



Joan E. Klein, Editor

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PASTOR – by Juhee Lee

My Beloved Haven Family,

As we enter this beautiful season of gratitude, may God's abundant grace fill your hearts and homes. In this time of abundance, let us take a moment to reflect on the blessings we've received and open our hearts to share with those in need.

Thanksgiving reminds us of God's boundless generosity, inviting us to extend that same spirit to others. This season, as is our tradition, we are now collecting stuff for the Thanksgiving baskets filled with love and care for families who may be struggling to celebrate. Through these baskets, we can bring warmth, comfort, and hope to those who need it most. If you feel led to contribute, I would greatly appreciate donations from our Thanksgiving food list.

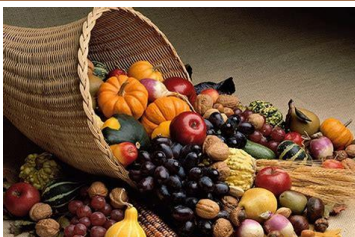
Looking ahead to December, I am excited to invite you to our Christmas concert on December 8 at 3 p.m. This year's concert will be filled with beautiful music and joy, featuring a full lineup: a talented string ensemble, two brass bands playing carols, and special performances by our choir and guest opera singers (Lori & Jay). This musical celebration will not only bring us together in the spirit of the season but will also serve a greater purpose. All proceeds from the concert will support the House of Hope, a local shelter dedicated to helping the homeless. Your attendance and support will go directly to bringing hope and assistance to those most vulnerable in our community.

In addition, we have something special planned for families and children – a photo opportunity with Santa Claus led by David! Before and after the concert, children can enjoy a memorable moment with Santa, creating memories they'll cherish for years to come. Please spread the word and invite friends, family, and neighbors to join us for this festive day.

As we move through this season of gratitude and giving, I humbly ask for your prayers for our church's mission and ministry. May God continue to bless and guide us as we strive to serve and uplift our community. Thank you for being a part of this journey and for your dedication to the work God has placed before us.

With love and thanksgiving,

Rev. Juhee Lee



Mission Statement: We are a haven for those who would seek to know God better while spreading the love of Jesus Christ.



to support House of Hope

CHRISTMAS FAMILY CONCERT

Sunday Dec. 8 3PM

Haven United Methodist Church

*200 Taunton Ave
East Providence, RI 02914*

The concert is free.



Soprano: Lori Phillips



Baritone: Jay Baylon



Extraordinary Rendition Band

Featuring Opera Singers, Brown University String Chamber, Corner Club, Extraordinary Rendition Band and the Community Music Project: Christmas Carols, Pop & Jazz

A goodwill donation will be collected to support the House of Hope, which serves individuals experiencing homelessness.



<https://www.community-music-project.com>



HOUSE OF HOPE

Oct. 31, 2024



“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of God in heaven, . . .’ — Matthew 5:43-35

In the fall of 1991, I was teaching my regular Wednesday night Bible Study in the local church I was serving at that time. Word came to us during the service that the United States was leading an attack on Iraq that would become the Gulf War. We immediately gathered at the altar for prayer then dismissed for the night. At home, our televisions began to detail the attack with graphic coverage of the events of that night. It was a time of uncertainty and concern as the coalition forces from 35 countries responded to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.

The next day I sent out word to my congregation that there would be a prayer vigil at the church that evening. When I walked into the sanctuary that night, the pews were filled. It was evident that there was a real need for spiritual centering, so much so that I announced that the church would remain open 24 hours a day for those who wanted to come and pray. I lit a Christ Candle every morning and made sure the church doors were unlocked.

People came — and they kept on coming. Some evenings I would walk over to the church and pray with a soldier’s parents. On other occasions I would walk into the church well after midnight only to discover the single candle burning and someone kneeling at the altar. The need was there, and the need was met.

Just a couple of years later, Hurricane Andrew swept through southern Florida with a wide swath of devastation. That same congregation was challenged to respond with relief supplies. They filled not only the fellowship hall but the sanctuary with bag after bag to be delivered to Homestead, Florida. The need was there, and the need was met.

Today we are, again, in a season of need. As you read these words, our country finds itself on the edge. We are more divided than we are united. Signs fill neighborhoods with political preference. Television ads are filled with accusations. The rhetoric is filled with finger-pointing. There is no unity and, as a result, our communities are filled with chaos. No matter who wins this election, the day after will be filled with accusations, disunity, chaos, and uncertainty.

Where will we find peace?

Today I write in a climate that is filled with extreme need. Hurricanes and floods have ravished communities and changed the landscape for years to come, if not permanently. As a result, businesses are destroyed, families are displaced, and homelessness is rising. It’s only a matter of time before depression and loneliness give way to mental illness and drug addiction.

Where will we find hope?

In most communities, there is a building that has historically been at the center of the community. In that building are people who have found inspiration, hope, and faith. In that building there has been found a peace that has passed understanding, a fellowship that has provided support, and a feeling of unity that extended way beyond our individual preferences. In that building the mysterious power of a Holy Spirit has provided the courage to face injustice and a drive to meet the needs that revealed themselves. That building is our church.

I believe that this is the moment for the people in those churches, our churches, to mobilize to meet the need at hand. We know there is disunity. We know there is anger. We know there is fear. We know that chaos is present and will continue no matter who wins.

I want to call upon every one of our churches to mobilize immediately to do what we do best when a need exists. It is time to open our churches for prayer. Time to offer a safe space for conversation. Time to call the community to unity and a common sense of purpose.

I also want to call upon every one of our churches to mobilize and gather resources and offerings for flood and hurricane ravaged regions. It is time to extend our passion into our communities and our world. Time to demonstrate to the community that we can do extraordinary things when the need presents itself. And,

friends, the need is presenting itself.

We dare not sit by idly and let the world's priorities dominate the landscape. Hatred will prevail unless love exerts itself. Apathy will lull us to sleep unless passion stirs the hearts of good people. Division will alienate us from one another unless we call people, in the name of Jesus, to a higher plane of unity.

This is our time. Our moment. Our opportunity. The need is present. Will we meet it?

In my last local church, every Sunday, after the benediction was pronounced, the congregation I was privileged to serve would sing this song:

*Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.
Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be.
With God, our creator, children all are we.
Let us walk with each other in perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me, let this be the moment now.
With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow.
To take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally.
Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.
May it be so.*

The Journey Continues, . . .



Thomas J. Bickerton
Resident Bishop
New Hope Episcopal Area
The New England and New York Annual Conferences

Power Through Powerlessness

Daily Meditation | 7 | October | 2024

henri nouwen
SOCIETY



The movement from power through strength to power through powerlessness is our call. As fearful, anxious, insecure, and wounded people we are tempted constantly to grab a little bit of power that the world around us offers, left and right, here and there, now and then. These bits of power make us little puppets jerked up and down on strings until we are dead. But insofar as we dare to be baptized in powerlessness, always moving toward the poor who do not have such power, we are plunged right into the heart of God's endless mercy. We are free to reenter our world with

the same divine power with which Jesus came, and we are able to walk in the valley of darkness and tears, unceasingly in communion with God, with our heads erect, confidently standing under the cross of our life.

It is this power that engenders leaders for our communities, women and men who dare to take risks and take new initiatives. It is this power that enables us to be not only gentle as doves, but also as clever as serpents in our dealings with governments and church agencies. It is this power that enables us to talk straight and without hesitation about sharing money with those who have financial resources, to call men and women to radical service, to challenge people to make long-term commitments in the world of human services, and to keep announcing the good news everywhere at all times. It is this divine power that makes us saints—fearless—who can make all things new.



[A Living Sacrifice] Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. - Romans 12:1

Addicts blossom into ‘doves’ at recovery house

By Jim Patterson Oct. 7, 2024 | INDIANAPOLIS (UM News)



Haleigh Baker said she lost nearly everything, including her daughter, because of pill and alcohol addiction. Living at the Dove Recovery House for Women in Indianapolis has given her hope for the future. Photo by Joey Butler, UM News.

Her T-shirt declares “My Life’s in Ruins.” Once, it was true.

“If you don’t laugh, you’ll cry,” says Haleigh Baker, 22, with a rueful smile. “Yeah, that’s how I feel.”

Addictions, violence and prison once dominated Baker’s life. On this day, safe and relaxed in an easy chair at Dove Recovery House for Women, she seems the picture of serenity.

But chaotic memories are never far away, dating back to when she was a toddler.

“I remember one time my mom was sitting in a roly chair,” she said. “I was really young and I’m not really sure what my grandma was mad about. But my grandma just hauled off and hit her. She was probably just really fed up with my mom’s (stuff). My mom had four kids and my grandma was taking care of all of them.”

That was a normal day in Baker’s family.

“The police were always at my house,” she said. “In my (Greenfield) neighborhood, we were the white trash family.”

Dove Recovery House, a community of 50 or so women fighting addictions, is a much more joyful atmosphere. Among its major supporters is St. Luke’s United Methodist Church.

The day a reporter visited, a birthday party was happening, with singing, cake and presents. It felt like a carefree gathering of an extended family, which it kind of is.

Wendy

Wendy Noe, in her office near the room where the party is happening, runs Dove House with a potent combination of corporate smarts and empathy for women who want to turn their lives around. Instead of quoting quarterly earnings report results, she sings the praises of the women she calls her “doves.”

But she is as tough as any hard-charging executive.

“I expect the best because our doves deserve the best,” said Noe, who a few years back replaced three-quarters of the staff because she was dissatisfied with their efforts.

“We’re a free program,” she pointed out. “They can stay with us for up to two years, and we provide individual therapy and group therapy. We provide classes in management life skills like financial literacy, job readiness, healthy relationships, faith-based programming, anything that we can to just throw at them to get them healthy and stable to leave the house with a 70% success rate.”

Noe graduated from Marion University, a small Catholic institution, with a degree in communications and the expectation she would go into public relations.

“I had to have an internship my senior year and so I started interning at a local domestic violence shelter,” she said. “That’s where I fell in love with nonprofit and women’s issues.

“I was raised by a single woman, a single mom and her twin sister, so I always just felt compelled to help other women.”

When she arrived, Dove House had an annual budget of \$250,000, six staff members and was housing 23 women. Nine years later, a staff of 36 employees oversees the care of 55 women, with an annual budget of \$3 million.

United Methodist Lori Chambers (left) meets with Haleign Baker, a resident of the Dove Recovery House for Women in Indianapolis. Among the home's major supporters is St. Luke's United Methodist Church, where Chambers is a lay leader. Photo by Joey Butler, UM News.



Haleign

Baker briefly attended Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (before the school split into two separate entities), and her dream was to become a nurse.

“School was always my dream,” Baker said. “I was always the very smart kid. A lot of my teachers I had a little bit of trouble with because I was always talking.

“They were like, ‘She talks too much, but she’s a joy to have in class.’”

Then she started drinking alcohol and getting into fights.

Despite that, with her grandmother’s help, she got into college.

“I started school in the fall of 2019, and I got pregnant with my daughter in November of 2019,” she said.

She quit school and moved back in with her grandmother, with whom she says she “doesn’t have the best relationship.”

“So I guess I was drinking one night, and I guess I pulled her off the couch by her hair,” Baker said. “I don’t remember this.”

The police arrived and arrested her and the Indiana Department of Child Services took custody of her daughter.

“They took me to jail,” she said. She was charged with domestic violence in the presence of a child.

She got out on pretrial release but couldn’t move back in with her grandmother.

“I was homeless... and I just lost it. I started drinking and doing more stuff, and that’s when I ended up on pills. I was living with people I shouldn’t be living with, and every time I would get so close to getting her (daughter) back, something would happen and I would have to move out.”

She did two stints in jail, and the father of her daughter was awarded custody.

When Baker was close to leaving prison, her probation officer asked her if she would like to live at Dove House. She agreed to do it.

“The ladies that I talked to who had previously been here really loved it,” she said. “They have lots of programs.

“I have a 3-year-old,” she added. “I just really wanted to be somewhere where (she) could come and be here with me. She comes every weekend.”

Wendy

For Baker and women like her who find their way to Dove House, the facility is the only feasible place to get help kicking their addictions.

“The number one reason people don’t receive treatment for substance use is cost, so there’s a benefit to them to be introduced to Dove House to get those services,” Noe said.

“Many of the women here come with nothing except for the clothing on their backs, and they are extremely distrustful,” she said.

The counselors try to counter the idea that Dove House is a place where they are just serving out their sentence.

“What we do here is so much different,” Noe said. “We love them until they can love themselves. That’s our motto here.”

