



### February 18, 2021

Lent is quickly approaching. We continue to follow the COVID-19 pandemic guidelines and protocols to keep one another safe. Vaccines are rolling out. Outside it is cold, snowy, and blustery. On a moonlit and windy night the bare trees are silhouettes swaying in the darkness. There is much beauty during this time of the year.



Now, even in the cold of February it is time to prepare for the journey of Lent. A journey that is not easy. A journey that leads to the Cross. A journey that begins with Ash Wednesday. This year, although our services will be adjusted to keep one another safe, we need to remind each other that Lent is a time of self-reflection, fasting, prayer, confession, and repentance.

I share a meditation that I found many years ago. Each year I pull out this meditation and sit with it for a while, asking God to change my heart and to transform my life as I and I hope you, will continue your faith journey as a disciple of Jesus.

***Smudges on the Soul: A Meditation for Ash Wednesday*** (First printed in the 2007 Upper Room Disciplines and used with permission.)

*Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.*

-- Joel 2:12-13, NRSV

"I would rather wear the smudge on my forehead than to admit its residence upon my soul. I prefer a crude cross above my eyes to questions about runny mascara and smudged liner. In a place where self-confidence is rewarded and any sign of weakness or emotional predisposition is held suspect, it is difficult to consider actually following the advice of the prophet to return to the Lord with fasting, with weeping and with mourning. It is, however, acceptable — maybe even fashionable to appear in public with a dirty forehead as a sign that I have religion. It is amazing how the symbols of piety, sackcloth and ashes, have been transformed into a mask that hides me from myself and circumvents the intent of Ash Wednesday.

Blow the trumpet in Zion, the prophet said. Not the trumpet that signals advance to war, or the trumpet that celebrates victory, but the one that warns trembling penitents that the day of the Lord is coming. Blow the trumpet that warns a penitent like me to wear the smudge of ashes long after her face has been washed and to admit the smudge on the one place that matters to God, her heart.

Blow the trumpet in Zion, the prophet said, and sanctify a fast (Joel 2:15). Hear the sounds of grumbling need in a world where few are filled — and where we are overfilled. Today I am called to push away from the voracious consumption of everything in my path, for at least a little while, in hopes that I might realize something about the equitable distribution of the world's resources before the fast is over.

Rend your hearts and not your garments, the prophet said (Joel 2:13). The gift of the day is personal reflection, a season of confession, and change. Start the arduous journey from shadow to substance, from ritual to reality, from façade to faith. Today, choose the harder course. It is easier to buy new clothing than to mend a soul."

**Prayer:** Lord, as I begin this year's Lenten Journey, turn my attention to the things that matter most to you. Amen."

As we journey through Lent 2021, let us pray together over the next 40 days:

## Ash Wednesday Prayer (UMH #353)

“O God, maker of every thing and judge of all that you have made, from the dust of the earth you have formed us and from the dust of death you would raise us up. By the redemptive power of the cross, create in us clean hearts and put within us a new spirit, that we may repent of our sins and lead lives worthy of your calling; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Reflect on **Sunday's Palms Are Wednesday's Ashes** (Faith We Sing #2138 by Rae E. Whitney)

- Verse 1: Sunday's palms are Wednesday's ashes as another Lent begins;  
Thus we kneel before our Maker in contrition for our sins.  
We have marred baptismal pledges, in rebellion gone astray;  
Now, returning, seek forgiveness, grant us pardon, God, this day!
- Verse 2: We have failed to love our neighbors, their offences to forgive;  
Have not listened to their troubles, nor have cared just how they live.  
We are jealous, proud, impatient, loving over much our things;  
May the yielding of our failing be our Lenten offerings.
- Verse 3: We are hasty to judge others, blind to proof of human need;  
And our lack of understanding demonstrates our inner greed.  
We have wasted earth's resources; want and suffering we've ignored;  
Come and cleanse us, then restore us; make new hearts within us Lord!

May our resilience in sharing the love of God continue. May our relationships grow stronger and deeper with God and with one another. May our repentance and rending of our hearts transform us as disciples of Jesus Christ. May the renewing of our daily lives be guided by the Holy Spirit.

Journeying Through Lent Together,

**Suzanne**



***Dear God, let us love you with all our hearts, just as you love us with all your heart. Amen.***

Please keep these pastors, their families and the Church families in your prayers throughout the coming weeks.

