

From the Pastor

“Let’s Talk About Our Giftedness”

The other day we were reading our mission statement aloud in staff meeting and someone commented that it’s cool it says we “exist as a congregation of faith and doubt” (see full mission/vision/values statement elsewhere in this issue). Yes. It is cool and it is a blessing. The opposite of faith is not doubt; it’s fear.

Yet even as we question the tenets of our faith in a healthy way from time to time, in my experience it’s both more common and more troubling that we doubt ourselves. In this topsy turvy world, with all the political churning that we swim in both in the wider church and in the society at large, we do both God and ourselves a disservice when we doubt our own giftedness.

We are all deeply gifted as well as deeply flawed. This Epiphany season, we’ll take some time to look at the gifts that the Holy Spirit so graciously bestows upon us, as individuals, as families, as a congregation. We’ll lift up these gifts, we’ll recognize them, we’ll claim them and we’ll celebrate them. It’s high time.

For as Marianne Williamson writes, “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It’s not just in some of us; it’s in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

What gifts do you bring to the world?

Peace, love, and blessings,  
Rev. Marti Swords-Horrell  
Pastor

<sup>1</sup>Marianne Williamson, *A Return To Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles*, Harper Collins, 1992. From Chapter 7, Section 3 (Pg. 190-191)

### Worship Themes for February

Epiphany is a season of mission. The word “epiphany” comes from the Greek, *epiphaneo*, “to shine out”. It’s the season when we celebrate the light of Christ shining out of Bethlehem, first to the wise strangers from the East who followed the star for many miles through great dangers to meet the Christ child, and from there to all the world.

In February we will continue what we started in January, celebrating by means of two interlocking worship series designed to “equip our congregation to ‘see all the people.’ The first series, “Greater Gifts”, focuses upon lifting up the gifts in the community and strategically acting together as one body with many interconnected parts. This body, then, works as a cohesive unit to reach out beyond the walls of the church and bring people to know and receive the love of God as we begin the second series, “See All the People.”

The season after Epiphany begins with a transitional Sunday—Baptism of the Lord—in which we encounter the narrative of Jesus’ baptism and John the Baptist’s very dramatic description of baptism in Jesus’ name. The voice of God rings from heaven at Jesus’ baptism: “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Lk. 3:22, NRSV). When we are baptized or gathered at the baptism of others, how do we hear

God's voice affirming each new member of God's family? The second week contains Paul's description of spiritual gifts—how the Spirit works in and through them and how we are gifted for being a part of the body of Christ with one another. A little bit of explanation is needed around the theme for week three, "Being Needy": This phrase has a certain negative connotation that often relates to people who require a little more attention than others (we all likely know people like this). We would like to redeem the meaning by asserting that we all, regardless of our own gifts, need one another in order to be part of the whole body of Christ. The purpose of all these gifts is revealed in week four, in which the whole point of acting together is revealed—"having love," which is the most important of the "marks of the new birth" (faith, hope, and love), as shared by both the apostle Paul and John Wesley."

Since this season takes place at the beginning of a new calendar year, it may be a helpful practice for us to assess the spiritual gifts of our congregation. Please feel free to copy and paste the link below into the browser of your computer and discover your own spiritual gifts! I look forward with eager anticipation to hearing from each of you what this inventory uncovers! Please call, email or text me to set up a time to visit over a cup of tea or coffee! – Pastor Marti

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/new-church-starts/spiritual-gifts>

On February 10th, we'll launch our second Epiphany series, "See All the People." As we begin to prepare for this series, we will notice one theme keeps emerging: Jesus truly saw all the people; and as a result, the people were always with him. As our church continues to make connections in the community, we would do well to make note of the way Jesus responded to the crowds.

In the first week of the series, the pressing crowd is mentioned alongside Jesus' encouragement for his first disciples to go fishing. The image of the fish breaking the nets becomes an image analogous with the people "pressing in" on Jesus. The second week recalls "a great crowd of Jesus' disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon" (Lk. 6:17). They were expecting Jesus to heal them. This image is a powerful one as we imagine the crowd relentlessly reaching for Jesus, that they might touch him and receive his healing power. Week three involves a departure, as we put ourselves in the shoes of the crowd listening to Jesus' sermon. The message of loving enemies was (and is) so countercultural that it still causes us to question our very instincts as powers threaten to overtake and divide us. Week four, Transfiguration Sunday, presents a dramatic scene as Jesus is transfigured as he stands with Moses and Elijah. Jesus, Peter, John, and James then descended the mountain, and Jesus healed a boy with a demon—to the astonishment of "a great crowd" (Lk. 9:37).