One key point is getting the doves to stop looking at their addictions as “a moral failing, a personal choice,” Noe said. “The evidence shows that addiction affects the brain, its chemical makeup.”

According to Noe, the average age the residents of the Dove House pick up their addiction is 13.

“Now, if you have children, you know that most children don’t pick up and decide they’re going to be heroin addicts or methamphetamine addicts,” she said.

“There’s something that comes before that, and that’s trauma. ... Addiction brings them to Dove House, but trauma brings them to addiction.”

Nearly all Dove House residents suffer from trauma, and 90% of them have experienced sexual abuse, Noe said.

“If you don’t identify that trauma and work through that trauma, then we’re going to see repeating behavior,” Noe said. “Science shows that at the age you start using drugs or alcohol, your brain stops maturing, so we have a house full of 13- or 14-year-olds,” and it usually takes about six months of treatment “for the lights to come back on.”

“Lack of time is our greatest enemy,” she said. “So if we can’t get through to them and help them here, we’re going to lose them back out there.”

If they fail, former residents are welcome to come back and try again.

“Our doors are open after a client leaves our program,” she said. “This is where our family will always be their family. Once a dove, always a dove. They’re always welcome to come back, even if they’ve relapsed.”

Haleign

Baker thinks the program has worked for her.

“I was never going to stop,” she said. “I would have never come here on my own. Just because of ignorance and stubbornness.”

Her dream of college is back on her to-do list.

“I just gave (school) up before, because nobody is going to want me or think I’m good enough,” Baker said. “I’m so grateful that (coming to Dove House) happened, even though I’m sad that I missed so much time.”

Patterson is a UM News reporter in Nashville, Tennessee. Contact him at 615-742-5470 or newsdesk@umcom.org.

Seven sites every United Methodist should see

United Methodist Communications

The New Room was one of John Wesley's main bases for the early Methodist movement. Photo by Kathleen Barry, United Methodist Communications.

World travelers may seek out pyramids, cathedrals and safari parks, but United Methodists have destinations across the globe that hold their own allure. Here are suggestions for seven fascinating places to visit.



Methodism's first building, "the New Room," was used by John and Charles Wesley, and others, as a meeting and preaching place, and a center for educating people in need. It is located in Bristol, England. This photo shows a statue of Charles Wesley standing near the building. Photo by Victoria Rebeck

Where Wesley Walked

England is the cradle of Methodism, where John Wesley started the worldwide evangelical movement in the 18th century, and where travelers today can visit three three main sites that trace the steps of the socially minded Anglican minister. In



Bristol, where Wesley preached his first outdoor sermon, the New Room stands as Methodism's first building, used by Wesley and other early Methodists as a meeting and preaching place and a center for helping and educating people in need. "[The New Room] is soaked in prayer. It's a great thrill to stand in the pulpit," says Jo Hibbard, heritage officer for the Methodist Church in Britain. London is home to Wesley's Chapel and House, the hub for Wesley's later work and considered the Mother Church of World Methodism. To explore where Wesley grew up, take the three-hour train ride from London to Epworth to tour the childhood home of John and his hymn-writing brother Charles. Here, their revered mother, Susanna, instilled in her large brood of children the methodical manner that later would characterize her sons' approach to religion.

St. George's United Methodist Church, constructed in 1763 in Philadelphia, Pa., is the oldest house of Methodist worship in continuous use in America and is designated a heritage landmark of The United Methodist Church. Photo courtesy of Historic St. George's UMC.



Cathedral Church of American Methodism

The oldest house of Methodist worship in continuous use in America, St. George's United Methodist Church of Philadelphia houses an active congregation that began as a Methodist society in 1767 and has occupied the historic church building since 1769. The congregation went to court during the 1920s to save the structure from being razed to make room for the Ben Franklin Bridge. The site of many firsts, St. George's is where missionary Joseph Pilmore made the first public statement on Methodist principles and beliefs and held the nation's first Methodist prayer meeting. Francis Asbury, the pioneering bishop of American Methodism, preached his first American sermon at St. George's in 1771 and called the place The Cathedral Church of American Methodism. Want to learn more about those early days? St. George's offers a Time Traveler's tour on certain dates.

God's Square Mile at the Jersey Shore

The embodiment of Methodist camp meetings and the Holiness Movement of the late 19th century, Ocean Grove, N.J., was founded in 1869 during a prayer meeting on land set aside for the perpetual worship of Jesus Christ. Today, the seaside community still offers residents and visitors opportunities for spiritual



Each spring, 114 tents are erected and leased to summer residents of Ocean Grove, N.J., a seaside community founded by Methodists in 1869 as a camp meeting site. Photo by Tracey James.

birth, growth and renewal in a Christian recreational setting. Ocean Grove (pop. 3,342) holds a camp meeting revival every Sunday, closes its beaches to the public on Sunday mornings, features streets with Biblical names, sells no alcohol, and maintains a commercial-free boardwalk along one of the most pristine beaches in America. At its center is the 6,000-seat Great Auditorium, used for regular worship services and family-friendly concerts and featuring an 11,000-pipe organ. Each spring, 114 canvas tents are erected around the auditorium and rented to tenants, many of whom are fourth- and fifth-generation summer residents. "There's a peaceful spirit here. It's like stepping back in time," says J.P. Gradone, executive director of the Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association, the United Methodist-related group overseeing the grounds.

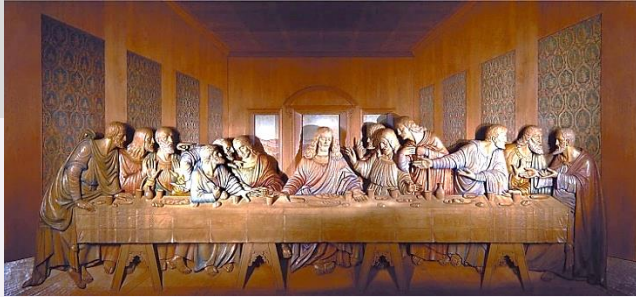
Dedicated in 1924, the United Methodist Building (left) is the only non-governmental building on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. Photo courtesy of the Board of Church and Society.

Witness to the World: United Methodist Building

Dedicated in 1924 in the heart of Washington, D.C., the United Methodist Building is the only non-governmental building on Capitol Hill – giving public witness at the seat of U.S. government



that The United Methodist Church is an advocate for justice and peace throughout the world. Located across from the Capitol and next to the Supreme Court, the Italian Renaissance-style building houses offices for several United Methodist agencies and numerous other church and ecumenical groups. Filled with rich history, the structure was dedicated amid the Temperance Movement and the Labor Reform/Social Gospel Movement. Weekday visitors can take a self-guided tour (or arrange in advance for guided tours) and attend noon worship services each Wednesday in Simpson Memorial Chapel.



A woodcarving of da Vinci's The Last Supper is the focal point of The Upper Room Chapel in Nashville, Tenn. Photo courtesy of The Upper Room.

Quiet Space: Upper Room Chapel

A gem of tranquility in a bustling district of Nashville, Tenn., Upper Room Chapel is a place of prayer and reflection, as well as the anchor of a spiritual formation ministry that since 1935 has distributed millions of copies

of its flagship devotional guide to 100 countries in 35 languages. The campus includes a prayer room, a Christian art museum and the home of global United Methodist ministries focused on spiritual development. It has become a pilgrimage destination for thousands of people who have learned about God and grown their faith through the quarterly grassroots-written publication called The Upper Room. The chapel holds a worship service each Wednesday morning, and the art museum features rotating exhibits. Admission is free, although donations are welcome.

Africa University is a United Methodist-related school which opened in 1992 in Mutare, Zimbabwe. Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS.

Beacon of Hope: Africa University

In the midst of a United Methodist evangelistic movement on the world's second most populous continent, Africa University stands as a beacon of hope to the people of Africa's under-developed nations. The United Methodist-related school opened in 1992 in Mutare, Zimbabwe, near a mission site established a century earlier by the Methodist Episcopal Church, where a founding bishop envisioned that youths holding books one day would walk in the valley. Today, the vision at Old Mutare Mission is being fulfilled as the university molds thousands of students from dozens of African nations into educated, principled Christian leaders.



This pier on Bayou Teche in Louisiana is part of the Sager Brown Depot. Located in Baldwin, the depot ships \$7 million worth of supplies and relief kits throughout the world for the United Methodist Committee on Relief. Photo by United Methodist News Service.

Repository for Relief: UMCOR Depot

If you want to see where ministry and mission converge, the bayou country of Louisiana is the home of the primary U.S. depot for the United Methodist Committee on Relief, where 2,600 volunteers pass through annually to process and ship \$7 million worth of supplies and relief kits distributed throughout the world. Located in Baldwin, 90 miles from New Orleans' strategic seaport, Sager Brown Depot has been a hub of UMCOR missions since Hurricane Andrew hit the Gulf Coast in 1992. For more than a century prior, however, the campus served as a Methodist school and home for black children orphaned by the Civil War. Tours of a small museum and the depot are available by appointment. "We're a hands-on place," explains executive director Kathy Kraiza. "A lot of hands touch these relief kits by the time they end up in the hands of somebody in a Third World country or in the midst of disaster." Kraiza suggests visiting between November and April when sticky bayou temperatures subside.



**Marta Aldrich is freelance writer from Franklin, Tenn. This story was first published on July 31, 2014.*

November 2024

Connected is a publication of the New England Conference of The United Methodist Church. This monthly insert is designed put Conference news directly into the hands of our local church members. **For more news and events, visit www.neumc.org.**



Support victims of disaster through UMCOR

It's hurricane season and many parts of the United States have already suffered in the wake of significant storms. You can support hurricane survivors and recovery – as well as those facing all types of disasters through the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) Domestic Disaster Fund, Advance #901670. UMCOR distributes funds as needed throughout the United States.

Churches that collect funds should deposit the donations into their bank accounts and then issue a check or make an online payment using the methods below:

By check through NEAC

Make checks payable to NEAC with Domestic Disaster or Hurricane Relief in the memo line. Mail checks to:

New England Conference
P.O. Box 419371
Boston, MA 02241-9371


Continued on page 2

The New England Conference of The United Methodist Church celebrates the

Installation of Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton

"Together, the Journey Continues..."

Sat., Nov. 2, 2024, 1 pm
Sudbury United Methodist Church
251 Old Sudbury Road, Sudbury, MA 01776
Reception following service
Learn more at www.neumc.org/installation



"All things work together for the good of those who love God." –Romans 8:28

RSVP for Bishop's Installation

United Methodists in New England are invited to celebrate our new episcopal leader at a Service of Installation for Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton this month.

We are encouraging clergy and laity to attend in person, both to welcome Bishop and Sally Bickerton and to connect with God and one another as we begin this new chapter of shared ministry.

1 pm
Saturday, Nov. 2, 2024
Sudbury UMC
251 Old Sudbury Road
Sudbury, MA

A reception will follow.

RSVP on the Conference website at the address below.



RSVP FOR THE SERVICE AND GET DETAILS:
www.neumc.org/installation

UMCOR

Learn how you can help support those facing disasters

Continued from page 1

By check directly to UMCOR

Make checks payable to Advance GCFA with Domestic Disaster #901670 in the memo line. Mail check to:
Global Ministries/UMCOR
P.O. Box 9068
New York, NY 10087-9068

Donate online using a credit/debit card

Through the Conference:

Use Church Payments Online at

<https://www.neumc.org/churchpaymentsonline>

This is a church created and controlled option, similar to say paying your utility bills online.

Individuals and churches can give directly to UMCOR at

<https://umcmmission.org/advance-project/901670/>



Church members are beginning the long, slow recovery from the devastating storm surge and flooding following Hurricane Helene in the southeastern U.S. Photo by Mike DuBose UM News

Special Sunday

United Methodist Student Day Nov. 24, 2024

This Special Sunday is a denomination-wide celebration focused on the value of education. We honor this day by giving generously

to support scholarships like The Gift of Hope Scholarship. By supporting our students now, we contribute to community transformation and leadership empowerment, building future leaders.

Your gift is a practical expression of care, equipping students to shape a hopeful future. Supporting United Methodist students provides both financial and spiritual boosts, showing them the church's confidence in their potential.

Contributions to the United Methodist Student Day offering send young leaders into the world with wisdom and understanding. Learn more under the Special Sundays tab at www.umcsgiving.org

A promotional poster for Special Sunday United Methodist Student Day. It features a young woman with dark hair, wearing a white shirt, looking thoughtfully to the side. The text on the poster reads: "SPECIAL SUNDAY UNITED METHODIST STUDENT DAY. Did you know that 100% of your United Methodist Student Day donation goes to scholarships for students? The people of The United Methodist Church".

