

“The CHIMES” – September

Volume 55, No. 9

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.

If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.” (James 1:8 NRSV)



COVID-19, financial stress, political and racial unrest, all have caused a massive stir both in the United States and around the globe. Stores are selling out of essential supplies, opinions are flying, theories are filling the internet, and most importantly people are getting

sick and dying. Both mass worry and total apathy are responses that are overflowing social media and popping up in our everyday conversations. People respond to trials and pressure-filled circumstances in various ways. Some panic, some get angry, some ignore, some even reject the existence of any problem.

We do not get to choose our trials, but we do get to our response to pressure-filled circumstances. This, of course, raises the question, how should the Christian respond to the trials of living through 2020? In James 1:2-8, James, the brother of our Lord, provides believers guidelines for how to respond to trials of life.

CONSIDER THE TRIAL JOY?

First, in verses 2-3, James says to consider trials as joy knowing that when faith is tested, endurance is

produced. What James is saying here is that the follower of Christ has reason to rejoice in any problem that they may face. This, of course, is not joy in the trial itself, but the potential growth brought about by trial. We are to rejoice in any trial that comes our way because God can use it for our growth and His glory.

Notice specifically here that James does not say “if” you face a trial but “when.” Pressure-filled circumstances and difficult situations are inevitable in life. You cannot control a world-wide pandemic, you cannot control other people’s words or actions. But you can control your response. Will you rejoice or will you fall apart or strike back?

LET ENDURANCE PREVAIL

Second, James says in verse 4 to let endurance have its work in you that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing. James began in verses 2-3 by commanding believers to consider trials a joy because of the potential growth or endurance that may be produced by them. Here he points to the ultimate goal of trials; maturity of the believer.

This is what James says you can rejoice in. However, the road to maturity through trials is endurance. You must endure the trial in faith to experience the maturity and joy produced by it.

There is no growth in a trial that you go through in fear, unbelief, apathy, or in a self-righteous attitude. Endure with confidence and joy knowing how God can use this trial to grow you.

ASK FOR GOD’S WISDOM

James then instructs us to ask God for wisdom when facing trials and struggle. Of all the things we could pray for, why wisdom? Because you need God’s wisdom more than anything else.

You can get all kinds of advice these days on any number of topics from experts in every field and wind up with a head full of conflicting advice and opinions. It is enough to make one’s head explode with an

continued

overload of man-made wisdom. We need God's wisdom and guidance to help us sort everything out. Do not waste your trial, ask God for His wisdom in confidence.

BE AUTHENTIC

James ends by saying that the one who asks with doubt is chaotic, and double-minded, unstable in every way. Many will say that in today's trials they are relying on God, but their words and actions will tell a different story, showing their dependence in the trials is on the world and themselves.

They will pray for wisdom and help but will do so in doubt because their reliance is divided between God and the world. That person is unstable spiritually and divided between God and the wisdom of the world. James says they will not receive wisdom from God. Friends, in these difficult days, the trial has arrived on our doorstep, will you waste it, or will you rejoice in it, grow through it, and rely on God above all else?

ASK YOURSELF

- How am I growing as a Christian during this time?
- How can I be a light for Jesus during this trial?
- Am I extending grace to people through this? People that are just as inconvenienced as I am and working harder than ever, enduring others who are not giving grace?
- Have I asked God for wisdom during this hard time in faith that God will provide abundantly?

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

Pastor L



I, and my family, would like to thank Ellen Hemstock and Toni Burrows for their amazing work on my voice recital. Thank you for all of your help and support for this performance. It would not have been possible without you. I am also grateful to have this church to sing in.