### **February 21**

Chautauqua:Hurlbut Memorial Community UMC  
Pastor John A. Jackson, his wife Juanita and their family.

### **February 28**

Rev. Carmen Perry, serving in Extension Ministry, her husband Nick and their children Nathan and Nadia.

### **March 7**

Jamestown:Kidder Memorial UMC  
Rev. Tom LeBeau, his wife Georgia Whitney and their family.



*From the desk of Bishop Mark J. Webb*

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ!

We continue to navigate one of the most challenging and unique seasons within our lives. COVID-19 continues to impact every area of daily life. We continue to pray for those who have been devastated by this disease physically, emotionally, and financially. We continue to give thanks to God for the front-line workers who have offered the best of who they are in our fight against this pandemic. I continue to give thanks to God for your faithfulness in ministry and mission throughout these days. The witness to your faith in the God who offers hope and your commitment to God's call to offer the good news of Jesus Christ in all circumstances continues to be an inspiration.

I especially want to celebrate and thank you for your gift of stewardship and generosity during this unprecedented season. Despite the challenges that you have experienced in the past year, the leaders, members, and congregations of Upper New York trusted God and continued to reach beyond ourselves through our connectional giving known as Ministry Shares.

Please keep the family of **Pastor Ross Ayers** (retired) in your prayers. Pastor Ayers died Monday, February 15, 2021. Funeral arrangements are being handled by Mentley Funeral Home in Gowanda. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Mrs. Karen Ayers, 12573 Woodtown Rd., Perrysburg, NY, 14129.

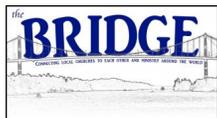
Please keep **Pastor Lee O'Brien** (Busti Federated Church) and his family in your prayers. Pastor Lee's wife, **Carol**, died February 4; a celebration of her life will be held at a later date. Condolences to Carol's family may be made at [petersonfh.net](http://petersonfh.net).

Continue to pray for all those who are affected by **COVID-19**, either directly or through a family member, neighbor or friend. May we continue to show respect for others by practicing good hygiene, wearing masks & social distancing.

To download the 2020-2021 District Prayer Calendar, [click here](#).



The **February Issue II** of the **Bridge** is now available for download. It is available in both color and black & white formats. [Click here](#) to select the version you prefer and make copies as necessary.



The stories that are featured in the **Bridge** can also be accessed from the news section of the Upper New York (UNY) Conference website for easy copying and pasting for those who wish to electronically distribute news featured in the *Bridge*. [Click here](#) to access the UNY Conference news

Because of your generosity and faithfulness, our Conference has been able to remain in ministry, equipping and linking churches for Christ. Your sacrificial giving helped our conference provide congregations with the guidance and encouragement needed to move worship from the sanctuary to the internet and, when conditions improved, safely return to the sanctuary for limited in-person services again. Your generosity enabled our five camp and retreat centers to remain open and find new ways to safely offer guests hospitality and spiritual refreshment. Your faithfulness helped us continue to mail out Sunday School resources from our Media Resource Center, offer licensing school for new local pastors, and host literally hundreds of remote gatherings for learning, planning and prayer.

[Click here](#) to read **Bishop Webb's letter in its entirety**.

## 2021



### Petitions/Resolutions/Reports

The Committee on Petitions and Resolutions is charged with overseeing the submission, review, and presentation of petitions and resolutions to the Annual Conference.

All resolutions and petitions for the 2021 session (which will be held online **June 17-19, 2021**) that will be printed in *Journal Vol. I* must be submitted to the Committee no later than **March 15, 2021**. Anything received after this date will be posted on the Conference website.

Submissions should be emailed to the Petitions and Resolutions Committee at [petitions@unyumc.org](mailto:petitions@unyumc.org).

[Click here](#) for more information, including guidelines and a petition and resolutions template.



**Please note:** The following information was accurate as of 3 p.m. Wednesday, February 17.

Many thanks to the Cornerstone churches that have completed their Ezra reports. The following Cornerstone churches are asked to complete the 2020 Ezra reports **as soon as possible**:  
Ashtville, Celoron, Centerville, Ellington, Fentonville, Findley Lake, Hamlet, Hinsdale & Steamburg.

items.

This issue features questions from a Black History Month quiz designed by UNY Committee on Religion & Race members the Rev. Holly Strickland and Georgia Whitney.

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### JOB OPENING

Kenmore United Methodist Church has an opening for a **full-time Director of Spiritual Development and Christian Education**. Click [here](#) for the job description overview and instructions for application.