New program offers 'Pathway to Hope' for young immigrants

In January 2024, [New England Justice for Our Neighbors](#) was awarded a federal subcontract to provide legal representation to unaccompanied minors seeking legal status in the United States.



Through *Pathway to Hope*, New England JFON will be able to represent hundreds of additional unaccompanied youth over the next few years, expand its geographical reach to include several more counties in Massachusetts, hire five new employees, and join a new national network of immigration legal service providers

Want to learn more?

Information can always be found on the website, www.newenglandjfon.org and on social media or learn more in person (or via Zoom) when New England JFON hosts annual Celebration! event from 3-5 pm on Sunday, Nov. 17, 2024, at the JMAC Brick-Box Theater in Worcester, MA. Folks are invited to an afternoon of information, inspiration, entertainment and, of course, refreshments! Tickets are free, but registration is required. Visit www.neumc.org/events

Let's Connect

Do you have a story to share? A feature idea? A question to ask? Contact Beth DiCocco, Conference Director of Communications, at communicate@neumc.org or (978) 682-8055 ext. 150

From auto parts to altar: Marjorie Matthews' journey as The UMC's first female bishop



By Crystal Caviness

The New York Times called Matthews "a symbol of progress" and others lauded her historic episcopacy election as "a new spring that would stream out into a great river of history."

It was 1959 and Marjorie Swank Matthews, a lifelong Methodist, was a single mom working for a Michigan auto parts manufacturer. She was 42 and she felt a call to ministry.



Over the next 25 years, Matthews would follow her call to become a leader within the denomination. When she was elected in 1980 as the first female bishop in The United Methodist Church— and within any mainline Protestant denomination in the world -- her election was heralded as momentous. The New York Times called Matthews “a symbol of progress” that women had made across all Protestant denominations.

From manufacturing to ministry

Matthews was born on July 11, 1916, in Onawa, Mich. Marrying at a young age, she and her family lived on Army posts during World War II. When she divorced after the war, she went to work at Lobdell-Emery Manufacturing Company in Alma, Mich., to support herself and her young son, William. While at Lobdell-Emery, she was promoted to assistant to the president and assistant treasurer during her 17 years with the company.

Although her career was going well, Matthews felt led to make a change.

“I thought there must be something else to do with my life,” she was quoted as saying. “I was grateful to God for having gotten me through difficulty and I wanted to do something in return.”

Throughout the next two decades, Matthews pursued her ministry call. She was ordained as an elder in 1965 at age 49. She graduated summa cum laude at age 51 from Central Michigan University. She earned a bachelor of divinity degree from Colgate Rochester Divinity School in upstate New York and then earned a master’s degree in religion and a doctorate in humanities from Florida State University. Throughout these years, Matthews served small congregations in Michigan, New York and Florida.

As her pastoral experience increased, Matthews was appointed to larger churches and, eventually, was selected in 1976 to serve as district superintendent. At the time, she was only the second woman in the denomination to attain that role. (Margaret Henrichsen was the first woman district superintendent, appointed in 1967.)

‘Gushing up of a new spring’

In July 1980, the North Central Jurisdiction met for its annual conference, representing Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin. Of the 460 delegates, 23 were female clergy. At the conference, 13 delegates, including Matthews, were running for three bishop seats. On July 17, on the 30th ballot, Matthews was one of two bishops elected.

In her book, “The Leading Women,” Bishop Judith Craig, described the joy in the room as Matthews was escorted to the platform following her election to the episcopacy.

“She stood before us, so small in stature, yet so huge in presence,” Craig wrote. “The moment was like the gushing up of a new spring that would stream out into a great river of history.”

Matthews was assigned to the Wisconsin Conference, where she was bishop for more than 135,000 United Methodists, eight district superintendents, 339 ministers and 522 congregations.

The historic election brought mixed reactions from those within the church.

“There are several people, I think, who have never reconciled to the fact that there is a woman bishop or

that that is a possibility,” Matthews said in a video from the General Board of Higher Education. “I hear from those people occasionally, especially when I say something that they don't like or I'm quoted in the paper as saying something they don't like. I believe they are entitled to their opinion.

God calls the willing

“However,” she shared, “I firmly believe that God calls both men and women and calls even children into the work of the church. God is more interested in persons who are willing to be used in the ministry or in the work of the church than, I think, that (God) is in in the sex of the person.”

Matthews served the Wisconsin Conference for four years before she retired in 1984. She died from breast cancer on June 30, 1986, at age 69.

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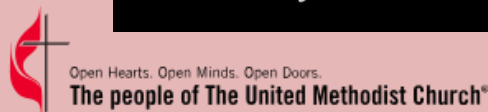
Ask The UMC

Ask The UMC series provides insight into legislation that went into effect immediately after the 2024 General Conference and major changes that will go into effect beginning in January, 2025. Graphic by Laurens Glass, United Methodist Communications.



Part 6: Opening the door to reaffiliation

Analysis by The Rev. Taylor W. Burton Edwards



While the 2024 General Conference closed the door on disaffiliation, it opened a door — by a plenary vote of 629-96 — for disaffiliated churches to reaffiliate at some future time by requiring affected annual conferences to develop and adopt their own reaffiliation policies.

The petition originally under consideration by the Conferences legislative committee (Petition 21027) laid out a thorough process that included questions to be asked of churches seeking reaffiliation. It required the cabinet or other body designated by the conference to review the written answers provided and conduct an interview with key leaders of the local church to include the pastor, lay leader, governing body chair, finance chair, trustees chair, and pastor-parish relations committee chair. The cabinet and the bishop would then submit recommendations to the annual conference to readmit the church for an initial two-year probationary period. A final vote on full admission could be held after that, contingent on subsequent recommendation by the cabinet and the bishop. If approved by the conference, the church would then be required to pay two full years of apportionments before it could receive appointed clergy. The petition also prohibited churches from receiving grants from the district or the conference during the two-year probationary period.

The legislative committee struggled with the complexity and the rigor of the process mandated in the petition and replaced its language entirely to emphasize an approach of graciousness toward churches seeking reaffiliation. Instead of outlining a specific process to be followed by every conference, the committee version left the details of the process up to each annual conference.

“With a spirit of grace, we welcome those churches which have disaffiliated or withdrawn to rejoin The United Methodist Church. Where applicable, every annual conference shall have a policy of reaffiliation for the churches seeking to return to the connection.”

When this petition came to the floor of the General Conference, the graciousness of the proposal was appreciated, but concerns were raised whether it adequately addressed the Trust Clause. On one of the closer votes of the General Conference (386-304), the plenary approved an amendment to add a final sentence: “Each such policy shall require that reaffiliating churches affirm their commitment to the Trust Clause in ¶2503.” The amended petition was approved 629-96.

Two policies completed and adopted

Prior to the General Conference, the Arkansas and Alabama-West Florida annual conferences had each already begun work on developing its own reaffiliation policy. Alabama-West Florida asked its trustees to develop a policy at its 2023 annual conference session. The trustees developed and published the policy in

September 2023. The Arkansas conference would slightly amend and approve the policy as presented to its 2024 annual conference to include the Social Principles as one of the items to be reviewed with congregations as part of its discernment process.

While there are some minor differences in detail between the two conference policies, in broad outlines they bear many similarities. Indeed, the 2024 Arkansas policy appears to be built largely on the structure and, in some places, the specific language of the 2023 Alabama-West Florida policy. Both include a required discernment process (more explicit in Arkansas' policy), followed by a two-stage voting process by the local church — first the leadership body of the church, then a church conference — each requiring simple majority.

Beyond this, however, the two policies diverge somewhat. The Alabama-West Florida Conference requires that churches seeking reaffiliation have at least 50 members to be eligible to begin the process. The Arkansas policy places no such limitations. The Arkansas discernment process includes a requirement that the church develop a written statement of the rationale for reaffiliation, including “their understanding of what it means to be a United Methodist Congregation and their willingness to support the UMC and the Arkansas Conference with their prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.” The Alabama-West Florida Conference does not require such a written statement.

The most notable difference is how a disaffiliated church is received into the conference. In Alabama-West Florida, the entire process is managed by the conference board of trustees, with involvement and approval by the district superintendent, bishop, cabinet and the conference board of congregational development to ensure compliance with Paragraph 259.1 of the Book of Discipline (the process for establishing a new congregation). With that work completed and all approvals received, the trustees then oversee a process to reestablish the congregation with its property and assets duly covered under the Trust Clause as a congregation of the Alabama-West Florida Conference. Reaffiliation is considered to have been completed prior to any action by the annual conference. The subsequent annual conference session welcomes the congregation, but does not take a vote to receive it. There is also forgiveness of apportionments for one year upon readmission provided the church seeks reaffiliation within three years of its disaffiliation.

By contrast, the Arkansas policy is substantially directed by the district superintendent, who works with the local church, the bishop, the cabinet and the conference board of trustees. In Arkansas, after the local church approval, all of these must subsequently approve presenting a request to the next session of the annual conference. A simple majority vote of the annual conference constitutes reception into the conference. Only after annual conference approval and reception do the trustees address the revision and transfer of deeds to restore the church to the conference. The local church has 90 days to complete its part of this process and covers all legal costs involved.

Other policies to be developed

The remainder of the annual conferences in the United States are in various stages of developing their reaffiliation policies. Some conferences are focusing on managing significant transitions, such as receiving a new bishop, becoming part of a newly organized episcopal area or, as in Texas, uniting existing conferences into a new annual conference (North Texas, Central Texas, and Northwest Texas will hold their unifying conference Sept. 28).

Additionally, some conferences had very few disaffiliations (notably California-Pacific, Alaska, New York, Greater New Jersey, Eastern Pennsylvania, Oregon-Idaho, Northern Illinois, and California-Nevada) or none at all (Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, Central Appalachian Missionary Conference, and Desert Southwest). Communicators who responded from these conferences generally indicated that they were not developing a policy at this time, and may not unless an expressed request for reaffiliation came from one of their disaffiliated churches. Several stated they believed such requests to be unlikely.

In conferences where disaffiliation had a substantial effect, and were not substantially engaged in adjusting to other major changes at this time, conference communicators generally indicated that their cabinet and trustees had begun or were about to begin a consultation process to develop a policy for their conference. However, none of these has indicated a specific timeline for its adoption.

The foundations laid by Alabama-West Florida and Arkansas, and especially the experience each has in

implementing them, may become an important influence in shaping the policies other conferences eventually adopt.

Burton Edwards is the director of Ask The UMC, the information service of United Methodist Communications.

November 1, 2024



Time Well Spent By: Winn Collier

Be very careful, then, how you live . . . making the most of every opportunity. Ephesians 5:15-16

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 5:15-20 (NIV)

¹⁵ *Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

On March 14, 2019, NASA rockets ignited, catapulting astronaut Christina Koch toward the International Space Station. Koch wouldn't return to Earth for 328 days, giving her the record for the longest continuous space flight by a woman. Every day, living roughly 254 miles above the Earth, a screen kept track of the astronaut's time in five-minute increments. She had a myriad of daily tasks to complete (from meals to experiments), and—hour after hour—a red line inched along the display, constantly showing whether Koch was ahead or behind schedule. Not a moment to waste.

While certainly not recommending anything so intrusive as a red line ruling over our life, the apostle Paul did encourage us to carefully use our precious, limited resource of time. "Be very careful then, how you live," he wrote, "not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15-16). God's wisdom instructs us to fill our days with intention and care, employing them to practice obedience to Him, to love our neighbor, and to participate in Jesus' ongoing redemption in the world. Sadly, it's entirely possible to ignore wisdom's instruction and instead use our time foolishly (v. 17), frittering away our years in selfish or destructive pursuits.

The point isn't to obsessively fret about time but simply to follow God in obedience and trust. He will help us make the most of our days.

REFLECT & PRAY

R: What does time mean to you? How can you make the most of your time today?

P: *Dear God, please help me make the most of my time.*

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

Ephesians 5 tells us to "be very careful . . . how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity" (vv. 15-16). Part of using time wisely is remembering that life is filled with its different seasons, but we can rest in God's wisdom and timing. This is beautifully captured by Solomon in Ecclesiastes 3: "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens. . . . He has made everything beautiful in its time" (vv. 1, 11). Recognizing that God is in control of our lives can help us walk by faith as we anticipate our eternal home with Him forever.