Sincerely, Nathan Janzen



Love Blooms on the Altar

Altar plants have been an expression of God's love and creation for many years at SUMC. We may be the only church that brings in fresh plants every week. During the past months we have all had to adapt. UMW would like to thank Donna, Karen, Margie, Emily, Amy, Cathy, Tina, Julie, Cyndi, Cheryl, Eileen and Cindy for monthly plant pick up at Sparta Floral and delivery to church. We adapted when plants had to be picked up at the back door of the floral shop and taken to church for Thursday afternoon's taping of Pastor Loretta's message. This began with lilies at Easter time. Things are back to some normalcy now.

UMW thanks all members and friends of SUMC who have signed up on the monthly calendars for one or more plants. Plants are \$4.75 for one and \$9.50 for two. It's a wonderful way to express honor, memories, thank yous or just thinking of you. Each plant then journeys to someone's home. Thank you to Cyndi for many years of delivering plants.

In the near future the first few months of 2021 will be posted. For your comfort and safety before returning to in-person Sunday services you may call, text, or email Cathy Nichols at: (cell: 608-487-4919, bcn@charter.net) to request months/dates, honor of/memory of and keep/not keep/gift to for each plant you sign up for. Undesignated plants are given to celebrate births, anniversaries, hospital stays, etc.

Thank you to Lorie Dale for her summertime bouquets of flowers from her gardens. If you frequent Sparta Floral thank them for the beautiful plants they provide for our worship service at a much reduced rate.

God's blessings to all,
Cathy Nichols



Resilience in Clay Jars

“But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;” (2 Corinthians 4:7-9)

There is much being written about the need for resilience in our home lives, in our churches, in our communities and in our institutions. Resilience is the ability to recover quickly from difficulties; think of the tree that bends but does not break. Clearly, the Apostle Paul had resilience in mind when writing to the Corinthians.

There are three things that I believe a resilient church needs: 1. Devotion to a vision of ministry and mission 2. Knowledge of the spiritual gifts of members and friends of the congregation (the “treasure in clay jars”) 3. Nurturing of gifts through spiritual disciplines of prayer, presence, gifts, service and witness.

In these pandemic times, we will need to discover and nurture resilience because, first, our affliction will not be ending any time soon. Until there is an effective vaccine that has been broadly implemented (2 or 3 or more years in the future), church attendance will be dangerous to members over 60 or those with chronic illnesses. Our churches must be resilient, second, because we are not going back to where we were. A mix of online and in-person worship, participation and giving will be the new normal going forward. Finally, we must be resilient because the newcomers we need to survive will judge us according to how we adhered to Christian values during the pandemic.

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

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 using the scrip cards. Those businesses then donate a percent of your spending back to the church.

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 **September 13**. 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).



In-Building Worship Continues

Worship services continue with social distancing precautions in place. In August we reached a new high in attendance with over 40 people on August 16. Thank you to everyone who is respecting and working with the social distancing protocols in place. We understand it isn't a perfect situation but our main goal is to keep people safe and healthy as we worship.

If you haven't been back yet and decide to come in the near future you will find the pews have been taped off to make sure that a safe six-foot distance is kept between those in attendance that don't live in the same household. There are stations set up at both the K Street and Court Street entrances and the elevator with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and disposable masks for those who do not come with a mask. Offering plates are also set up at these locations, as we are not passing the plates at this time.

Also on August 16 we livestreamed the worship service for the first time. We may still have some issues to tweak (volume for the livestream) but it went well for our first time. We will continue to work on presenting the best worship service we possibly can. We are also still working on getting the new recordings posted to YouTube for those who join us that way.

Although Pastor Loretta and those in attendance are 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 do not, and we will continue to record and post online services so that as many as possible have the opportunity to worship with this community of faith.

Please continue to call, text, or message Pastor with prayer requests and joys too. We all need to hear about and celebrate each other's joys! Pastor's cell number is 608-386-1862.

Administrative Assistant Search Begins

Pastor Loretta has posted our job opening on Facebook and Indeed.com. We have had some interest shown in the position and she hopes to start interviewing candidates the first week in September.