Upon reflection of the entire season after Epiphany this year, we find a comprehensive way to make connections with our community: discover our spiritual gifts, understand our need for one another and the love of God, and know that wherever Jesus goes, a crowd is sure to follow. The question is: "Are we ready to go and meet the crowds as we 'see all the people'?"

February 3rd: Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany. We'll celebrate the Feast of Love as we hear the Apostle Paul's hymn to love, I Corinthians 13:1-13, the "still more excellent way". Our Gospel reading will be Luke 4:21-30.

February 10th: Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany. Allison Bookhout will be leading worship and bringing the message at the morning service, and Lori DePauw at the Gathering, as Rev. Marti studies with Marcia McFee of Worship Design Studio Inc. this week. Please read: Isaiah 6:1-8 and Luke 5:1-11.

February 17th: Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany. In Matthew, Jesus' major teaching ministry happens on the mountain. In Luke, he comes down to stand with the crowds on the plain: which underscores the intention of Luke to portray Jesus as one who is "down to earth", with the people on their level. Please read Jeremiah 17:5-8 and Luke 6:17-26.

February 24th: Eighth Sunday after the Epiphany. "The Questioning Crowd" : please read Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40 and Luke 6:27-38. Both our culture and our denomination have become increasingly divided; we demonize the "other" and cease listening to one another. In the Common English Bible, verse 27 of Luke 6 begins, "But I say to you who are willing to hear: Love your enemies." Jesus challenges the crowd to hear. Then he says the shocking phrase, "Love your enemies." What?! He doesn't just tell us to listen to them. We are to love them!

Dear Villagers of FUMC, as followers of Jesus, we want to be welcoming of all people, including our youngest and most vulnerable ones. The denomination-wide Safe Sanctuaries policies have been set up to ensure our children are safe here.

The three-hour Safe Sanctuaries training, available on site by our own in-house trainer Marty Becker, helps church members recognize and respond appropriately to physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, and how we can minimize the possibility of that happening to the children, youth, and vulnerable adults in our community. Marty makes the training interactive and as “painless” as possible. Ideally, every adult in the congregation would have the training. We ALL want to keep our kids safe.

We need Safe Sanctuaries-trained people to help out occasionally with childcare, Sunday School, and special events. It’s fun to get to know our kids, and to enjoy their enthusiasm and energy, even those of us, like me, who can only keep up with them for a short period of time!

We also would like a cross-section of people to serve on the Safe Sanctuaries Task Force, which now consists of Marty, me, and Pastor Marti. We promise you there will not be any unnecessary meetings. We believe that ensuring FUMC is a safe place for ALL people is a joyous mission! Isn’t that what being a Reconciling Congregation is about?

**Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.  
2019 Birthday Celebration**

Temple Beth El, 83 Chestnut Street, Oneonta

**Sunday February 3: 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm**

Open and Free to All! Birthday Cake! Music! Song! Refreshments!

Sponsored by the Oneonta branch of the NAACP.

**Boomerangs for Valentine’s Day**

Orders can be placed now through **February 3<sup>rd</sup>** to purchase regular or gluten-free Boomerangs. At \$7.00 a dozen, they are a bargain! Call Irene (432-7932), Dottie (432-0904), or sign up on the clipboard passed at Sunday services to place your order.

**Thank you to Everyone!**

We received a thank you from Opportunities for Otsego for the generous donation of Christmas gifts for the children of the domestic violence shelter.

**Annual Roast Pork Dinner**

This annual event is on Friday, February 1, serving from 4:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m. Tickets are \$10.00 for adults; \$5 for children 6-12 years old; 5 and under free. Tickets may be purchased at the door. Dinner is served buffet style and includes roast pork, mashed potatoes & gravy, green beans, carrots, applesauce, rolls, beverage, and *homemade* pies for dessert. Take-outs are also available.