By: Bill Crowder

"It is not our business to make the message acceptable, but to make it available. We are not to see that they like it, but that they get it." ~ *Vance Havner*

"Let me remind you that this is God's universe, and He is doing things His way. You may think you have a better way, but you don't have a universe to rule." ~ *J. Vernon McGee*

Masters and Servants Bible Quiz



1. Who served Laban for 20 years? *Genesis 31:41*

- Joshua
- Isaac
- Jacob
- Abraham

2. Who were cursed to be servants when they deceived Joshua? *Joshua 9:23*

- Amorites
- Hivites
- Hittites
- Jebusites

3. Who did Nehemiah serve as cupbearer for? *Nehemiah 1:11*

- Nebuchadrezzar
- Artaxerxes
- Darius
- Sanballat

4. Who cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant, Malchus? *John 18:10*

- James
- Philip
- John
- Peter

5. Who was the servant of Elisha? *2 Kings 4:12*

- Nebat
- Gehazi
- Zimri
- Eliezer

6. To whose servant did Peter deny knowing Jesus for a third time? *John 18:26*

- Centurion's
- Pontius Pilate's
- Caesar's
- High Priest's

7. Where did Cornelius send two of his servants to find Peter? *Acts 10:7-8*

- Joppa
- Jerusalem
- Galilee
- Damascus

Answers can be found on the next to last page. Quiz taken from <https://bibletrivia.co.uk/quiz/mastersandservants>

8. Who was the master of Onesimus? *Philemon 1:10*

- Silas
- Philemon
- Titus
- Paul

9. Who did an Egyptian maid rescue from the River Nile?

Exodus 2:5

- Moses
- Isaac
- Othniel
- Jephthah

10. In which book do we read "the small and great are there; and the servant is free from his master"? *Revelation 3:19*

- Revelation
- Psalms
- Job
- Jude

11. What did Abraham's servant do to seal an oath with him? *Genesis 24:9*

- Built an altar
- Swapped shoes
- Shook hands
- Placed his hand under Abraham's thigh

12. Who said, "no servant can serve two masters"? *Luke 16:13*

- Paul
- Timothy
- Jesus
- Peter

13. What did the Canaanite woman talking to Jesus say that the dogs ate that fell from their masters' table?

Matthew 15:27

- Honey
- Crumbs
- Fish
- Moldy figs

14. What did the servant who received one talent from his master do with it? *Matthew 25:18*

- Hid it
- Lost it
- Invested it
- Spent it

15. Who was Joseph sold to as a servant in Egypt?

Genesis 39:1

- The jailer
- Potiphar
- Cleopatra
- Pharaoh

16. Whose armor-bearer killed him at his request?

Judges 9:54

- Jonathan
- Abimelech
- Saul
- Joab

17 Which prophet did the young maid of Naaman's wife suggest could heal Naaman of his leprosy? *2 Kings 5:2-3,8*

- Isaiah
- Elijah
- Jeremiah
- Elisha

18. Who was cursed to be a "servant of servants" to his brothers? *Genesis 9:25*

- Canaan
- Japheth
- Shem
- Ham

19. How many servants did Abraham take with him in pursuit of Lot's captors? *Genesis 14:14-16*

- 144
- 278
- 318
- 1000

20. Who was sold as a slave to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver? *Genesis 37:25-28*

- Jeremiah
- Jesus
- Joseph
- Judas

"The bottom line is pray. If you're tired, sick, emotionally overwhelmed—pray. If you're on cloud nine and life seems perfect—pray. If you lack direction—pray. If you doubt that prayer makes any difference—pray. If the circumstances of your life are out of your control—pray. If the circumstances of your life seem well within you're your control—pray even harder. Whatever you do—pray." ~ *Tony Evans*

"People who are obsessed with Jesus aren't consumed with their personal safety and comfort above all else. Obsessed people care more about God's kingdom coming to this earth than their own lives being shielded from pain or distress." ~ *Francis Chan*

I Don't Want to Change!

by kate [loop] hannon

"But I don't want to change," Deborah repeated for what must have been the fifteenth time that afternoon. For years, Deborah had lived the life of a pauper. The open sky had been her shelter; the generosity of passerby's her income. Now her father stood before her, offering her what he had offered her every day of her life—to give her a new life with him.

"But, Deborah, why would you insist on clinging to your pauper ways when I offer you a way of escape?"

Deborah could hear the pain in her father's voice. Nevertheless, she stubbornly shook her head and replied, "I don't want to change," she repeated again. "I like the way things are."

"But just last week, you complained about how you went to bed hungry. And don't you remember how miserable life can be in the rain?"

Deborah paused as she contemplated these points. It was true. Life could get very miserable out on the streets. But give up the life she'd known? Oh, no, that she could never do! She would much rather go on complaining, even while ignoring the solution to her complaints.

"I can't change, Father," Deborah argued. "I'm too set in my ways. It's just a hopeless case. I tried a few months back to give up this life, remember? And the very first day I was back on the streets! I just can't help it!"

"Oh, but you could! I would help you! You could come live with me. I would give you other things to do besides aimlessly roaming the streets in this fashion. We could have so much fun together! Oh, do come!" Deborah's father reached out his hand as if to invite her to join him in happiness.

Deborah shook her head. "I just can't change," she repeated.

"You can't, or you won't?" The question was made in a voice barely above a whisper. Deborah made no reply. She simply turned and walked down the street to continue her self-imposed miserable life.

Deborah's father forced back the tears as he watched his daughter leave. He slowly turned and walked away. He would come back again tomorrow. Maybe then his daughter would be ready to accept his gift of love.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16

<https://www.christianperspective.net/short-stories>

A Zoological Theology

Sam P. Schuldheisz 10/07/24

1517

CHRIST FOR YOU



God's creatures on four legs are some of the greatest storytellers of the Scriptures.

Just about every morning, our family cat, Tillamook, greets me as I walk into the living room. He stretches his hind legs and lets out a little yawn, then meows and rubs his fur on my ankle before beginning his storytelling. And he will repeatedly tell me the same story if I haven't gotten the hint by the time I reach the kitchen to pour myself a glass of water. With a persistent purring and a little more meowing, Tillamook is telling me the sad story of his empty food dish. Sometimes, it's not hard to tell what animals are communicating to us.

And yet, if you're like me, at some point, you've probably wondered what it would be like if our favorite animals or beloved family pets could actually talk with us. What would they say? How would they greet us when we come home or when we fill their food dish with their favorite flaked salmon? If animals could talk, what stories would they tell?

Maybe this is one of the reasons I've always loved books like *Wind in the Willows* or C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, where that magical, imaginative world is full of talking animals. In our favorite stories, often animals are more than background decorations or an afterthought; they're the main characters who help drive the story.

In *The Magician's Nephew*, C.S. Lewis takes his characters and readers back to the very foundation of Narnia. Aslan walks about the empty void of the land, singing creation into existence. It's lyrical life. Aslan sang it, and it happened. Narnia blossoms, sprouts, and shines into existence by this majestic music pouring out of the Lion's mouth. Eventually, Aslan gathered several animals around him and gave them a particularly unique and sacred gift in Narnia: the gift of speech. And with this gift, Aslan gave a benediction: "Narnia, Narnia, Narnia, awake. Love. Think. Speak. Be walking trees. Be talking beasts. Be divine waters."

Places like Narnia and Hogwarts aren't the only places where you can find fantastic beasts. In the story of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, there are animals around every corner.

Scripture's story of salvation is also a wildlife safari through God's creation. There's a whole biblical bestiary to be found within the story of the Scriptures. The animals of the Bible may not always speak with human words, as Balaam's famous donkey did in Numbers 22. And yet, more often than not, the animals of the Bible have a story to tell. If these animals could talk, what would they say? What stories would they tell us? If the heavens above declare the handiwork of God, what do all the creeping things and beasts of the earth have to declare about our Lord the Creator and Redeemer? Let's do a little theology by zoology and find out.

No surprise, our biblical animal adventure begins in Genesis. After the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and bird of the air, they are brought before Adam and named. And at least for a while, everything was good. More than good; God declared it all very good. God the Creator lives in harmony and peace with his creatures. Man and woman live in harmony with creation and God's creatures because he placed them under their stewardship. But we know that the Edenic paradise of Genesis 1 and 2 quickly and tragically moves on to Genesis 3, where Satan takes the form of a serpent. Soon, temptation gives way to desire. Desire gives way to pride. Pride gives way to sin. And sin gives way to death. And yet, amid the fallout and curse of Genesis 3, there is good news. There is an animal that has a better word than the deceitful half-truths uttered by that forked tongue liar.

We're not told what kind of animal this was. But we do know this animal gave its life and shed its blood to cover the guilt, shame, and nakedness of Adam and Eve. "And the Lord God made for Adam and for his

wife garments of skins and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21). Whatever animal God used to clothe Adam and Eve, this creature foretells the story of the time when the Creator himself would take on human flesh to cover us by his innocent death and blood, and once again God clothes the guilty in the innocence of another. The first sacrifice in creation points to the sacrifice of salvation, where you are clothed in Christ.

The next animals in our safari of salvation are found in Genesis 8. Noah and his floating zoo came to rest on the mountains after forty days and forty nights of rain and the raging deluge, and then another 150 days waiting in the arc for the waters to subside. After this, Noah sent out a raven who went to and fro about the earth until the waters dried up on the earth. Then, Noah sent out a dove, but the dove returned. Noah waited another seven days and sent out the dove again. And this time, she returned with a freshly plucked olive leaf in her beak. What a story she could have told Noah. And yet the leaf in her beak spoke for her louder than words ever could. The flood waters had receded. The raging torrent had subsided. A new creation awaited. The olive leaf in her beak spoke both a word of peace to Noah and his family as well as a sign of a promise. A downpayment of a new creation that was yet to come, not in Noah, but ultimately in Jesus, the true man of rest who would come one day and finish the job of saving creation once and for all.

The fish hears and heeds God's word better than his own prophet does.

No trek through the animal tales of the Bible would be complete without taking in the sights at the SeaWorld of the Scriptures. Here, the reluctant prophet, Jonah, found himself not just inside the largest fishbowl of the sea but inside the belly of a great fish itself. In Jonah chapter two, after running from God's call to go to Nineveh by boarding a ship in the opposite direction, God sends a storm and tosses Jonah overboard and into the belly of a great fish. There, he laments, confesses, and prays. Finally, the same fish that God sent to swallow up the prophet spits him back out again on the beach three days later. Ironically, the fish hears and heeds God's word better than his own prophet does. What a story that fish would tell its school as it swam back into the deep. "You guys are never going to believe what happened!" And unlike our grandpa's fish stories, this one is true. If the great fish could talk, his gills and mouth would bubble forth the good news that although this story is amazing, there is someone greater than Jonah. Jonah's God. The God who sent the fish to swallow up Jonah came to swallow up death forever.

He cast himself onto the nets of the cross. He threw himself overboard into the abyss of the grave. He spent three days and three nights in the belly of the earth. But just like the fish couldn't stomach Jonah for more than three days, so too, death and the grave couldn't hold the Lord of Life in any longer. The tomb spat him out in a glorious resurrection

As our nature walk through the fauna of Scripture continues, the Psalms remind us that God created the birds of the air for their nests, the high mountains for the wild goats, the rocks of refuge for the badgers, the lion who hunts by night and sleeps by day, and the leviathan who plays in the depths of the sea (Psalm 104). These all look to their Creator to give them their food in due season. And if they could all speak, they'd tell you the same story—the story our ears are so often deaf to hear. God creates, cares, provides, and he does so without fail.

These all look to you,
to give them their food in due season
When you give it to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things (Ps.104:27-28).

God's creatures - great and small - tell us the same story when we come to the New Testament as well.

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Matt. 6:25-26)

If we could translate the song of the sparrows, the melodies of the meadowlarks, and the chirping of the chickadees, they would not only sing the praises of him who feeds the ravens when they call but their morning and evening psalms echoing through the trees fill our ears with another chorus of good news. As beautiful, artistic, and carefully crafted as the birds are, you are of more value than the birds. What story would the songbirds sing into our ears? Perhaps something like this. How loved are you by our Creator?

So much so that he did not take on the speckled feathers and colorful plumage of peacocks, cardinals, or the eagle, but he became man for you. How much does your Creator care for you? Let him count the ways, not on his pinions and tailfeathers, but on his fingers and toes, which were stretched out on the cross for you. They chirp and chime a song of salvation: our Creator is also your Redeemer.

