain. You don't and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have an opportunity to worship with this community of faith.



Nathan Hull checking out his work after the installation of the big screens.

If you haven't joined us for online worship yet the services can be found on YouTube at Sparta UMC (date). For example the latest service is at Sparta UMC 6 28 20.

Trustees Update

The trustees continue to stay busy keeping our building in good shape and updating equipment where needed. Work completed in June included the purchase of two new window air conditioners for the church office. The air conditioner in Pastor Loretta's office has been installed (and is very much appreciated). The air conditioner for the outer office still needs to be installed.

Dave provided paint for the small door up in the bell tower to be painted. Aaron Leider completed that job.

The big screens have been installed in the sanctuary. A couple of the trustees came in to help lift the TVs onto the wall brackets. The camera that was also ordered for recording the services is on back order and should be installed in a couple of weeks. The new camera will give us better quality recording for our online worship services. The best part of this new technology is that it was all paid for with designated gifts to the church.



Team effort as the screens go up.

Financial Update

Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of this church! We continue to stay current in paying all our bills and ministry obligations.

As a reminder, you can mail your offering to the church at: Sparta UMC, 210 N Court St., Sparta, WI 54656; or you can sign up for electronic giving by going to our church Web site at: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc and clicking on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of the page (call the church office or our financial secretary, Heidi Sullivan if you have questions); or check with your financial institution and ask if they have a "bill pay" option that you can send your offering through.

However you choose to give, please know how important that act is to keeping our church alive and vital during this challenging time. Together we will continue faithfully serving God with trust and confidence.



Shop with scrip...support your church

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the church through the shop with scrip program. It is such a simple way to help as you do your regular shopping or eating at your favorite restaurants with scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church. It is a great way to support the church and some of our local businesses!



A big thank you also goes out to Cheryl Isensee for organizing our scrip program and keeping it up and running. The next scrip order will be going in on **July 12**. You can mail your order directly to Cheryl 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).



The Only Constant in Life is Change

"No woman/man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river and she/he is not the same woman/man." –Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC)

What will church be like after the pandemic? We should plan for it to be different. The Israelites returned from exile to rebuild the temple, as well as their religion. However, neither was the same as it had been.

Around the same time, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus noted that, "The only constant in life is change." No one can step into the same church twice, especially post-Covid-19. In the post-Covid-19 church:

Worship will be online. Most churches find that the number of links to online worship is greater than their average attendance before the epidemic. Who would go back to serving fewer people? Therefore, we will have in-person and online services. However, we will need new ways of reaching out to people who may not live nearby.

Buildings will be less important. We spend a quarter to a third of our budgets on physical properties. That will likely change, though slowly.

Time will be less important. Many churches record their worship and people can watch anytime. No more will our churches be able to ignore those who work, travel, or spend time with family on Sunday mornings.

How you support the church will change as well. You may not be present, but God will still be working through the church. Thus, your giving will have to be digital (funds transfer, online giving, etc.).

How we relate to the community will change. We will have to be more adaptable to changing circumstances. For example, right now a famine is starting. As food grows scarce, rising prices thrust many families into famine-like circumstances. How will our church help feed others, not just at home, but around the world?

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863



A Beautiful Day for a Parade

We had to get creative with our celebration of Jenny Johnson and her graduation from Sparta High School. So, we had a parade in her honor. Two rows of cars lined up at Meadowview School parking lot as we prepared to surprise Jenny. Her mom made sure Jenny was out by their driveway as we all drove by honking and waving. We also dropped off graduation cards (and even balloons and signs). We all had great fun. Congratulations again Jenny and best of luck in the future!



Ever wonder what our bell tower looks like?

Wonder no more. Aaron Leider spent an afternoon cleaning buckets of dust and debris out of the bell tower and snapped these pictures.



In case you can't quite make it out, the above is a signature dated March of 1926. Pretty cool.

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At the 2019 session of our Wisconsin Annual Conference, we overwhelmingly supported requests to address racism in our churches and communities. One of the reasons that this is so important for us – and actually a request that we should actively enjoy engaging in – is that 40% of appointed clergy in the Wisconsin Conference represent racial and ethnic minority populations. We have excellent Hmong, Korean, Hispanic, Latino, African, African American (and a variety of other ethnicities including but not limited to Italian, German, Indian, Filipino, Myanmarese...) pastoral leadership. We have an abundance of cross-cultural appointments that celebrate the diversity of our Annual Conference. But diversity can be a two-edged sword. It is a joy to gather together as an Annual Conference and see the rich diversity of races, languages, nations, ethnicities, and heritages represented in the room. We are truly a global faith community.