## Green Team

The United Methodist Social Principles state in paragraph 160 that “All creation is the Lord’s, and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it. Water, air, soil, minerals, energy resources, plants, animal life, and space are to be valued and conserved because they are God’s creation and not solely because they are useful to human beings.”

As a congregation that has covenanted with God to love and protect God’s gift of creation, this is our Pledge, approved by our Church Council:

We, the members of First United Methodist Church, Oneonta, hereby pledge to make it a priority to educate ourselves about environmental issues and to do our part to promote climate justice.

We will strive to be a zero-waste congregation: to reduce waste going to landfills by careful purchasing decisions, by promoting reuse, and by recycling and composting.

We pledge to avoid use of toxins, to conserve energy, and to work with and encourage our faith partners and neighbors to be good stewards of creation.

We will review this pledge and our adherence thereto biannually.

We will educate others who use our facilities about, and expect them to abide by, this pledge.

The Green Team has presented the following Guidelines to be our “Users’ Manual” as we strive to do all we can to protect the earth. This is practical advice from United Methodist Women’s Climate Justice/Sustainability website.

In order to practice waste prevention throughout the church building, we will:

- Purchase only what is needed
- Purchase the least amount possible in a fiscally responsible manner
- Purchase items that are available in the most sustainable form, with no or minimal packaging
- Purchase products manufactured partially or completely from sustainable or recyclable materials whenever possible
- Plan for reuse if at all possible; donate or recycle what will never be used
- Ensure that printed items have narrow margins and/or are double-sided; use electronic sharing when possible to reduce copying; whiteboards or easels can be used for meeting agendas
- Use recycling receptacles for paper, plastic, glass and metal in every room that needs them

In the kitchen, we will:

- Serve healthy food from minimally packaged local, fair-trade, and organic sources when possible
- Serve and eat food with reusable dinnerware and cutlery or, when not possible, nontoxic compostable disposables
- Eliminate individual throwaway/recyclable bottles and plastic-coated paper cups, and will serve water in reusable glassware or, when that is not possible, in recyclable plastic cups
- Donate excess/leftover food as permitted by local law, packaging leftovers in nontoxic compostable disposables and/or reusable food containers
- Compost food waste
- In order to reduce the use of toxins, we will:
  - Use non-toxic cleaning agents
  - Purchase unbleached paper products, made from post-consumer recycled content when possible
- In order to conserve energy use and reduce our carbon footprint, we will:
  - Use lighting appropriately, aiming to reduce usage when unnecessary
  - Turn computers and all other electrical equipment off when not in use overnight and days off
  - Align with best building energy conservation practices

We welcome your participation on the Green Team! Feel free to contact Marty Becker, Gail Niles, or Sharry Strait-Carey to learn how you can join our efforts. Next meeting: January 31 at Sharry Strait-Carey’s home.

## We have New Members who joined in September and October

Jesse & Ava Brashear	Steve McCarthy
Carol & Alan Franks	Shelly Snider
Kayann & Jayden Johnson	Rose Thomas
Marsha Kozubek	

Here are some of their biographies, from the members who presented them in church.

### Phil Young:

I first met **Jessie Brashear** with his mother, Rose, and daughter, **Ava**, at one of our round tables in the fellowship hall. It was clear from the beginning that he was friendly, open, an engaging listener with rich stories and was caring, dedicated, and committed as father and as son. And it didn't hurt that his brother is Chris.

He was born Weehawken, NJ and from there on he lived in a number of places, including further north in New Hampshire and later on even Oklahoma City, where as an OKIE we shared some connections. We both can both say "Y'all" with authenticity.

Here in Oneonta, you may have eaten food from his hands including piping hot delicious lasagna, egg parm, large calzone, cannoli, etc. from Sal's. Yet he says his most important job is to be the best single dad for Ava that he can.

Some of you already know his strong singing voice, and with his love of all kinds of music, he brings the gifts of playing many instruments, including guitar and piano.