And when our Redeemer, the one who upholds all creation with his word, entered into Jerusalem, what was it that bore the King as he marched his way to the throne of the cross? Not a chariot. Not a princely litter. Not a mighty machine of war. Who else could possibly carry the King, the Creator, and the soon-to-be crucified one but one of his own beloved creatures, a donkey?

Say to the daughter of Zion,
"Behold, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden."

If that donkey could speak, like its long-lost relative in Numbers 22, what would this donkey have said? "I heard the Hosannas. I saw the palm branches. I bore the King. The Creator. The Redeemer. The Savior. If I am a beast of burden, how much more is he who bore the burdens of all creation and all humanity upon his weary shoulders? I carried the Son of David, the Son of God, on his journey to make all things new."

God's creatures on four legs are some of the greatest storytellers of the Scriptures. They tell us repeatedly that the God who made all things in his work of creation also makes all things new by his work of redemption. That the Creator who declared creation into existence with a word also declares us righteous, holy, and forgiven with that same life-giving, creative, living, and active word. At the center of the new Jerusalem is the same Lord who's at the center of all the stories of Scripture: the Lord who is the Lion and the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. "And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new" (Rev. 21:5)

Believe it or not! September 30, 2024

True story! In 1940, a large and wonderful Christian family, the Rudolph's, announced the birth of their 20th baby! Though the baby was not expected to live, having been born prematurely and with polio, she defied all odds. She did live, but by the time she was four she had suffered polio, pneumonia and scarlet fever. This little girl was badly crippled with hardly any use of her left leg. While her brothers and sisters enjoyed running and playing outside, she was left confined to braces.

"Will I ever be able to run and play like the other children?" she asked her parents. "Honey, you only have to believe," they responded. "If you believe, God will make it happen." And she did! Now and again, she would practice walking without her braces with the aid of her siblings. On her twelfth birthday, she surprised her parents and doctors by removing her braces and walking around the doctor's office unassisted. She never wore braces again.

Her next goal was to play basketball. The coach only agreed to let her play as a means of getting her older sister on the team. She was given an outdated uniform, but she was allowed to work out with the other players. One day she approached the coach and promised him if he would give her an extra ten minutes of coaching each day, she would give him a world class athlete. He laughed, but seeing she was serious, half-heartedly agreed. Before long her determination paid off. She became one of the team's best players. Her team went to the state basketball championships. One of the referees noticed her exceptional ability. He asked if she had ever run track. She hadn't. He encouraged her to try it. So after the basketball season she went out for track. She began winning races and earned a berth in the state championships.

At the age of 16, she was one of the best young runners in the country. She went to the Olympics in Australia and won a bronze medal for anchoring the 400-meter relay team. Four years later in Rome she won the 100-meter dash, the 200-meter dash and anchored the winning 400-meter relay team — all in world-record times. She received the prestigious Sullivan Award as the most outstanding amateur athlete in America.

This is the amazing story of Wilma Rudolph, an Olympic gold medalist, who believed the promises of God. We must never allow our circumstances to dictate what we can accomplish or who we can become! Let's believe the promises of God for our lives and be encouraged to move forward for him! All things are possible to them that believe!

<https://www.worthydevotions.com/christian-devotional/believe-it-or-not-2>

Should My Kid Be Playing That?

By Nathan Webb

Should my child be playing that video game?

The world of video games is constantly evolving, and Fortnite's recent additions of a Lego mode (think Minecraft), racing mode, and rhythm game mode (think Guitar Hero) are a testament to this ever-changing landscape. These new features are designed to capture the imagination and attention of younger players, making it more important than ever for parents to understand what their kids are playing.



As a nerdy pastor who planted a church for nerds, geeks, and gamers, I am often asked for advice on what games kids should be playing. As a parent, I'm similarly concerned. However, as a gamer, I have a bit of a different perspective. I believe we are asking the wrong question.

Understanding Ratings

Before we get into the right question to ask, it's important to lay some basic understanding of how the world of gaming works logistically. When considering whether or not you should buy that game, there are those out there playing them and providing ratings.

1. The ESRB: The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) is a crucial tool for parents. It provides age and content ratings for video games, helping you make informed decisions about what's appropriate for your child. But it's more than just a sticker on the game cover, the ESRB website contains a specific summary for many of the most popular games.
2. Professional Reviews: These reviews often offer in-depth analysis of a game's content, mechanics, and suitability for different age groups. Depending on where you find them, these can range from very vague to quite specific (and often lengthy).
3. Amateur Reviews: User reviews can give insights into the gaming community's perspective, including the experiences of other parents and younger players. This can also be where you can get a bit more niche on what you're hoping for from games, such as faith.

Understanding Gaming

An unfortunate shortsightedness of parents of gamers is found in their comprehension of the multiplayer experience. This is a bit too minimized, but gaming can be somewhat condensed into three styles of play:

1. Solo Gaming: this refers to the person playing the game alone. It doesn't necessarily mean that they are literally alone. Popular platforms like Discord are meant to facilitate conversations between people playing video games, even if the game itself is a single-player experience.
2. Couch Co-Op: this refers to the games that can be played by multiple people, but the game is limited (intentionally or not) to only those physically present. Again, this only implies the game itself is limited, the possibility of gamers playing games separately while being together is very likely.
3. Online Play: this refers to the gameplay experience being facilitated through the Internet. These situations could be that two people are physically together playing two separate feeds of the same game together via the Internet. This is also the most likely option to host games of randomized people to fill lobbies to play the games.

Another vital misconception that must be straightened out before asking the proper question is where harm can actually be found in games. The mass perception of games has been popularized by the echoes of the Satanic Panic, but the truth is that games do contain concerns, but they aren't often from gore or violence, but cruelty and corporate manipulation.

The Right Question

So, with all of this considered—what is the right question?

It comes down to everything I've listed so far. In my experience as a pastor of gamers, there is frustration whenever a respected adult doesn't take their hobby seriously and questions it haphazardly. Imagine talking about innings while discussing football. It wouldn't make sense and it would prove that there is no

thought being given beyond gut reactions.

So, rather than rushing to find out some quick fix, the right question to ask is:

Do I know what my kid is playing?

It's crucial to stay informed about the games your child is interested in. This doesn't mean intruding on their privacy, but rather taking an active interest in their hobbies. There are many ways to go about this, especially in the Internet era. Now we know the question, but where should we be turning for the answers?

Where to Get Answers

1. Turn To The Pros: As I mentioned earlier, utilize the tool of the ESRB rating site to explore the games. Turn to professional game reviewers who are connected with reputable sites, like IGN, Polygon, or Kotaku. Use an aggregate site like Metacritic to really understand the quality of a game and read some reviews for a specific look at the game. You could use a site intentionally built for parents like Common Sense Media, but I personally use those sparingly given heavy biases.
2. Experience It Yourself: There really is no time quite like the present for experiencing a game without having to pay the ticket price. Find a game streamer or a Let's Play-er and watch them play through a few hours of the game to get a feel for how it plays and the story it tells.
3. When in Doubt... The Gift of Playtime: This is my personal favorite option. I believe that the best way to understand what your child is playing is to ask them directly and offer to play with them. This approach not only helps you understand the content of the games but also fosters a deeper connection with your child.

What About Faith?

This article isn't accidentally posted on the UMC site. It's incredibly important that we take into consideration theology and stories when we play games or watch movies. However, it is also incredibly important that we adequately foster relationships within the family unit.

The church that I pastor online tackles the deeper meanings behind the games, movies, and television shows we consume every week. Despite posting over 100 of these deep dives into the faith behind nerdy topics, the best ministry we've done in the past three years has been through playing games, watching things, and reading books together.

With this in mind, it is my firm belief that we should put far less emphasis on limiting things and placing up unnecessary boundaries and far more time actually getting into the world with people and meeting them where they are—whether it's our own children or just another person we're meeting for the first time. I'm certain that Jesus would be in the arcade playing, not picketing outside its doors.

Nathan Webb is a major nerd in just about every way. He loves video games, anime, cartoons, comic books, tech, and his fellow nerds. Hoping to provide a spiritual community for people with similar interests, he founded Checkpoint Church--"the church for nerds, geeks and gamers." Nathan can be found lurking on some visual novel subreddit, reading the latest shōnen entry, or playing the newest Farm Sim. Nathan is an ordained provisional elder in the United Methodist Church in the Western North Carolina Conference. He hosts a weekly newsletter podcast: To The Point.

Conference honors kids who endured U.S. Indian boarding schools

By Todd Seifert Oct 01, 2024

CONAM representative Denise Estes present a blanket as a gift during the remembrance ceremony. Photos by Todd Seifert

LINCOLN — More than 120 people joined to hear the story of trauma associated with U.S. Indian boarding schools during a special event Saturday, Sept. 28, at Lincoln St. Paul United Methodist Church.

Such events help heal wounds that continue to fester into the 21st century from a Government policy aimed at stripping Native people of their culture, said Erika



Washee Stanley, Cheyenne-Arapaho and co-chair of the Great Plains Conference's Committee on Native American Ministries (CONAM).

"I don't think you can find a single Native person that isn't impacted in some way by the boarding school experience," she said. "What they were really ultimately trying to do is by taking the children away from their culture and stripping all of that they knew, that they could raise these children without those ties to their community and without their culture, and it just was so damaging."

The event was the second in consecutive years for the Great Plains following an initial service in 2023 in Lawrence. Tied to a national day of remembrance Sept. 30, CONAM organized the event with a goal of continuing the discussion and of keeping memories alive of children who endured atrocities in the more than 500 government-funded boarding schools in the 19th and 20th centuries. Many children died in those schools, and tens of thousands suffered. Orange ribbons were distributed to people in attendance as a reminder of the children harmed.

Native Americans as young as 4 years old often were taken hundreds of miles from their families and were not allowed to speak their Native language, had to surrender their traditional clothing, and were forced to cut their hair. They also often were forced to learn Christianity in schools run by religious organizations, including the former Methodist Episcopal Church.

Four schools operated each in Nebraska and Kansas.

One school was the Genoa Indian Industrial School in Nebraska, about 55 miles northeast of Grand Island and 22 miles west of Columbus. The school there opened in 1884 with just a few buildings and 74 students. It later grew to 30 buildings on a 640-acre campus and enrolled more than 4,300 children before it finally closed in 1934.

The CONAM-sponsored event's featured speaker was Gabriel Bruguier, Yankton Sioux and assistant professor and research specialist librarian at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He is working on a project to digitize records to preserve the voices of students who attended the Genoa school.

Bruguier said the Genoa school was similar to many others in operation in that era of U.S. history after costly wars against U.S. Indian tribes.

"The folks in charge were realizing that those wars were very costly," he said. "In the cost-benefit analysis it was less expensive to take children off the reservation and provide this 'education,' and so that became the main guiding policy in assimilation."

The policy continues to influence Native American societies today, a concept articulated by Aliyah American Horse, Lakota and a student at Nebraska Wesleyan University. She was Nebraska's youth poet laureate from 2023 to 2024. In her poem "I Will Tell Them About You" — actually, a combination of three of her poems for the occasion — American Horse talked about braids being cut, Native clothes ripped from children, the loss of stories, tears, and how their memories will not be forgotten.



Bishop David Wilson addresses the people who attended the 2024 U.S. Indian Boarding School remembrance service.

"What inspired me was my hair," she explained after the event. "I feel like back then they had their braids chopped all the time, and I decided I wanted to grow out my hair because I used to cut it because when I put it into braids people would pull on my braids when I was younger. That just inspired this whole array of poetry."

Attendees were treated to music by the Standing Bear Drum Circle, which Christian Kramer, whose native name is Woolly Bear and who leads the intertribal group, announced as a Ponca song celebrating the Earth. The group later provided a song with a melody that resembled strongly "Amazing Grace," though he said the tune long pre-dated John Newton's famous 1772 hymn.

The Saint Paul UMC Choir also provided special music by voicing two Native hymns at the request of Bishop David Wilson.

"That music was amazing!" Bishop Wilson said after the remembrance. "I came here last spring, there was

a young woman, and her dissertation was on music, so she created this big concert with about seven to eight groups — non-Native groups — that came and created compositions, and they wrote songs. I heard them sing then, and Saint Paul did a beautiful job — just amazing — today, too. That's powerful, and I'm so thankful that they go beyond what we might think normal music for our churches.”

In closing, Rev. Tony Serbousek, the first Lakota to be ordained in the Great Plains Conference, CONAM member and current pastor at Abilene First United Methodist Church, offered a story with a reminder about the legacy that all people share. He told the story of an encounter he had with American Indian activist Russell Means after a presentation at Iliff School of Theology in Denver.