But if all diversity does is highlight our differences, then it fails to bring about change. Having colorful threads in a bunch may look nice, but until and unless they are woven together in a tapestry, they have not achieved their full potential. The non-political definitions of pluralism could shape our vision: while diversity focuses mainly on how we are different, pluralism focuses on how much better we are together than apart. A true and healthy pluralism is synergistic – everyone contributes their unique history, culture, and gifts to the greater whole, which in every way is more than the sum of its parts. Our diversity should not simply be an appearance, it should strengthen the very foundations upon which we do our ministry. We are the beautiful tapestry of God, woven together through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we change? I want to offer a few simple reflections to guide our Wisconsin Conference and to encourage the vital leadership of all of our clergy and laity:

1. Make intentional time and space for conversation (electronically or safely in appropriate gatherings as we begin to move toward reentering our churches in the months to come) – talk to one another about what has been happening in our country concerning race. However, I want to offer a caution. We must move beyond talk about “racism.” Racism becomes a safe abstraction that allows us to share opinions that fail to lead us to action. We need to be specific about what we want to talk about. Outrage about George Floyd wasn’t just “racism”; it is about “anti-black violence.” We focus on Black Lives Matter instead of a sweet, well-intentioned, but highly misinformed “All Lives Matter” because black people specifically have been singled out for unjust and unjustifiable violence. When we talk about immigration from Mexico for Mexicans and Central Americans, this is not simply “racism”; this is “anti-

brown xenophobia and oppression.” In our conversations, we must name what is going on and not hide behind abstract labels. Anti-Asian, Anti-African, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown attitudes and bigotry are indeed all forms of racism, but to fully understand systemic reform, you need to dig through the covering to get to the roots. We should be talking in our churches, between our churches ecumenically, in our circuits and districts, with our communities about issues of racial justice. The more we open space for conversation, where the intention is to share, listen, and better understand, the better we prepare the soil for fertile and fruitful growth.

2. Read and study together – Of course, the Bible, but this pandemic and the time of racial unrest call us back to the Hebrew Testament and the many ways plague and ethnic clashes defined “normal” life. Our Council of Bishops and the leadership of the Wisconsin Conference are reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, by Bettina Love. Two other excellent resources are Ibram X. Kendi’s, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Jennifer Harvey’s, *Dear White Christians*. These are just a few excellent places to start to gain good information that provides a basis for productive, rich, and transformative conversations.
3. Reach out to your community organizations that are actively engaged in multi-cultural, racial/ethnic, mercy and justice work – Our United Methodist Churches do not mirror the communities in which they exist in well over 80% of our current locations. Wisconsin United Methodist Churches rarely represent the diversity present in the city, township, or suburb in which they are located. If we only talk to ourselves, we limit the amount of change we can expect. This is a priority time for community engagement. Our congregations need to actively seek to take their place at the table in the civic life of the community. We will open our hearts, minds, and doors to a full panorama of race, language, heritage, culture, and life if we will simply engage in conversation with our larger communities.

If we will begin with just these three things, I believe we will see God work the miracle of transformation in our churches. We will discover a wide range of new ministry possibilities that engage us in the work of racial justice and systemic change. We will be moved from the abstract to the concrete. We will become doers of the word in addition to being faithful hearers. We will become the God-called, God-inspired, God-intended catalyst for change that fulfills our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The time has come. The time is now. Let us be better, together.

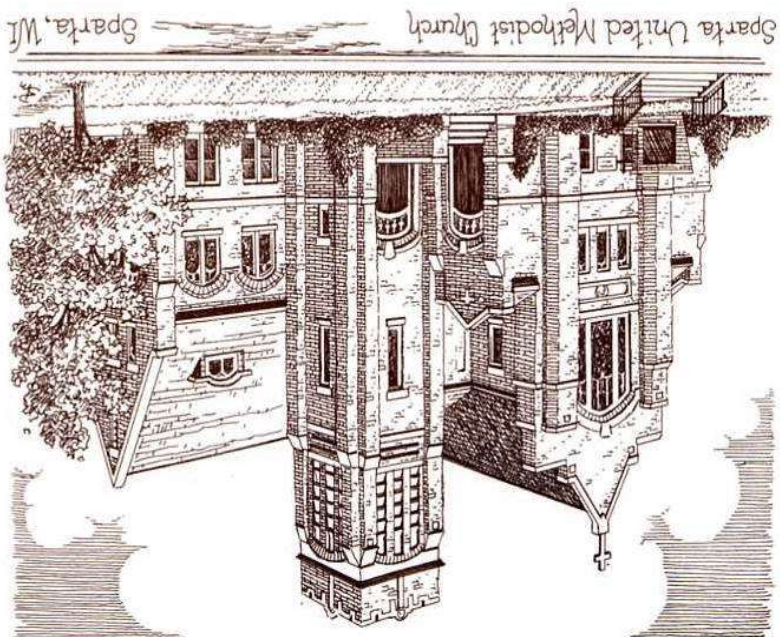
Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

The Chimes

Sparta United Methodist Church
210 N Court Street
Sparta, WI 54656

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Prepared Especially For:



Sparta United Methodist Church
Sparta, WI

Pastor: Rev. Loretta Waughtal

Pastor's Cell Phone: (608) 386-1862

Phone: (608)269-6949

Fax: (608)269-6940

Email: office@spartamethodist.com

Website: lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartumc

SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing,
Sunday, 9 a.m.

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year