If you know someone who might be interested, you can pick up a detailed job description in the church office or have him or her call Pastor Loretta and she will email them a copy. We are asking those interested to send a letter of introduction, their resume, and three job references to the church for our consideration.

Baptisms Celebrated in August

On Saturday, August 15 Liam Huntington and K'maya Richards were baptised. They are the children of Alex and Natalie (Peth) Echeverria. We normally do baptisms in our Sunday morning worship services, but because of the pandemic pastor is open to being flexible with this important sacrament.

We had members of our congregation present to represent the church and take the congregational vows. It was a very nice and meaningful service for the family. In fact, Liam told pastor that this was the biggest day of his life. The second biggest day for him was when his sisters were born.



Liam and K'maya
with Pastor L



Echeverria family

From the Parish Nurse...

Bookstores are full of books attempting to help us figure out this life. Books on marriage, parenting, relationships, and personal growth fill countless shelves. Others claim to aid in addiction recovery and explain the meaning of life. Still more give views on life after death, good and evil, and the origin of human existence. But only the Bible gives us answers to those questions directly from the God who created us. The Bible is God's inspired words to us. No man-made self-help book can come close to the words of our Creator.



Because the Bible is the word of God, breathed out by His Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16), it is accurate and reliable. Although societies, cultures, and technologies have changed over the years, God's character remains the same. God's universal truths do not alter. The Bible, written over the course of 4500 years, shows this. A mere 2000 years later, God's Word is as relevant to us now as it ever has been. Mankind is still sinful, we all search for meaning and happiness in vain ways, and God is always patient, waiting for us to acknowledge Him (2 Peter 3:9). The Bible shows that this has always been the case, and then shows us that God is always the answer.

The Bible also gives us examples of what happens when people live according to God's will—and what happens when they don't. The Bible is the only book inspired by God, filled with what He wants us to understand. To read it is to read a personal message to us from God Himself. To ignore it is to reject His primary method of communicating with us. God wants us to understand who He is, who we are, how we can be reconciled with Him, and how we can live fruitful, joyful lives. To that end, He gave us the Scriptures. The more we study the Bible, the more we will gain.

We have His guidance and life's instructions right before us in the Bible. I want to help you start to navigate your way into the Bible so you will find a document called God's Yellow Pages tucked into the newsletter.

Love and prayers, Priscilla

Church Facebook Page

The church has an official Facebook site if you would like to keep up with what is going on in the church and easily access the online worship services. The worship services are now livestreamed on the church Facebook page at 9 a.m. on Sunday mornings. If you can't join us right at 9 a recording of the service will also be on Facebook after the service.



You can find that site at:

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



Thank you for the Kalanchoe plant from the Sunday morning altar. Scott who had surgery in Rochester, MN and is recovering at our house appreciates the thoughts and prayers you sent. Duane is having knee surgery September 1. He will be recovering at home. Thank you to all who have sent prayers and cards for Duane.

Scott, Duane, and Jane Hobson



We have had some very busy groundskeepers/gardeners around the church this summer. **Thank you to Larry Humphrey, Dean Olson, and John and Diane Noonan** (and any other people) who have been working so hard at keeping the exterior of the church looking so spiffy! It really looks nice, especially after all the exterior brickwork was done. Your hard work and diligence is greatly appreciated!

Records and History Committee
Margie Lakowske



Sparta UMW News

The United Methodist Women executive committee had a socially-distanced meeting on Cathy Nichols' porch on Tuesday July 21. They had some important and difficult decisions to make because of the changes the pandemic has made in everyone's life.

The first item of discussion was what to do about the proposed 2020 budget. Their biggest fund raisers for the year are the Spring Salad Lunch and the Harvest Supper. As we all know, because of COVID 19 those events were cancelled for 2020. The executive committee made the decision that only two items on the 2020 Budget will be given: \$3,000 Pledge to Mission and \$50 Christmas gift to Pastor Loretta.