Rev. Tony Serbousek provides the closing prayer.

Serbousek bought one of Means' books, and the author signed it for him. After returning home, he looked at what the author had written.

“I've always remembered these words to this day,” Serbousek said. “Those words were: ‘Always keep your table big and remember that you are the ancestor of those yet unborn.’”

Serbousek said he had to think about those words for a while.

“What I take that he was telling me was just know that you have the ability to make a difference today so that what has happened in the past doesn't happen again,” he said. “That's always been the back of my mind ever since then all those years.”

Bishop Wilson said events such as the boarding school remembrance were important to educating the public about what happened and how they can help prevent such atrocities from happening again.

“One of the great things among the many great things about the Great Plains is that folks are always willing to learn, and they show up, and they go to help educate other people,” the bishop said. “One of my hopes is that people can create relationships with these tribal peoples. The tribes are not always going to take the initiative just because they've been hurt in the past, but I've met folks from churches that say we'd like to have those kinds of relationships and just to get to know how we can support each other and help each other. That's one thing I hope this event will do for people to go home and think about folks that live among us.”

Todd Seifert is communications director for the Great Plains Conference. Contact him at tseifert@greatplainsumc.org.



Mobile solar microgrid sees deployment amidst Hurricane Helene recovery efforts

SAPORTA REPORT

by Mark Lannaman October 9, 2024 8:12 pm

(Photo from the Ray C. Anderson Foundation.)

A mobile solar microgrid has been aiding in recovery efforts following Hurricane Helene, a powerful hurricane that rocked the Southeast in late September.

The Mobile Solar Power Station — an array of solar panels transported via a small trailer that can be unloaded anywhere — debuted at the annual sustainability celebration Ray Day last year; nearly a year later, the Georgia-built microgrid was deployed to help Georgians for just this kind of scenario.



North Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church, facilitators and stewards of the mobile microgrid, deployed its services to Camp Tygart outside of Valdosta, Ga. The microgrid reportedly powered lights, freezers and refrigerators at the church camp until the power was restored.

The United Methodist Committee On Relief (UMCOR) released a fact sheet detailing the potential for the

solar microgrid; it has a total solar capacity of 16 kW, and a total battery storage capacity of 38.4 kWh.

At that capacity, the trailer's batteries could power a 325 W fridge for over 118 hours, a 1350 W heater for over 38 hours or a 1400 W microwave for over 27 hours, according to the fact sheet.

"This was the first time we deployed our entire solar array! We had just one panel left in the trailer as a spare. The quiet, clean, renewable energy fueled the heart of the camp. It powered lighting, refrigeration, air conditioning and more," said Tom Staigle, UMCOR Early Response Team (ERT) member and a member of Peachtree City United Methodist Church.

Rev. Jenny Phillips, director of environmental sustainability for Global Ministries, the humanitarian organization of the United Methodist Church which includes UMCOR, said that while disaster is never good news, she feels great that her church is able to support those in need with renewable energy.

"It adds an extra tool in the toolbelt of disaster response coordinators," Phillips said, acknowledging that even if they don't completely replace traditional generators, they can complement them. "Adding solar to the toolkit also frees up other energy-generating resources."

Staigle echoed this sentiment with a real-world example from the microgrid deployment.

"It allowed for the reallocation of extremely limited fossil fuels to power a well enabling the first showers and flushing [of] toilets in five days," Staigle said. "The solar microgrid trailer supported the volunteers putting their skills to work in a community that needed them."

The project was funded through a grant from the Ray C. Anderson Foundation to Footprint Project, a nonprofit on providing clean energy deployment for disaster response; other project partners include Cherry Street Energy and the Ray C. Anderson Foundation.



*The Mobile Solar Power Station.
(Photo from the Ray C. Anderson Foundation.)*

The idea had been in discussions since late spring in 2023, Phillips said. The Ray C. Anderson Foundation was thinking of ways to reduce onsite emissions at their annual Ray Day event in the Fall, which sparked the idea for a mobile solar microgrid that could be deployed at will but otherwise wouldn't take up land space.

Eventually, the potential for the mobile solar trailer gained traction as a disaster response tool, because project partners wanted to ensure they weren't adding to the root cause of disaster when engaging in disaster response —

referencing greenhouse gas emissions from traditional generators used in disaster response.

"We [were] looking for ways to reduce or eliminate emissions so that we aren't sowing the seeds for more supercharged storms in the future and causing more suffering down the road as we seek to alleviate suffering in the present," Phillips said.

It was then decided the North Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church would be the stewards of the project after its use at Ray Day 2023, with the Footprint Project still owning it.

Since then, it has been used as an educational opportunity for the church to demonstrate its stewardship of the planet and allow people to get up close and personal with solar panels. It's also been deployed for similar outdoor events to Ray Day.

"When people encounter it, oftentimes it's the first time they're getting up close and personal with a solar panel, and have the opportunity to see how relatively simple the technology is and how relatively easy it is to use," Phillips said.

The North Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church used this experiment as a pilot program of sorts. Other United Methodist Church conferences like North Carolina and Florida also have similar mobile trailers. So far, the feedback and usefulness of the trailers have demonstrated it being a worthwhile

investment, said Phillips — one that they hope to build upon.

UMCOR just funded a new grant program: the Sustainable Response Technology Library. The grant was awarded to the Footprint Project, who will work with United Methodist conferences that want to try the solar microgrid for themselves by giving them online training and sending the solar array to them.

Phillips also added that United Methodist Church conferences around the country would be able to send out these panels whenever someone is in need, furthering their mission to be good stewards of both the planet and helping their fellow person.

As part of the Sustainable Response Technology Library, these solar panels to be carried in a truck or SUV that will be smaller than the current solar panels. The larger panels in the current mobile solar project are too big for most common vehicles on the road; the idea is that by downsizing, more volume of solar panels could be deployed in everyday vehicles.

“[We will] be able to provide them with some smaller scale solar devices that are easy to transport, easy to manage and set up... so that they can get a taste of what it’s like,” Phillips said. “It gives folks a chance to get their hands and different pieces of equipment to see what they’re like in action so they can better plan for their needs.”

Phillips added the upcoming project will also add atmospheric water generators to their portfolio — essentially big dehumidifiers with a water filter, also to be used in crisis situations.

With climate change continuing to bring more severe and frequent storms to regions across the world, these small changes in our disaster response can make the world of a difference, said Phillips — and she hopes that one day, they’ll be second nature in the response toolkit.

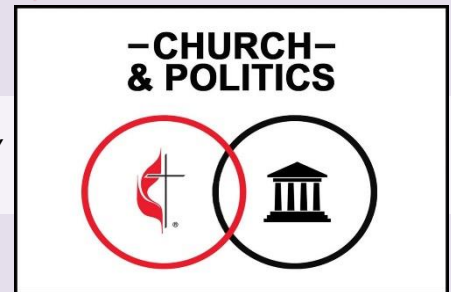
“I think that’s what is so exciting about some of the technology: it’s just going to become normal,” Phillips said. “It’s a story now, it’s different now — but the dream is that we don’t put out a press release. People just say, ‘Of course they’re using solar to respond; of course they’re using atmospheric generators.’”

Is The United Methodist Church involved in politics?

Sept. 14, 2020 This content was produced by Ask The UMC, a ministry of United Methodist Communications.



Since the Church’s inception, Methodists have been actively involved in social and political matters in order to build a more peaceful and just world. Graphic by Laurens Glass, United Methodist Communications.



The people called Methodists have been actively involved in social and political matters from their founding in 18th century England. Methodists were among the primary advocates for the abolition of slavery across the British Empire, the organization of labor unions to protect workers from dangerous working conditions, the ending of the debtors prison system, and the creation of new systems of care for poor children. Given this heritage, Methodists have continued to advocate for other social or political issues since that time - women’s suffrage, temperance, civil rights, health care and care for the environment, to name a few.

Should United Methodists be involved in politics?

The United Methodist Church acknowledges that we are responsible to God for our social, economic and political life. The Church regards political participation as the privilege and responsibility of citizens.

The Church asserts, “Scripture recognizes that faithfulness to God requires political engagement by the people of God” (Church-Government Relations). “The strength of a political system depends upon the full and willing participation of its citizens. The church should continually exert a strong ethical influence upon the state, supporting policies and programs deemed to be just and opposing policies and programs that are unjust” (The Political Community).

United Methodists rely on the same world-wide Social Principles and Resolutions for guidance about the interaction of church and politics. How the Church is engaged in politics varies across the regions where

The United Methodist Church is present. Its response to the state will look quite different in the United States, the Philippines, Germany, Russia or Côte d'Ivoire.

What about separation of church and state?

The United Methodist Church also affirms an appropriate separation of church and state. United Methodists reject undue control or interference by either religious bodies or the state in the affairs of the other. "Separation of church and state means no organic union of the two, but it does permit interaction" (Church and State Relations).

Does the UMC have a lobbying office in Washington DC?

The General Board of Church and Society, the church's advocacy agency for issues of justice, equality and peace, has offices on Capitol Hill in Washington and at the Church Center for the United Nations in New York City.

Church and Society is dedicated to implementing the Social Principles by educating, equipping and organizing United Methodists to faithfully advocate for the Church's positions. The activities of Church and Society are advocacy, not lobbying.

The agency communicates the denomination's position on more than 30 social issues with policymakers and church and national leaders, with the mission of transforming the world.

Does the General Board of Church and Society represent me or my church in political issues?

Only the General Conference speaks for The United Methodist Church. Church and Society implements the policies and resolutions adopted by the General Conference. Their role is to educate and equip United Methodists to think through and act on issues from a faith perspective.

What can I do if I disagree with The UMC's position on an issue?

The Church recognizes that individual members may hold varying views on social and political concerns. The Church notes in the Book of Resolutions, "You may find that your denomination's policies give you more 'food for thought.' Maybe you will agree with the denomination's position. On the other hand, you may disagree."

If you disagree with the Church's position, start by talking with your pastor. United Methodist members who feel strongly about an issue and seek to change a current statement or policy may petition General Conference to request action.

Why do the Church's social statements and government policies seem so far apart on some issues?

Our 2016 Book of Resolutions addresses this question, beginning on p. 23.

"The United Methodist Church membership extends beyond the U.S. boundaries; it is global. So, in many cases we are speaking to, from, or with more than one national government. Further, the Christian church must never be a mirror image of any government, whether Democrat or Republican, totalitarian or democratic. We know that Christians are obligated to be responsible and participating citizens under any governmental system, but that response and participation is to be interpreted in light of our faith.

"As the Social Principles state, 'Our allegiance to God takes precedence over our allegiance to any state' (§ 164). And our church's public witness is first and foremost to be judged by God by whether it supports justice, love, and mercy, particularly for the poor and powerless."

Does The UMC in the U.S. support or contribute to any candidate or political party?

No. This is a prohibited activity under U.S. non-profit law for churches and other charitable organizations.

Churches and religious organizations qualify for exemption from federal income tax and are generally eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions. Churches may jeopardize or even lose this status if they engage in "political campaign activity." According to the IRS, "all section 501(c)(3) organizations are absolutely prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elective public office. Contributions to political campaign funds or public statements of position (verbal or written) made on behalf of the organization in favor of or in opposition to any candidate for public office clearly violate the prohibition against political campaign

activity. Violating this prohibition may result in denial or revocation of tax-exempt status and the imposition of certain excise taxes."

Can churches be politically active without jeopardizing their tax exempt status?

In the United States, churches may be wary of engaging in the electoral process out of concern for the church's tax exempt status.

Religious organizations can safeguard the right to vote, educate communities on issues and candidates, and encourage participation in the electoral process when done in a non-partisan manner. Church and Society's resource for local churches, *Creating Change Together: A Toolkit for Faithful Civic Engagement*, lists activities a church can and cannot do.

The IRS clarifies political activities which may jeopardize a church's tax exempt status. One is participating in the political campaigns of candidates for public office. Another is spending a substantial portion of time or resources to influence legislation. The "substantial portion" discernment is made by the IRS on a case by case basis. The IRS considers a number of key factors in determining whether an activity or communication risks violating prohibitions against political campaign intervention.

The UMC believes that churches have the "right and the duty to speak and act corporately on those matters of public policy that involve basic moral or ethical issues and questions. ... The attempt to influence the information and execution of public policy at all levels of government is often the most effective means available to churches to keep before humanity the ideal of a society in which power and order are made to serve the ends of justice and freedom for all people" (Church-Government Relations).

Can church property be used for political rallies, voter drives, or candidate events?