### Rosalie Higgins:

**Carol and Alan Franks** both grew up in the Hudson Valley. They met in high school (he took her to the prom) and have been together since. Their first date was on a hay ride sponsored by Youth Fellowship. Alan was raised in the Reform Church; Carol was raised in the Catholic Church. They first moved to this area when Alan took a teaching position in Veterinary Science at SUNY Delhi in 1981 (he is also a Delhi graduate). After four years he left and took a position with Proctor and Gamble where he did research for nine years. Then it was on the way back to SUNY Delhi and Oneonta. Carol was a Nurse before their children were born. They have two adult sons, Ben – 32 and Kyle – 29. Both live in the area. Carol is retired, and Alan looks forward to that status in a few years. Carol is a pro at spinning wool and knitting. Alan's hobby is trains or (as he puts it) just about anything on wheels, including his little red wagon which he is known for pulling across campus to carry all his "stuff" on his way to his class. It is my distinct pleasure to sponsor their membership in our church.

### Nancy Bondurant-Couch:

This fall I had the pleasure of meeting **Kayann Johnson** (Kay) when she came to First United Methodist Church in search of a place of worship. She had attended the Baptist church across the street and joined us when they closed their doors. On September 15<sup>th</sup>, a few weeks after joining the church, she became an American citizen. Pastor Marti and several church members joined her at this ceremony.

Kay is a remarkable person with a strong spiritual center and an interesting story. She was born in Kitson Town, Jamaica and raised by her beloved grandmother who was very active in the Kitson Town Baptist Church. Kay's grandmother was one of several women who had a strong spiritual influence on Kay's life. Kay has many fond memories of her grandmother's service to the church as a deacon, usher, and choir member. Kay lived with her grandmother during these formative years surrounded by the love of a large family of cousins and half siblings until she was 11 years old.

A visit brought Kay to Long Island where she lived with her father, stepmother and stepsister. Kay's stepmother was very active in the Seventh Day Adventist Church and encouraged Kay's participation. Kay enjoyed working in the church. She joined the Praise and Worship Team and continued to learn scriptures. She describes the church as a strict but accepting community. At age 13, during a crusade she committed her life to Christ and was baptized.

By age 16 she found herself moving to Oneonta to join several half siblings and other family members. She graduated from Oneonta High School in 2008. Upon graduation she moved to West Palm Beach, Florida, to pursue a Business degree in Hospitality Management at Northwood University. Again, circumstances with family and friends caused another change, taking her back to Long Island to live with her stepmother and stepsister. While caring for her stepmother and raising Jayden, she attended CUNY at Queens and earned a degree in Aviation Management.

In 2013 Kay returned with Jayden to Oneonta where she rejoined her extended family of half-siblings, and cousins. Her fiancé, Touissant Freckleton, also born in Jamaica and whom she met through cousins in Florida, moved to Oneonta where they reside on Dietz Street.

Kay works at Job Corps as an Administrative Assistant in Admissions. Her son, **Jayden** is in the second grade at Valley View Elementary. Kay's fiancé, Touissant, is employed at Fox Hospital.

Joyce Miller:

Marsha **Kozubek** is an accomplished newspaper reporter, book illustrator, writer, and has worked at Hartwick College. Now retired, she owns and operates the "Starry Night" Bed and Breakfast and is a member of the Monday Book Group.

Dick Powell:

We are pleased to welcome **Steve McCarthy** into membership of our church. Steve was born in Butte, Montana and spent the first few years of his life in Philipsburg, Montana. At about the age of two, his parents, along with Steve and his older sister, moved to Seattle, Washington, where his father became a police officer. His mother was employed as a pediatric nurse. Following high school, Steve attended Seattle University, earning a degree in electrical engineering. How did Steve end up in Oneonta, New York? Well in June 1968, Steve accepted a position with General Electric in Utica, New York; beginning a 38-year career with that company. His first work assignment was to go to Syracuse University where he obtained advanced degrees. In his career he obtained numerous patents and published numerous papers. Much of his work involved advanced military defense systems.

Steve retired in 2005. Living in Cazenovia, New York, he was introduced through a mutual friend to Sharon who lived in Oneonta. This was the beginning of a courtship (or was it a pursuit!?), requiring Steve to make many trips between Cazenovia and Oneonta, even driving through the severe winter storms that occur in the area between those locations. Steve and Sharon were married in our Church in 2009 by our own Ned Eastman and began their married life in Oneonta. Prior to his joining our Church, Steve's preparation included reading the "rule book" of our Methodist Church, the 800+ page tome, The Discipline! He is a member of our Church Council and serves as chair of the Patrick Committee.