In order to honor their Pledge to Mission donations to UMW would be appreciated. You might consider donating the dollar amount that you would have spent in supporting the Salad Lunch and Harvest Dinner. Cathy Nichols will be sending a letter to the congregation with details.

They also discussed their 2021 Budget and decided to present the following to the rest of the UMW for a vote in September: \$500 to Pledge to Mission and \$40 to Special Mission Recognition, for a total 2021 budget of \$540.

A full UMW meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 1 at 6 p.m. on the church lawn. Please bring your own chair. If we have inclement weather, the meeting will take place in the fellowship hall with social distancing and masks.

The **Wesleyan Circle** will meet on Tuesday, September 8 at 6 p.m. on the lawn at Cheryl Isensee's home. If we have inclement weather the meeting will take place in the church using social distancing. Please note the time change from 7 p.m.

Lois Circle will not meet for the rest of 2020.

Instead of the traditional UMW booklet all information will be condensed and printed on a single sheet.

A Note from Mary Morrow's Attic

We have recently had an abundance of donations beyond what our Mary Morrow's Attic Thrift Shop has room for at this time. There is a variety of furniture items, women's clothing, possible other items.

If there is someone in your congregation that might be in need of something or would know of someone who is, they are welcome to call my office at 366-6293.

Thank you for sharing, Jenny Koehler



Back to School Prayer

Dear Lord, we pray for the students and teachers going back to schools this school year. We pray for their health and safety as classrooms and schools have been modified to allow for proper social distancing and hygiene. We pray for the janitorial staff and cafeteria workers, as well as the office staff who are essential employees at schools that are open; we pray that you would keep them safe and protected from the virus. Please protect the families of the students and teachers as they return home each day; please slow the spread of the virus so that it would not infect these families. Lord, we also pray for energy and rest for the students and teachers so that they would be able to plan their lessons and effectively teach all their students, also that the students would be able to learn and keep up with their lessons. We also pray for their spiritual growth, and that they may find joy in the midst of this season.

Father God, we pray for the students who will be doing school virtually from home; we pray that they have the resources they need to do schoolwork at home. And we pray for their parents that they would be able to balance work and watch over their children as they try to be disciplined in live classroom time and the recorded lessons as well as any additional homework. We pray for the teachers who have to switch to online learning formats that they would be able to have the resources and technology training they need. Please give the teachers, students, and parents the patience they need for this new type of schooling that they could all work together to accomplish what needs to be done. We pray for kind reactions and gratitude for the work that is still able to be done. Thank You that You are sovereign over all things, Lord, amen.

DAILY REMINDERS:

MOST IMPORTANT IN LIFE – JESUS
MOST BEAUTIFUL ATTIRE – SMILE
GREATEST ASSET – FAITH
MOST POWERFUL FORCE – LOVE
GREATEST WEAPON – PRAYER

A word from our Bishop

Published: 16 August 2020

A Song of Ascents

“How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life for evermore.” (Psalm 133)



“How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity.” Isn’t this a nice, comforting, friendly statement? Yet, how difficult, especially when our communities both local and global face such differences, divisions, and threats. We are politically divided, geographically divided – and for a time

socially distanced – and we are threatened by a disease that is attacking our health, our well-being, our employment, and our security. Oh, peaceful, graceful unity – where art thou?

I believe we make a mistake with Psalm 133 when we read an English translation and interpret through modern Western eyes. What appears to be a very sweet, yet passive passage of scripture for many of us was intended differently in the ancient Hebrew context. The purpose and celebration was still unity, but hearers might have heard the words of this hymn/song and thought “Uh, oh...”

You see, for this song to have meaning, it was an expression of expectation and responsibility. It is both “good and pleasant,” and it is the responsibility of the whole congregation to make it true! This isn’t a precious wish or even a passive observation – it is the will of God, what God has “ordained” for us all. It isn’t an option, and heaven help the person who sows discord, division, or disharmony. The purpose and goal of our life and faith is to work together to create, sustain, and strengthen unity.