There are multiple issues that inform whether or how church property may be used for such events.

An IRS webinar offers guidance on these types of activities by charitable organizations. Charitable organizations may conduct nonpartisan activities that educate and encourage people to participate in the electoral process.

Congregations can:

- discuss moral and public policy issues,
- urge congregants to communicate with candidates about issues or policies important to the community,
- encourage voting and help people get to the polls,
- sponsor voter registration drives if conducted in a non-partisan manner,
- provide education on topics in a non-partisan manner,
- sponsor "get out the vote" campaigns and permit church facilities to serve as a polling place, and
- host candidate forums as long as all candidates are invited, a broad range of issues is discussed, and all candidates have equal opportunity to speak.

Congregations cannot:

- issue statements endorsing or supporting candidates or distribute materials biased toward or against a particular candidate or political party,
- donate money to a candidate or solicit contributions on their behalf,
- offer church space to one candidate and refuse it to another,
- sponsor campaign rallies for candidates in church,
- donate to or set up their own Political Action Committee (PAC).

Are pastors allowed to preach about or share personal political views on social media?

The United Methodist Church has official positions on a wide variety of public policy issues. All clergy are expected and encouraged to preach and teach about the church's statements and policies as part of their pastoral ministry.

The scriptures themselves are also full of guidance from prophets, Jesus and the early church that have strong political, social and economic implications. Preaching what the scriptures say and how they apply to current situations is a significant part of what pastors are called to do.

A pastor may not use the pulpit, church publications, website or social media, or any other forum related to the church to declare their individual preferences for any political candidate or specific legislation. They

may do so as private citizens using their own social media platforms. The IRS encourages religious leaders who speak or write in their individual capacity to clearly indicate that their comments are personal and not intended to represent the views of their church.

A pastor may critique certain actions or policy positions of specific candidates based on scripture or the official statements of The United Methodist Church. However, such critique must be about policy positions or actions, not whether that candidate should be elected.

Can a pastor be involved in local politics?

A pastor may be directly involved in local politics and even become a candidate for political office, as long as it is on the pastor's own time and not as a representative of the church. The pastor cannot use their position in the church nor any church property or resources to promote their own political campaign.

Am I expected to respect elected leaders with whom I disagree?

Whether or not our preferred candidate is elected, United Methodists pray for all leaders who serve the public and "support their efforts to afford justice and equal opportunity for all people." We recognize the difficult decisions elected leaders make on behalf of the people they serve and the enormity of the consequences of those decisions.

However, we do not submit blindly to governing authorities. As the church, we strive to exercise a "strong ethical influence" upon the government, holding leaders accountable for policies which are just and opposing those which are unjust (Political Responsibility).

We hold government responsible for protecting the rights of the people and oppose governmental oppression of its people. Citizens may exercise their right to vote to ensure leaders responsibly use their power. When government enacts policies that are unjust or detrimental, the witness of scripture shows us that there may be times when "biblical faithfulness will necessitate civil disobedience to the ruling authorities (Acts 4:1-20)" (Church-Government Relations). As disciples of Jesus Christ working for the transformation of the world, we take seriously our responsibility to fully participate in building a more peaceful and just world.

How can I faithfully respond to an issue that concerns me?

United Methodists can work individually and collectively to effect change. Write to or meet with representatives; submit a letter to the editor; join in prayer vigils, marches or social media campaigns; team up with like-minded people to learn more about how an issue affects those most directly impacted and work together for positive change.

Church and Society staff can help you develop a strategy to address the issues about which you are passionate. They can also help you connect with other teams in your area who are working on similar issues. Creating Change Together, a resource for local churches, offers tools to address public concerns.

How can I talk about political issues with others who disagree?

In this time of polarization around social and political issues, Christians may struggle to have positive dialogue with family, friends and congregation members. Political differences are sometimes experienced as unhealthy conflict, but can be experienced as grace-filled, charitable conversation.

Begin with an attitude of compassion and curiosity. Practice active and respectful listening for understanding. Look for common ground as you clarify your values. Focus on what makes for the common good and not only your particular interests. Test what you say and how you say it alongside scripture, the Social Principles and Resolutions, and United Methodist tradition and history.

Guidelines for Holy Conferencing: What God Expects of Us reminds us that every person is a child of God. People are defined, ultimately, by their relationship with God -- not by the flaws we think we see in their views and actions.

JustPeace Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation offers tools and resources for having welcoming conversations.

Courageous Conversations is a series designed to help local churches learn to move beyond impasses and discover how to listen well, learn from others, and respectfully disagree in love.

Church diversity: Are we doing it right?

By Rev. Joseph Yoo

Carl was one of the most talented organists I've ever had the pleasure to meet. I met him in the twilight of his career (and life) and I always wondered what it would've been like meeting him when he was in his prime. Though, I'm sure we would've butted heads far more often if I had met him in his prime. He acquiesced and compromised many times, stating "I'm too old to be stubborn. Give it a few decades, and you'll see what I'm talking about."



One day Carl invited me to his house for coffee. After a full discussion of work/church related things, there was a lull in our conversation and he placed his coffee mug down and said, "I also have something else I need to discuss with you."

I braced myself for the worst.

"My feelings were really hurt last week but I don't think it was intentional."

My mind raced to narrow down what I could've done wrong. With me, there are many things to choose from. He put me out of my misery by informing me that the previous Sunday, during the administration of the eucharist that I didn't look at him in the eye.

He went on to explain that eye contact is really important and meaningful to his people, the Swedes. He was worried that he had done something to offend me or upset me and he knew that Sunday, perhaps, wasn't the best time to discuss this. But he wanted to clear the air.

My first reaction was laughter (I know. It's a nervous habit).

I sincerely apologized and explained to Carl that for me, as a Korean, making direct eye contact with my elders was a sign of disrespect and that I had been conditioned to not maintain eye contact with people who are older than me or in a place of authority over me.

We both had a good laugh afterwards, comparing and contrasting our different cultural upbringings. He thanked me for letting him have this space where he could speak to me like this and I thanked him for his honesty and openness.

Now I was the minority in that church — both ethnically and age-wise. But I was the pastor and the leader of the church. It made sense that I would step out of my comfort zone and start looking at not just Carl, but all the people in the eye when administering the elements of the Eucharist.

For Carl's and my story, the stakes were low. It didn't "cost" much for the compromise to happen — and the compromise was made by the leadership of the church. And it benefitted us all. I wonder who else may have pondered "why doesn't Joseph look us in the eye" but were too timid to bring it up.

That's the thing about being inclusive and embracing diversity. You're bringing in, welcoming and embracing people with different backgrounds and different perspectives and different ideologies. Conflicts are inevitable. It's how we respond to such conflicts that will we know if we're embracing diversity or if we rather settle for tokenism.

Too many churches settle for tokenism and declare it diversity.

What's the difference? I'm so glad you asked!

Tokenism or diversity?

I once interviewed with a church who boasted about how diverse their staff was. After that interview, I went to their church website to see just how diverse their staff was.

The pastoral staff were all white men. The administration staff were all white women. The maintenance staff were all people of color.

Another church, a lay leader was exclaiming that they were a very diverse church. Their congregation had a large population of Asian Americans for sure but the staff — every single staff member — were white along with all the lay leaders.

These two churches are not embracing diversity, they're embracing tokenism.

"Tokenism" is when we proudly declare how diverse our church is but the people who make us diverse have no places of influence, authority, or power.

That church that interviewed me — the maintenance staff isn't in the staff meetings that make important and crucial decisions that impact the church. The maintenance staff usually just does what they're told to do.

The second church, no person of color had any voice in meetings with the staff nor did they have seats in important committees in the church.

That's not diversity. That's tokenism. That's like "collecting" people who are different than you and showing them off to the world so that you can pat yourself on the back of how "diverse" you are.

Churches that are aiming for diversity should go all-in and start placing the "diverse people" in places of leadership, influence, and authority. The leadership should reflect the diversity of the congregation.

This is not easy work. It is why most churches settle for tokenism -- and therefore silence the minority voices.

But nothing in life that is worth attaining and obtaining is ever easy.

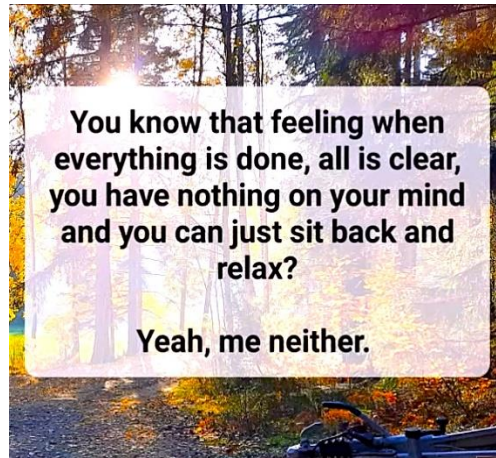
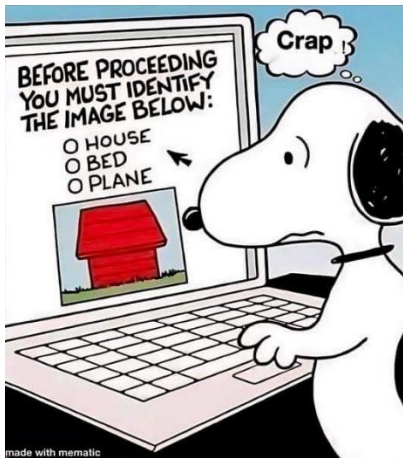
Being diverse is difficult work. But it's good work that brings about good transformation.

It's a true reflection of what the kingdom of God is supposed to look like.

For those churches who are embracing diversity — don't embrace diversity for the sake of being diverse. Your church should reflect the community you reside in.

And for those of us serious about reflecting our community, it will be prudent to really grasp the difference between tokenism and diversity. The former is a form of discrimination. The latter is a reflection of God's kin-dom.

Joseph Yoo is the author When the Saints Go Flying In. He is a West Coaster at heart contently living in Houston, Texas with his wife and son. He serves at Mosaic Church in Houston. Find more of his writing at josephyoo.com.



The Bible refers to 'vegetables' 13 times.
It refers to 'meat' 290 times.
Eat Biblically. 🍔 🍷

5 YR OLD DAUGHTER: MOM, WHY IS SOME OF YOUR HAIR WHITE?
ME: *SMILES* EVERY TIME YOU MAKE ME SAD, ANOTHER HAIR TURNS WHITE.
DAUGHTER: *WIDE EYES* WOW MOM, WHAT DID YOU DO TO GRANDMA?
Casual Christian Comedy 2

What Can You Do When You're Afraid?

Eight Practices that Counter Our Fears with Faith in God's Provision

Rest in the reality that Jesus, the Risen One
Loves you, strengthens you, and is always with you
As He promised, as He's proven

Listen to songs that inspire
Let the Spirit of the music embrace you
Immerse in the message and imagine its meaning for you

Read the Psalms and Philippians
Read Habakkuk and First Peter
Read and reflect and resonate

Pray like you mean it
Like you know He hears you and cares
Pour out your feelings, your fears, your cry for help

Gather with other believers
To honestly share, to comfort and encourage one another
To support, lift up, gently challenge and hold each other accountable

Serve
Help someone else
Focus on meeting their needs and making a life-changing difference

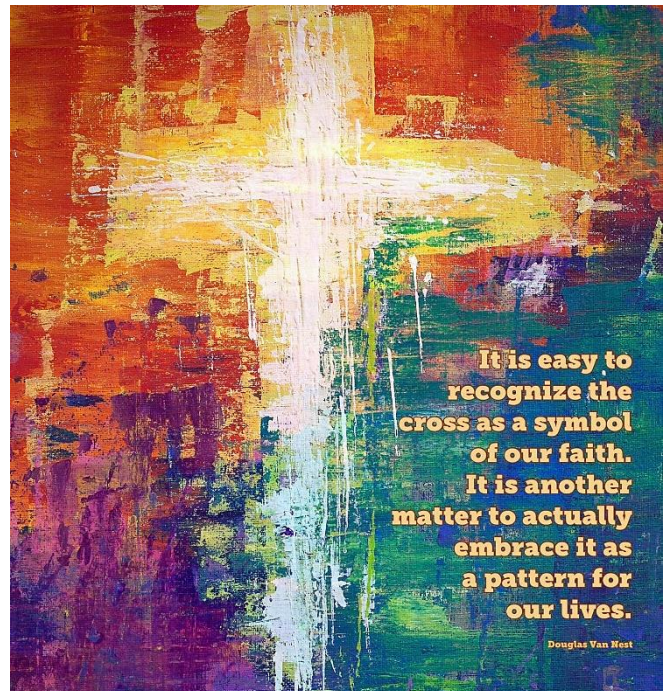
Confirm your identity and destiny as a child of God
Chosen, dearly loved and repurposed for good works
Secure and flourishing in His eternal Kingdom