Joyce Miller:

**Rosemary "Rose" Thomas** is a retired secretary from SUNY Oneonta who is currently a member of the Buckingham Bell Choir. She is the mother of Chris and Jesse Brashear and grandmother of Ava Brashear. In one of her previous lives, she was in the Air Force. When asked what she does in retirement, she replied, "Anything I want!"

As we approach February, I am thrilled to announce that by receiving more income through unpledged giving, building use revenue, net proceeds from the Annual Sock Hop than budgeted in as well as some other areas, FUMC once again was able to finish the year in the black as compared to the budget that was passed in January 2018. FUMC was fortunate that the letter that Pastor Marti and Council Chair Peter Paluch sent out asking for people to give a little extra for the things that they are “Grateful” for about FUMC generated \$6,291. In addition the Patrick Committee had funds available and was able to give the operating budget an additional \$7,655 to help put us in the black.

Although, a budget was passed with over a \$20,000 deficit, the surplus from operations was \$7,270, not as much as the previous year but better than expected as we entered the final quarter of 2018. In addition to the extra revenue that was received, a few budget areas did not incur all the expenses as budgeted which also contributed to positive finish to the year.

FUMC is truly blessed with many contributors of financial resources as well as their time and talents.

I am happy to report that at the January Church Council meeting we passed the 2019 FUMC operating budget. It was passed with just over a \$33,000 deficit. The \$7,270 surplus from operations in 2018 will be used to help offset what would have been a much larger potential budget deficit. The reason for a larger deficit budget in 2019 as compared to 2018 is two-fold. One, the ministry shares or apportionments that FUMC pays to the conference went up significantly. This is based on the amount of income and how that income was determined from the previous year was to be reported. Secondly, we did not have nearly as much surplus at the end of the year as we did the year before.

As many of you know the of 2018 was a rough ride in the financial markets and although our investment team at Community Bank’s trust department have our endowment portfolio’s diversified between stocks, equities and bonds, the value main endowment dropped by \$265,000 or 7%. Some due to market fluctuations and \$75,000 that we drew out beyond what it generated in interest and dividends. We did not take out more than the 5% allowed by policy.

On the Patrick side, the value of the endowment dropped by \$178,000 or 5.7% due to market fluctuations. However, it did generate \$7,337 more in income than the previous year for a total of \$77,054 that can be given out in grants in 2019, some of which will be used to help the budget deficit.

The amount to be taken from the endowment in 2019 is \$165,279.16 and is the full 5% allowed by policy. This is \$84,335 more than the endowment earned in interest and dividends.

For the fourth straight year the budget includes pledged income greater than the amount that is being taken out of the endowment. This is a very positive trend that we hope will continue for many years to come. The total pledged income for 2019 is \$173,787, up slightly from 2018’s \$171,160. Looking at the numbers, pledging units increased from 71 to 80. Of these 80 pledging units, 23 of them pledged a combined \$119,052 or 69% of the budgeted pledge income and 11 of the 23 pledged \$80,000 or 46.06%. We did receive pledge cards from 22 giving units helping the pledge income budget by \$12,486, while 33 other pledging families we are able to increase their pledge. These are just numbers to keep in mind as our congregation continues to grow older and the need to grow our congregation becomes more and more important. Although, we did not here from 12 families who have previously pledged, we are confident that we will still receive donations from them, thus we increased the budget for unpledged income.

Throughout the year, FUMC takes offerings on special Sundays that are recognized by the United Methodist Church. According to The Book of Discipline, special Sundays in the UMC are intended to illustrate the nature and calling of The Church and are celebrated annually. The first of these was Human Relations Day celebrated on January 20th. A total of \$104.25 was collected and forward on to the conference to be added to donations received by other churches. The goal of this Sunday is to strengthen United Methodist outreach in the US and Puerto Rico, encouraging social justice and work with at-risk youth.

The next special Sunday will be UMCOR Sunday formerly known as One Great Hour of Sharing Sunday. There will be special envelopes in the bulletins on March 31st as well as the April newsletter. The money collected will be used for administrative costs at UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) which assist people affected by crisis or chronic need with programs and projects in disaster response, health, sustainable agriculture, food security, relief supplies and more.

Each month throughout the year, FUMC collects a “jingle” or loose change for a specific cause. In January it was for Family Services towards cold and flu remedies.