Questions may be directed to Rev. Beckie Sweet, Kenmore UMC, 32 Landers Rd., Kenmore, NY, 14217, [revbeckiesweet@gmail.com](mailto:revbeckiesweet@gmail.com).

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### UPDATED WEDDING GUIDELINES

Guidelines for worship in Upper New York haven't changed (50% capacity, masks, social distancing), but there are new guidelines for receptions.

The updated guidance for wedding receptions will go into place March 15 and will require the following:

- Testing for all that attend the event.
- 50% capacity - up to 150 attendees.
- Must be approved by local health department.

[Click here](#) to see all FAQs related to the coronavirus and your church.

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### WORSHIP RESOURCE

Upper New York (UNY) Area Resident Bishop Mark J. Webb, and members of the UNY Cabinet have put together and released a **worship service** that may be used on a Sunday of your choice. It is hoped that by using this service, your pastor can have some much-needed rest and renewal.

[Click here](#) to see the service.



Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, Upper New

If you have questions or need help, please don't hesitate to contact the District office or Erica Wentworth, [ericawentworth@unyumc.org](mailto:ericawentworth@unyumc.org), 315-898-2004.

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### Clergy: Deadline Extended to Complete Boundary Awareness Training

**Boundary Awareness Training** is required every 5 years of every clergy person in any active status or relationship with the Conference whose appointment is approved or set by the Bishop; every person serving as a supply pastor assigned by the District Superintendent; and retired clergy performing ministerial functions.

The deadline has been extended to **March 1**. Click [here](#) for registration instruction.

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### Applications for Lottie Brown, Cady Grants Due March 15

Applications for the **Lottie Brown Grant** are now available through March 15. Because of the coronavirus pandemic and limited staff working at the Conference office each day, it is highly recommended that all completed materials be sent electronically to [scholarships@unyumc.org](mailto:scholarships@unyumc.org).

Preference is given to those entering some form of Christian service. A statement of your faith journey and philosophy of life is given high consideration. All application materials for this scholarship must be postmarked by **March 15**.

[Click here](#) for application materials.

Applications for the **Ercil Cady Grant** are available now. Grant(s) of up to \$5,000 may be awarded to individual United Methodists, local UM churches, or UNY District and Conference ministry teams. As directed by the originator of the Ercil Cady Grant, "priority shall be given to educational proposals that benefit minority groups or individuals, preferably black and American Indians."

Please consider creative ways to use this grant. [Click here](#) for the procedures and application. The deadline to apply for this grant is **March 15**,

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### LSM CLASSES OPEN TO ALL

**Preaching: From Your Hearts to Theirs**

February 22, March 1, 8 from 6-9 pm; March 13, 9 am - 1 pm

**Preaching: From Your Hearts to Theirs**

February 25, March 4 & 11, 6-9 pm; March 20: 9



York Assistant Director of Vital Congregations for Spiritual Life, the **Rev. Nancy Dibelius**, has been providing videos of helpful spiritual practices to help deepen people's relationship to God during this difficult time.

Rev. Dibelius now will be zeroing in on spiritual disciplines. She explains that spiritual disciplines are a way to get away with Jesus, walk with Jesus, and learn from Jesus.

[Click here](#) for Rev. Dibelius's latest spiritual discipline exploration, which delves into the discipline of study.

In the past week someone has been **phishing** in the Cornerstone District, sending emails as DS Suzanne Block.



The email included a picture of Suzanne and "sounded" enough like her that several people opened the email. Instances like this have been reported throughout the Upper New York Conference.

Please always preview any email you receive and notice the sender's email address. Suzanne's email is [suzanneblock@unyumc.org](mailto:suzanneblock@unyumc.org). All email from the Conference and District will have the extension "@unyumc.org."

Emails like this are attempting to get personal information from you via your email account. [Click here](#) for a good five-minute video clip on what to look for.



The UNY Conference Commission on Religion and Race (CCORR) will offer **Imagine**

**No Racism 2.0** courses on Zoom as the need arises; people interested and looking for an INR group may contact Blenda Smith, [bsmith@binghamton.edu](mailto:bsmith@binghamton.edu).

Format is typically six sessions. Clergy may receive 1 CEU; INR 2.0 also qualifies as an Advanced LSM course.

am - 1 pm

### Basic Course

March 2, 9, 16, 23 & 30, 7-9 pm

Course fee \$15

[Click here](#) for the registration brochure.