Recognize, Receive and Rejoice
In the redirection, resources and renewal that come
In the grace given, suffering rewarded, and the intervention of miracles



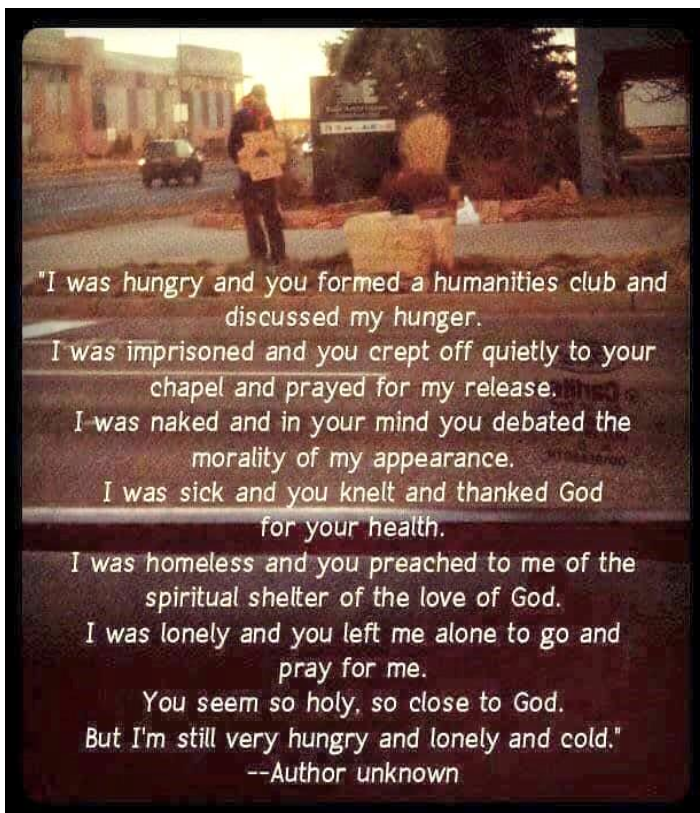
I wish Christians in America would worry a lot less about our nation being Christian and a lot more about our actions being Christlike.

Zach W Lambert

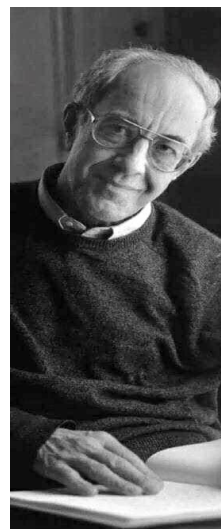


It is easy to recognize the cross as a symbol of our faith. It is another matter to actually embrace it as a pattern for our lives.

Douglas Van Nest



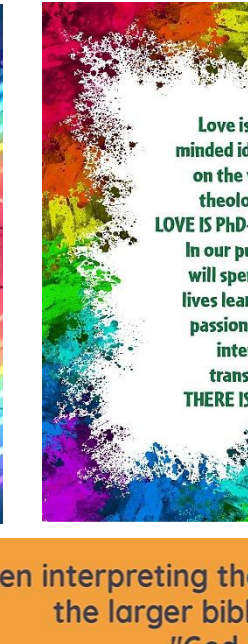
"I was hungry and you formed a humanities club and discussed my hunger.
I was imprisoned and you crept off quietly to your chapel and prayed for my release.
I was naked and in your mind you debated the morality of my appearance.
I was sick and you knelt and thanked God for your health.
I was homeless and you preached to me of the spiritual shelter of the love of God.
I was lonely and you left me alone to go and pray for me.
You seem so holy, so close to God.
But I'm still very hungry and lonely and cold."
--Author unknown



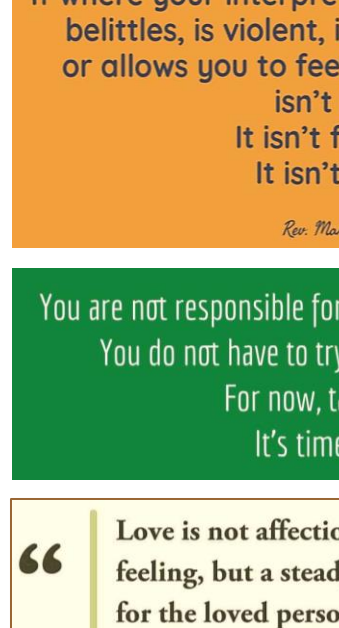
"TO PRAY...
TO LISTEN
TO THE VOICE
OF THE ONE WHO
CALLS US THE
"BELOVED",
IS TO LEARN THAT
THAT VOICE
EXCLUDES
NO ONE."

~ HENRI NOUWEN

“
We cannot love issues,
but we can love people,
and the love
of people reveals
to us the
way to deal
with issues.
HENRI NOUWEN
HENRINOUWEN.ORG



Love is not some small
minded ideal that we bypass
on the way to weightier
theological principles.
LOVE IS PhD-LEVEL CHRISTIANITY.
In our pursuit of Jesus, we
will spend the rest of our
lives learning to love more
passionately, intimately,
intentionally, and
transformationally.
THERE IS NO HIGHER CALL.
Jayson D. Bradley



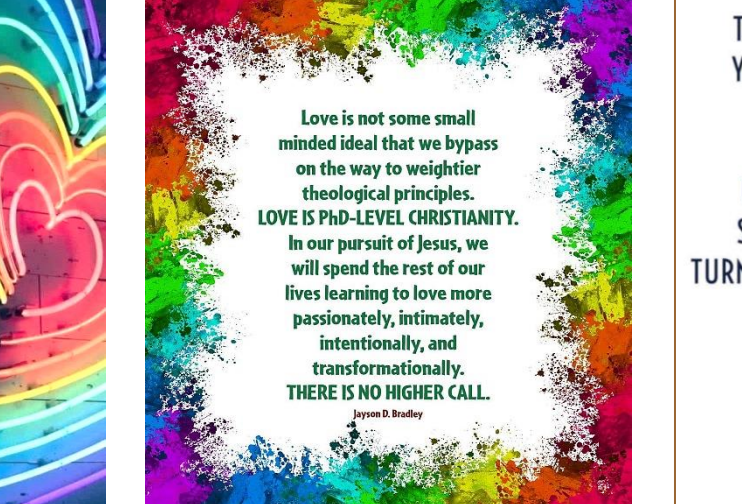
TODAY YOU HAVE A CHOICE
YOU CAN CHOOSE BETWEEN
ANGER AND LOVE,
DIVISION AND UNITY,
FRUSTRATION AND HOPE,
SELFISHNESS AND GIVING,
TURNING AWAY AND SHOWING UP.
CHOOSE KINDNESS.
THE CHOICE IS SIMPLE.
IT'S HARD TO REGRET
BEING KIND.
RACHEL MARIE MARTIN

“
LET US COME ALIVE
TO THE SPLENDOR
THAT IS ALL AROUND
US, AND SEE THE
BEAUTY IN ORDINARY
THINGS.”
Thomas Merton

When interpreting the Bible, filter it through
the larger biblical theology of
"God is love."
If where your interpretation ends up excludes,
belittles, is violent, ignores those in need,
or allows you to feel superior to others, it
isn't loving.
It isn't from love.
It isn't of God.
Rev. Mark Sandlin

- Answers
November 2024 Quiz
1. Jacob
 2. Hivites
 3. Artaxerxes
 4. Peter
 5. Gehazi
 6. High Priest's
 7. Joppa
 8. Philemon
 9. Moses
 10. Job
 11. Placed his hand
under Abraham's thigh
 12. Jesus
 13. Crumbs
 14. Hid it
 15. Potiphar
 16. Abimelech
 17. Elisha
 18. Canaan
 19. 318
 20. Joseph

One of the best
lessons you can learn
in life is to master
how to remain calm.
Catherine Pulsifer



You are not responsible for fixing everything that is broken.
You do not have to try and make everyone happy.
For now, take time for you.
It's time to replenish.

“
Love is not affectionate
feeling, but a steady wish
for the loved person's
ultimate good as far as it
can be obtained.
C. S. Lewis



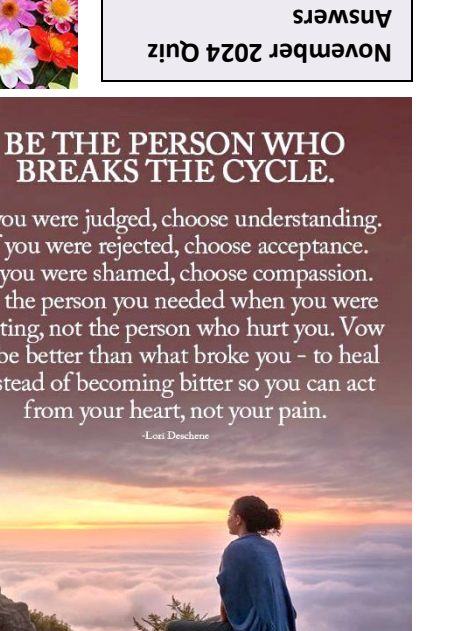
some days you'll
move MOUNTAINS,
OTHER DAYS YOU'LL
MOVE FROM THE BED
to the COUCH.
Both are Necessary.
© gaudiyouart.com



You can't reach for anything new
if your hands are full of
yesterday's junk.
Louise Smith



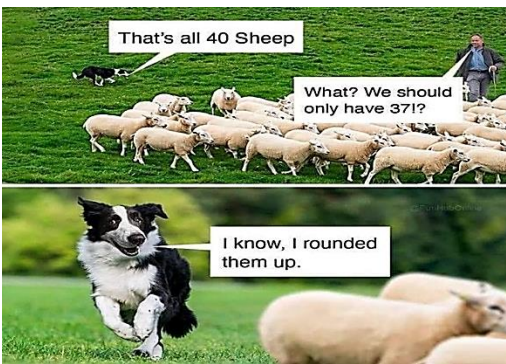
BE THE PERSON WHO
BREAKS THE CYCLE.
If you were judged, choose understanding.
If you were rejected, choose acceptance.
If you were shamed, choose compassion.
Be the person you needed when you were
hurting, not the person who hurt you. Vow
to be better than what broke you - to heal
instead of becoming bitter so you can act
from your heart, not your pain.
Lori Deschene





Every chef on TV: Today, I'm going to show you how to make something with simple ingredients everyone has in their pantry. I'm starting with Madagascar vanilla, hemp milk, and a single feather from a dodo bird.

I called my work this morning and I said, "Sorry boss, I can't come in today, I have a wee cough." He said, "You have a wee cough?" I said, "Really? Thanks boss, see you next week!"



devon sawa
@DevonESawa

My mother used to tell me I was the worlds greatest potato peeler. I really bought into it. And every time we'd have potatoes I'd get so excited to show off my skills as the ultimate peeler. It wasn't until I was in my mid 30s that I realized the whole play. Touché mom. Touché.

If you feel tired and want to sleep with kids in the house. Tell them to wake you up in about 30 minutes so we can start cleaning the house and they will do literally anything to avoid waking you up. (self.lifehacks)

My wife asked me to put ketchup on our shopping list. Now I can't read anything.



NicholasG
@Dad_At_Law

When my daughter was 7 years-old she once interrupted a bedtime story to tell me, "In a pie-eating contest, it doesn't matter if you win or lose because you get to eat pie." I think about that a lot.

Wife: "Honey let's play a game?"
Husband: "Ok, what is the game all about?"

Wife: "If I mention a country, you will run to the left side of the room and touch the wall.

And if I mention a bird you will run to the right side of the room and touch the wall.

If you run to the wrong direction, you will give me all your salary for the month."

Husband: "Ok and if you fail, I will have your salary too right?"

Wife: (smile) "Yes darling." Husband: "Ok" (stood up and was ready to run to any direction)

Wife: "Are u ready?" Husband: "Yes, ready."

Wife: "Turkey" It has been 4 hours now the husband is still standing at the spot wondering if she meant the country or the bird.

I would just like to thank the person who told my daughter that when she lies her eyes turn a different color. Now she squeezes her eyes shut every time she lies... and my job just became a whole lot easier.



At a job interview: "What are your strengths?"

"I'm an optimist and a positive thinker."

"Can you give me an example?"

"Yes, when do I start?"

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