A big fundraiser that happens in January is our Annual Fruit Sale. This raises money to assist church families who wish to send their children to one of the many camps affiliated with the United Methodist Church. Orders will be taken through Jan. 29th. Usually there are a few extras available if you forget to order or would like additional fruit. Unfortunately, due to availability prices did have to increase again this.

In the past, February is the month we have our annual Chicken and Biscuit Musical Theater fundraiser. However, this year Nancy Bondurant-Couch will be directing a one night Cabaret with the Chicken and Biscuit dinner. This will be held March 2.

Thank you again to everyone for helping FUMC to be able to do the missions that we do.

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### **Winter Vacation Bible School**

In the spirit of FUMC’s Epiphany theme of discovering our spiritual gifts, Nancy Bondurant-Couch will lead two February school break workshops for our elementary (Pre-K through Grade 6) children. The children will have an opportunity to explore folktales through creative drama re-enactments, songs, arts and crafts, and games to learn how we all can use our abilities to help our community.

Children are invited to attend one or both sessions:

Tuesday, February 19, 9:00-11:30am

Thursday, February 21, 9:00-11:30am

They are welcome to bring their friends!

In order to make plans, we need to know how many children will be able to attend. Please contact Marty Van Lenten Becker at 432-4917 or [marty.vlb@gmail.com](mailto:marty.vlb@gmail.com) as soon as possible. You can also let her know if your child(ren) will need transportation, and/or if you can assist with an activity.

**The United Methodist Women’s Book Group** meets every 2nd and 4th Thursday at 10:00 am at the home of Lucy Ingalls. We now are discussing the book Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson, a book that brings to light the unfairness and racial bias within our criminal justice system. Our next book is The Newcomers: Finding Refuge, Friendship and Hope in an American Classroom by Helen Thorpe. This is a book that puts a human face on the immigration debate. Please join us for fellowship and lively discussion. If you have any questions call or email Sharry Strait-Carey at 432-4852 or email: [sharrysc9@hotmail.com](mailto:sharrysc9@hotmail.com).

**The Issues Class (Adult SS)** is finishing the series: The Challenge of Paul by John Dominic Crossan. This is a video series showing how Paul shaped people of his time to challenge the greed and violence of the Roman Empire and how it shaped early Christianity. This series will end on Feb. 24. After that we will start a series for six weeks on Hazardous Saints, exploring the lives of six “saints” who risked all for the Gospel: Barnabas, Francis of Assisi, Thomas Cramer, Sojourner Truth, Dorothy Day, and Oscar Romero. For the two weeks prior to Easter we will listen and discuss Amy Jill Levine’s series on Entering the Passion of Jesus. It is about how the passion story raises ethical and spiritual questions and how we all face risk in our Christian experience. – Margaret Parish

**Grey Matters**

We are meeting on Wednesday, February 20 at 1:00 in the Coke Room. We are a group of UMC members who take what the UMC Book of Discipline and our Social Principals says about social justice for all of God’s universe, very seriously. We try to bring social justice issues to a local level

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Dear Church Family,

Thank you for all your kindness and welcoming words as I have started the daunting new job as part-time Secretary of FUMC. To tell you a little about myself, I have been a member of this church since 2011 when my husband and I moved to Oneonta. I have been in the Buckingham Ringers since then, but otherwise you probably haven’t seen me around much. This is because I am also a church organist, and I play the organ at Atonement Lutheran Church across from Hartwick College. I’m rarely here on Sundays! You might also see me at Hannaford on Mondays where I am still working as a cashier.

I was born in Arkansas, and also lived in Louisiana, Alabama, Maryland, and Texas with my family. I went to college at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, earning a Bachelor’s of Music Degree in Organ Performance. Paul and I were married three days after we graduated and went on to live in Virginia, North Carolina, Texas, and Ohio. It sounds like a lot of places, but we actually lived in Ohio for 25 years so that still kind of feels like home. Paul teaches Economics at SUNY-Oneonta. We have one daughter, Katryn, who is 30 and lives in Rocky River, Ohio. You may have met Rocky, our 11-pound Irish Black and Tan Jack Russell Terrier. I understand she has visited the building quite a few times when we are out of town and Gail Niles is her special friend and caretaker.