**Registration ends February 25.**

### Leading Prayer

April 14, 21, May 5, 6-9 pm; May 1, 9 am - 1 pm

Course fee, \$15 each. To register or for more information, contact Arlene at

[adschmidt@nycap.rr.com](mailto:adschmidt@nycap.rr.com). To view the brochure, [click here](#).

### Imagine No Racism

April 22, 29, May 6, 13 & 20, 2-5 pm

Zoom: Course fee \$15

[Click here](#) for the registration brochure.

**Registration ends February 25.**

### Lay Pastoral Care

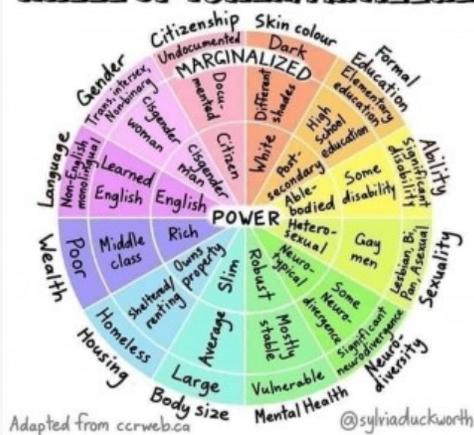
April 28, May 5, 12 & 19, 7-9 pm

Zoom: Course fee \$15

[Click here](#) for the registration brochure.

**Registration ends February 25.**

### WHEEL OF POWER/PRIVILEGE



The UMC is leading a sustained and coordinated effort through General Conference, August 29 to September 7, 2021, **to actively engage in the ministry of dismantling racism and promoting racial justice**. The UNY Conference Communications team will regularly share worship, advocacy, and educational resources to help with this important campaign.

Georgia Whitney of our UNY Conference Council on Religion and Race has written an eloquent article that describes white privilege in a way that may help you to better understand the difficult-to-grasp concept. [Click here](#) to read Part I of her article; [click here](#) to read Part II.

Each week of Lent and every day of Holy Week, a United Methodist bishop will offer a short devotion. Together, we will confess and fast from the sins of racism, discrimination, oppression and

**Black History Month** celebrates the unique contributions of African Americans to the American history. Whatever your heritage or background, Black history is part of everyone's history.



Do you know who the first Black woman to travel to space was? Are you familiar with where slaves gathered in antebellum America to secretly practice their religious traditions?

[Click here](#) to find the answers to these questions and 20 more in the Black History Month quiz put together by Upper New York Conference Commission on Religion and Race members, the Rev. Holly Strickland and Georgia Whitney.

### **NYS Sick Leave Law**

All private sector workers in New York State are covered under New York State's **paid sick leave law**. If a person is issued a W-2 year-end tax form, they are eligible for the New York State paid sick leave. Non-profit and religious organizations are not exempt from this law. [Click here](#) for information on the New York State paid sick leave law.

### **Online Services Here to Stay**

If there's a positive side to the coronavirus for churches, it's that many of them have dramatically upped their game online. [Click here](#) to read more.

[Click here](#) to view the UNY churches who are streaming services online. [Click here](#) to learn more about how your church can "go digital."

exclusion, and feast on the beauty and blessing of the diversity of God's Church. This series is another step on our journey of repentance, reconciliation and action. [Learn more](#).

Articles in the latest issue of the *Advocate* that focus on dismantling racism include:

An article that showcases how the Bible supports dismantling racism. [Click here](#) to read this article.

An article that illustrates how the *Book of Discipline* and the *Book of Resolutions* support dismantling racism. [Click here](#) to read this article.

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

### **PAST DUE**

Please send a completed & signed copy of each to the District office. (Click on the **boldface** titles to download the forms.):

[Report of Trustees](#)

[Report of the Finance Committee](#)

2020 Year-end Financial Report

2021 Church Budget

### **February 23-25**

UNY Appointive Cabinet (Zoom)

### **March 1**

Deadline, Boundaries Awareness Training

### **March 4**

District Committee on Ordained Ministry (dCOM)

### **March 14**

Daylight Savings Time begins

### **March 15**

Please send a completed & signed copy to the District office:

[2020 Local Church Annual Financial Audit](#)



### **Bishop Announces Clergy Appointments**

Upper New York Area Resident Bishop Mark J. Webb and the Upper New York Conference announce one appointment. View the full list of changes [here](#)