This is an important word for our church, for our families, for our congregations, our country, and our world. There are all kinds of forces at work to divide and destroy; the witness of our Christian faith is to prove a better way – the way of unity, harmony, grace, and love. In other words, the way of God. And from this unity that we work so hard to maintain, we raise our

voices in singing, celebrating the liberating truth of God’s ordained will for our lives and for God’s people.

Prayer: Great God of Amazing Grace, unite our hearts, minds, and spirits. Where we struggle for unity, strengthen and guide us. Where we find division and discord, heal us. When we are ready to throw up our hands in disgust and walk away, renew and restore in us commitment to stay. Help us to be a witness to the world that we can be a strong and faithful body, even in the challenges of our diversity. Make us one, Lord, make us one. We pray in the name and the Spirit of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Grace and Peace, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

Walk Through the Bible

Sparrows Nest at the Abbey will once again be hosting “Walk Through the Bible.” This year the focus will be on the New Testament. Those who attended last year had a wonderful and fun time learning about the Old Testament.

This year’s event is on Saturday, September 19 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at a cost of \$25 per person. The cost helps to cover the speaker fee, workbook, and lunch. The Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation is also helping this year with funding.

There is limited seating for 60. Attendees will pay at the door but you must RSVP for an accurate lunch count. Box lunches will be prepared and weather permitting lunch will be outside, otherwise lunch will be in the conference room. Call 661-406-1721 for more information or to make your reservation.

selfless leader
humility action
servant
leadership
good-listener open-minded
ethical role-model

Servant Leadership Board

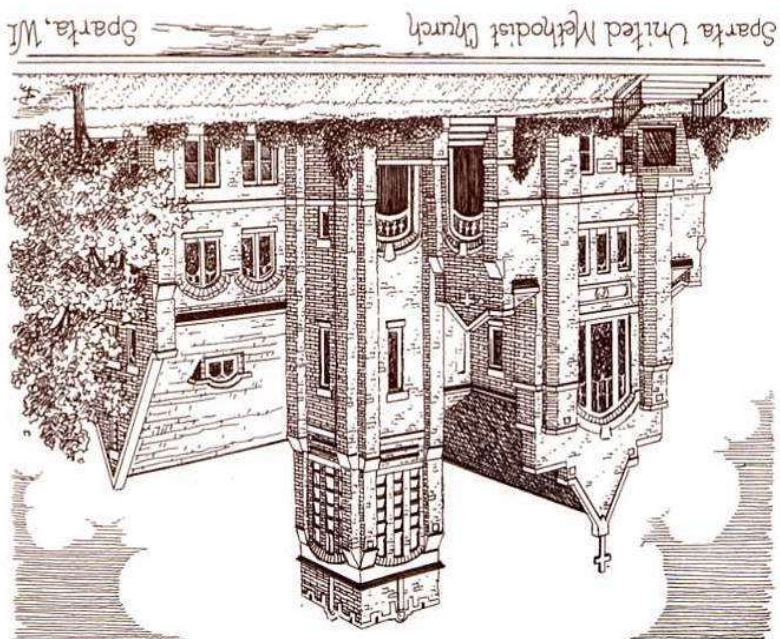
If the church office has your current email address, you should have received an email with a link to a video created by Toni Burrows that features Toni and Pastor Loretta explaining our potential move to a Servant Leadership Board structure. The email also included the Board Guidelines that were approved by the Ad Council earlier this year. If you have not watched the video yet you can find it on YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/fhkUys96wpk>. We really want everyone to be up on what is going on and we would love to hear your thoughts.

The Chimes

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

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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Email: office@spartamethodist.com

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SUMC Worship Schedule

In-house Service

In sanctuary with social distancing, masks, etc.
Sunday, 9 a.m.; this service is livestreamed

Online Service

YouTube: Sparta UMC month day year