I was raised in the United Methodist Church and also served as the Finance Manager of my UM Church in Ohio, so I am well-versed in a lot of what goes on in a church office. I knew Ginny but did not have the opportunity to talk with her about how to do this job, so I don’t know all her secrets and shortcuts. I hope you will all bear with me as I find my footing. And again, thank you so much for being so kind to me.

~~Leslie Bauer

Next month, look for a more normal newsletter that includes colors, pictures, graphics, and even a calendar!

## **New Covenant Group Forming**

In our society we don't speak much about covenants; we speak about contracts. When we make a contract with a person, we say: "I will fulfill my part as long as you fulfill yours. When you don't live up to your promises, I no longer have to live up to mine." Contracts are often broken because the partners are unwilling or unable to be faithful to their terms.

But God didn't make a contract with us; God made a covenant with us. "When God makes a covenant with us, God says: I will love you with an everlasting love. I will be faithful to you, even when you run away from me, reject me, or betray me." God wants our relationships with one another to reflect that covenant. That's why marriage, friendship, and life in community are all ways to give visibility to God's faithfulness in our lives together.

I wish I could claim to have crafted those words of wisdom, but they belong to my favorite author for devotions, Henry Nouwen. I share those ideas as they framed the parameters of what I will share about my own faith journey and the role of faith based covenant groups throughout my life.

As I prepared to share my testimony today I focused on the role of covenant groups in the community of faith. I am struck by the way God has been embodied throughout my childhood, teenage years and adulthood through small groups.

My parents are United Methodist pastors. Right out of the cradle I was present during small covenant group meetings in my home. I did not necessarily understand the discussions, the prayers, the tears, or the laughter, but I most definitely felt the warmth, and the commitment to love and support one another. The members of one particular small group became known to me as Grampa Love, Uncle Jerry and Aunt Ginny. And for a young child, that was enough to plant the seed of desire to seek those kinds of covenant relationships throughout my life. How powerful and impacting those beautiful people were in my young life, and what an incredible opportunity each and every one of us at First United Methodist Church has to embody the love of God for the young children in our faith community.

As a teen-ager, youth group at church had moments of transcending the worldly school rat race into a small fellowship of belonging and caring. In those moments, members of the youth group became the face, hands and heart of God for each other. During the summers, Camp Casowasco was my holy group - my opportunity to reconnect to small group dynamics grounded in the Christian faith. These small group encounters were building stones for the formation of my faith.

The young adult years were desert years of longing for small covenant groups for me, because other than the covenant relationship I shared with my husband, even though we sought relationship with church communities, nothing seemed to really connect in meaningful ways until we met Steve Heiss at Elm Park United Methodist. We went through the Discipleship bible study with Steve and began to understand more fully God's nature and grace. Somehow we became aware of another Discipleship bible study being offered at First United Methodist Church, and were blessed to find meaningful connection with Randy Freeman and Stacey Bickett. This was the covenant group that cemented our commitment to First United Methodist Church and our lives have been richly blessed as a result.

And finally, perhaps the most transformational covenant relationships of my adult life came at the most difficult time. Full time work, completing a master's degree and having two small children took a toll on my physical health. My body was screaming at me to do something different. Out of that difficult time, I found my way into a covenant group of intergenerational women. We held each other in prayer, grace, understanding and support. I experienced both being receiver of prayer and giver of prayer in a covenant dynamic which never judged, never tried to fix each other, but simply became the means of grace for one another.

It is difficult to stand here and share these details of my faith journey. I mean, so what, why should you care and want to hear about any of this? I do not presume to know whether the pathway in which my faith has been deepened is a similar one to yours. I just go back to Henri Nouwen's words that God made a covenant with us, and God wants our relationships with one another to reflect that covenant. For me, entering into these covenant relationships of marriage and small faith based groups, have been the greatest blessings and means of grace throughout my life.

~~Lori DePauw

## From the Art Team

### Spring Art Classes (Wednesday mornings, 10-12, the Art Room)

Monthly fees for most classes is \$30.00 inclusive of materials (note: some modifications, due to additional meeting days or special materials). Payment is due at registration. Class size is normally limited to 12 on a first come/first serve basis. Scholarship assistance is available through the Grace Seifert Memorial Art Fund. For application, contact Phil Young (607.433.1169) or Angela Eardley (607.434.2435). To register call the church office, 607-432-4102, and leave your name and contact information, – phone number and email address (if you have one).

February 6, 13, 20, 27 “**Painting and Collage**” with Christine Alexander

Class size limit: 14

Students will create a unique project reflecting their personal interests, aspirations, fears, and dreams. The emphasis is on self-expression using paint and paper. A variety of materials and techniques will be demonstrated and discussed. Students are welcome to bring additional materials if desired. Class is for beginners to advanced.

Alexander’s work reflects a life-long fascination with color. Often whimsical, her paintings are characteristically brightly hued. She paints in watercolor and acrylic, and makes intricate cut-paper collages. She has exhibited in many solo and group exhibitions, and teaches art and collage workshops. Prior to painting full time, Alexander worked as a graphic designer, photographer, and teacher. She earned a Master’s degree from North Carolina State University, College of Design, and a Bachelor of Arts degree from SUNY-Plattsburgh.

March 6, 13, 20, 27 “**Exploring Words on Paper**” with Hope Von Stengel

Class size limit: 12

This multi-media class employs stamping, collage, hand lettering, journaling & bookbinding to marry the visual arts with language. Different recycled and handmade papers, gouache, stamps, ink, pencils, and other tools will be utilized to create small journals, stationary, hand written letters, postcards, and more.

Von Stengel is a lover of language & art. She received her B.A. in English from the University of Oregon and has taken several art classes at Hartwick College.

April 3, 10, 17, 24 “**A Feast in Stain, Sculpture and other acrylic extensions**”\_with Phil Young      Class size limit: 12

This is a “crossover” course in acrylics. It will expand work done in stain painting and other manipulations of canvas and other cloth. One option is turning them into solid 3 dimensional forms. A demonstration & stretching of canvases from the project will be included. Canvas stretchers can be brought and stretching will be demonstrated. Bring your sketchbooks!

Young is a local artist & retired art professor at Hartwick College, Oneonta. He leads the committee for this art program and has taught stain painting and sculptural extensions in the past

May 1, 8, 15, 22 “**Innovative Book Structures**” with Nancy Callahan

Class size limit: 12

Using playful exploration of simple book forms, Nancy will guide you through the construction of a variety of unique folding patterns & binding techniques to produce numerous innovative book structures. An ideal class for artists, scrap bookers & teachers. No previous book making experiences required. Book designs will differ from those taught in previous courses.

Callahan is retired Professor of Art at SU NY-Oneonta and has taught several book structure classes in the past. Based on her research and development of unique book & paper structures, she regularly lectures & teaches workshops to artists, teachers & graphic designers from across the nation.

## Homemade Soup to Go

Message from Elm Park UMC: Soup available each Wednesday from 4-5pm through-March 20<sup>th</sup>. It's for everyone! There is no age, socio-economic, or church membership requirement. It's just because you are our neighbor! Elm Park UMC is at the corner of Ceperley & Chestnut.



The Oneonta District Mission Team Presents:

CARAVAN Day Road Trip to Liverpool!

Saturday, March 30

We will:

- tour the Upper NY Conference Center and assist with a mission project at our Mission HUB in the morning.
- have lunch at the Center.
- visit other mission projects around Syracuse in the afternoon (optional).

This is a great opportunity for individuals, families, youth groups, whole congregations!

Use this link to register:

<https://goo.gl/forms/DNIEkp6qFXg2vyQP2>

You will have an opportunity to indicate:

- if you want to register for just the morning, or the full day.
- which carpool location you would prefer.
- whether you're willing to drive.

We will get back to you with a time to meet your carpool.

Please note that all children and youth must be supervised by an adult.

From St. Mary's:

## TAIZÉ PRAYER

Winter—Lent—Easter—Spring 2019

A Prayer Service of SINGING—LISTENING—SILENCE—MEDITATION

Winter Tuesdays—February 5 & 19

Lent Tuesdays—March 12 & 26; April 2 & 16

Easter Tuesdays—April 30; May 14 & 28

7:00 pm in the Saint Mary's Church proper  
corner of Walnut and Elm Streets, Oneonta

[www.StMarysOneonta.org](http://www.StMarysOneonta.org)

(607) 432-3920